

**TRANSCENDENCE IN IMMANENCE – A CONVERSATION WITH JACQUES  
DERRIDA ON SPACE, TIME AND MEANING**

by

**JACOB PETRUS KRUGER**

submitted in accordance with the requirements  
for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY**

in the subject

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF. D.P. GOOSEN

September 2011

## SUMMARY

This study postulates the existence of a notion of transcendence in immanence in the thought of Jacques Derrida. The deconstruction of, amongst others, Husserlian phenomenology and Saussurean structuralism, affords Derrida the opportunity of presenting a thought of contamination, haunting and impurity, which is a thought of transcendence in immanence. The hypothesis of a notion of transcendence in immanence in Derrida's thought is refined by specifying it as temporal transcendence in immanence. Accordingly, the intimation of transcendence in immanence does not amount to the ontological acceptance of a separate transcendent realm. On the contrary, what appears is a monism: the infinite finitude of temporality.

In conversation with the notion of temporal transcendence in immanence intimated in Derrida's thought, this study proposes a notion of theological transcendence in immanence. Theological transcendence in immanence is presented as an inflected interpretive performance of salient themes from the tradition of Christian theology prior to the advent of modernity. From this perspective, all being is referred to God and finite creation is deemed to be a contingent, non-necessary participation, at an unquantifiable analogical remove, in the life and being of God. The notions of space, time and meaning that emerge from such a premise are subsequently explored, and brought into conversation with the corresponding notions in Derrida's work.

The study concludes by asking whether the conversation between the notions of temporal and theological transcendence in immanence can in any way be furthered, or whether the two positions should rather be regarded as irreconcilable, that is, as lying separately transcendent to each other. In response, it is suggested that the notion of transcendence in immanence implies the attempt to relate juxtaposed positions after the fashion of transcendence in immanence. The possibility of temporal transcendence in immanence inhabiting theological transcendence in immanence after the fashion of transcendence in immanence is firstly considered and rejected. Thereupon, the reverse option, namely that of theological transcendence in immanence making use of temporal transcendence in immanence,

while at the same time transcending it, is considered and judged to be a suitable provisional outcome of the conversation with Derrida.

**KEY TERMS**

Jacques Derrida, phenomenology, structuralism, theology, analogy, transcendence, immanence, space, time, meaning, difference, change, metaphysics

*For my wife, Donette,  
and our daughters, Madeleine and Marianné*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	vii
<b>1. Transcendence in immanence</b>	
1.1 The meaning of space and time .....	1
1.2 A hypothesis: different interpretations of transcendence in immanence ..	3
1.3 The conversation with Derrida .....	10
1.4 The hypothesis refined: temporal and theological transcendence in immanence .....	19
1.5 Whereto the conversation? .....	21
<b>2. Speaking of spatialisation: modernity and its discontents</b>	
2.1 Introduction .....	26
2.2 Spatialisation: structuralism .....	27
2.3 Spatialisation: phenomenology .....	31
2.4 Presence .....	38
2.5 On the contrary: an ecstatic Platonism and a high scholastic theology of participation in the infinite .....	50
2.6 The epistemological turn .....	68
<b>3. Derrida: spacing and the infinite finitude of temporality</b>	
3.1 Introduction .....	87
3.2 Deconstructing structuralism .....	89
3.3 Deconstructing phenomenology .....	101
3.4 Différance: the becoming space of time and the becoming time of space	113
3.5 The conversation with Heidegger .....	119
3.6 Temporal transcendence in immanence .....	126
<b>4. Theological transcendence in immanence: proportion and progression</b>	
4.1 Introduction .....	130
4.2 Theological transcendence in immanence .....	133
4.3 A semiology deriving from theological transcendence in immanence ....	147
4.4 Space, time and change .....	156

4.5	The practice of progression and proportion .....	169
<b>5.</b>	<b>Whereto the conversation? Once more: transcendence in immanence</b>	
5.1	Introduction .....	184
5.2	Theologies of temporal transcendence in immanence .....	191
5.3	Theological transcendence in immanence .....	209
5.4	Derrida's impossible God .....	222
<b>6.</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>234</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>236</b>

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my parents for awakening in me a love of learning and for encouraging my studies all these years. I can only hope to emulate the wonderful discussions with my father and the loving support from my mother in my relation with my own children. Speaking of encouragement, the affectionate interest shown by my parents-in-law deserves an equally affectionate word of thanks.

I want to extend a word of enormous gratitude to my promotor, professor Danie Goosen. He opened up vast new vistas in my theological and philosophical imagination, and guided me on a new intellectual path while at the same time extending a hand of warmth and friendship as a fellow traveller.

A final word of loving gratitude must go to my wife, Donette. Your encouragement to persevere and to get up early in the mornings to work carried me through on countless occasions. Both our children were born in the years that this study was undertaken. For putting up with an absent husband and father at those times that I played truant in the company of theologians and philosophers I cannot thank you enough.

*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*

## Chapter 1 Transcendence in immanence

### 1.1 The meaning of space and time

What is the meaning of space and time? The mind reels and slips when faced with such a question. Where is one to start in preparing some kind of responsible answer? To start answering will always be to have started already. A vast amount of assumptions will underlie any attempt to answer this simple question, and as many of them as possible will have to be addressed in as rigorous a fashion as possible. However, one has to start somewhere. It should be noted, in terms of *starting somewhere*, that the genitive construction in the question regarding the meaning of space and time may be understood subjectively, as well as objectively. On the one hand, how do the notions of space and time facilitate or contribute to the emergence of meaning? In other words, what is the space of meaning, what is the time of meaning? On the other hand, simply put, what does “space” mean and what does “time” mean? Subsequently, are the subjective and objective interpretations of the question mutually exclusive or do they rather contribute towards the interpretation of each other? Closely related and perhaps influencing the different ways of interpreting the question regarding the meaning of space and time is the issue of situating the question somewhere within the vast spectrum of intellectual discourse. From the perspective of a modern, natural scientific orientation, it may, for instance, be more - well, natural - to assume that by “space”, one is indicating extension - length, breadth and height - and by “time”, duration.<sup>1</sup> Such a discourse may furthermore typically consider measurability to be an important epistemic value. Alternatively, situating the question regarding the meaning of space and time in the field of linguistics and semiology brings a different range of issues to the fore. Are spatial and chronological references, for instance, to be viewed as metaphorical in one way or another? This, of course, immediately raises the question of metaphor and the relationship of metaphor to meaning. A moment’s reflection makes it clear

---

<sup>1</sup> Contemporary theoretical physics acknowledges that a rigid attachment to a naïve realist conception of space and time on the one hand, and a notion of meaning as the subjective addition of human consciousness, may not be very fruitful. Cf. eg. David Deutsch, *The Fabric of Reality* (London: Penguin, 1997), esp. ch. 5. Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe* (London: Vintage, 2007).



that to ask whether space and time are (mere) metaphors may be too facile a formulation. Which would, after all, be the more basic category? The etymology of the word “metaphor” seemingly already assumes the notions of space and time. This consideration may be radicalised when it is realized that the intimation of meaning in itself assumes some kind of notion of space and time. Meaning, after all, emerges where something is brought into - or understood to be in - a relation to something else, and this probably necessarily involves spatial and chronological assumptions. This insight was of course elucidated with great rigour from a certain perspective by Immanuel Kant in the *First Critique*.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, to say that something is brought into relation with something else may be a rudimentary explanation of the operation of signs, thereby drawing semiological considerations into the discussion on the meaning of space and time.

By engaging the hugely influential figure of Jacques Derrida as interlocutor, the discussion on the meaning of space and time is *ipso facto* situated in a certain context, thereby foregoing other points of entry into an enquiry regarding space and time and meaning. As will have to be substantiated later, Derrida’s work gathers together, amongst others, voices from the German transcendental tradition (Kant, Husserl and Heidegger, for example) and the French post-structural tradition, while at the same time problematising the notions of gathering and handing down as such.<sup>3</sup> The first objective of this study will be to read the writings of Derrida with special attention to the way in which the notions of space and time are used to explain the basic tenets of his thought. How, in other words, are spatial and chronological concepts used to convey Derrida’s intention? On the other hand, and inseparable from this, is an investigation which attempts to determine what profile the notions of space and time receive from Derrida’s reflections on meaning and meaninglessness (what, from Derrida’s viewpoint, *is* space, and what *is* time?)

At least in its Husserlian guise, the phenomenological method aims at isolating the meaning of an object as it appears in the consciousness of transcendental

---

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1964), A26, B42; A30, B46.

<sup>3</sup> In what amounts to an auto-genealogy of sorts, Derrida once described *differance* as “the juncture of ... the difference of forces in Nietzsche, Saussure’s principle of semiological difference, differing as the possibility of facilitation, impression and delayed effect in Freud, difference as the irreducibility of the trace of the other in Levinas, and the ontic-ontological difference in Heidegger.” (Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 130.)

subjectivity. By attempting, in this study, a *conversation* with Jacques Derrida on the meaning of space and time, an intellectual journey different from the strictly phenomenological is undertaken. More than simply asking about the apparent meaning of Derridean space and time, “space”, “time” and “meaning” themselves become the context for the appearance of Derrida’s thoughts, as well as a theoretical perspective that presents itself as an alternative to that of Derrida. This, in a curious way, accords with Derrida’s own attitude towards the phenomenological method. He proposes the opposite of the Husserlian *epochē*: an *epochē* precisely of the epoch of meaning - a putting between brackets that suspends the epoch of meaning. Once fixated meaning is bracketed out, the sliding, indifferent process of writing - as understood by Derrida - emerges.<sup>4</sup> That something - the impossibility of phenomenological certainty - emerges or appears is indicative of Derrida’s relation to the phenomenological tradition: the deconstruction of phenomenology in a curious way remains a kind of phenomenology, in that it is interested in what appears (and/or, precisely, does not appear).

Derridean “writing” interprets space and time, while at the same time being interpreted in terms of space and time. The question of the meaning of space and time thus has the possibility of becoming a stage, as it were, for the conversation between Derrida and the presuppositions underlying the theoretical approach of this study. What appears on this stage, from the perspective of the present research, is an attentive listening to, and in many ways deep concurrence, but eventual respectful parting of ways with, Derrida in terms of the meaning of space and time.

## **1.2 A hypothesis: different interpretations of transcendence in immanence**

Human experience is an experience of finitude and change. However, it is also an experience of relationality and often of order. Intimately associated with these experiences of finitude and change, as well as relationality and order, are notions of spatiality and temporality. The hypothesis guiding the conversation with Derrida in this study about the meaning of space and time is that within the conversation about

---

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 339.

experiences of change and also of relative stability – experiences that go hand in hand with the experience of finitude - there appears to be a shared notion of transcendence in immanence.

If immanence, or the immanent, is regarded as that realm of finite reality that is accessible to human experience up to the point of being able to be grasped in human consciousness, then transcendence, or the transcendent, could be understood as the experience of a mysterious “more” inhabiting the immanent and postponing an exhaustive, final understanding of an experienced situation. Immanence is the finite reality that is experienced by humans. Transcendence, precisely because it transcends experience, is not experienced directly. And yet there is in the experience of finite reality an experience of a “more”, an openness, an incompleteness that invites a kind of dynamism and restlessness. Moving from a description of experience to a reflection on experience in the context of knowledge formation, one could say that transcendence in immanence has to do with a mystical element present in all rational, conceptual knowledge.

Alternatively, one could talk about the presence of the sublime within the appreciation of the beautiful. If the beautiful has to do with form, harmony and aesthetic pleasure, the sublime refers to those liminal experiences where the categories used to describe our perceptions fall short. These are the experiences of awe, amazement and wonder. A fundamental question in this regard is whether the beautiful and sublime are to be radically separated or, in line with the notion of transcendence *in* immanence, have to be somehow considered together.<sup>5</sup>

Transcendence in immanence thus has to do with a “double vision” which intimates a “more” or “beyond” precisely in the intimation of liminality and finitude, and without necessarily being able to determine the border between these “regions” in any absolute way. Our closed reality is never closed – it always confronts us with

---

<sup>5</sup> Within the context of discussing the possibility of reciprocity between subject and subject and between subject and object, John Milbank provides an insightful overview of the development leading from a view of the sublime somehow inhabiting the beautiful and expressing the “more” within the beautiful to a radical separation of the beautiful and the sublime in the aesthetics of Immanuel Kant and his intellectual successors. John Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity: Part One, Reciprocity Refused”, *Modern Theology*, 17:3, July 2001, p. 344 ff.

openness and unpredictability.<sup>6</sup> The question now becomes one of whether or not it would be legitimate to extrapolate from our experience of transcendence in immanence to postulations regarding the composition of reality as such. Can one, in other words, speak of a relationship between “transcendence” and “immanence”, thereby implying that transcendence is somehow a separate reality apart from immanent finitude? Is it warranted to postulate some kind of duality in the real? Would it not be much more responsible of thought to remain with the immanent and try to accommodate our experience of a “more” in some other way? Should we, in other words, ontologically speaking, remain with some kind of monism?

Casting about for historical precedents of speculations regarding the ontological status of transcendence, one finds many examples. To start with the obvious, a clear distinction between transcendence and immanence and, concomitantly, the presupposition of an ontological duality, is a salient feature of Plato’s thought. The founder of the Academy postulated a realm of eternal, ideal forms separate from the material world, which is subject to change and uncertainty. This ideal world transcends the immanent world of sense experience and everyday consciousness. The realm of the transcendent is not, however, hermetically sealed off from that of the immanent, as the inhabitants of the material world participate in the forms of the eternal ideas, and are deemed to be good, true and beautiful, precisely to the extent that they participate in the transcendent ideas.

Plato’s student, Aristotle, criticised the postulations of his erstwhile tutor in important ways, two of which are relevant to the purposes of the present discussion. In the first place, there is Aristotle’s rejection of a separate transcendent realm, which in a sense duplicates the material world.<sup>7</sup> Eric Voegelin suggests that Aristotle’s philosophical approach must be regarded as a shift of attention to the immanent world of nature, rather than as a radical break with Plato, seeing that neither of them developed watertight systems.<sup>8</sup> In the second place the Aristotelian notion of *kinesis* is pertinent to the current discussion. The use of the term *kinesis* derives from

---

<sup>6</sup> Du Toit, C.W., 2009, ‘Towards a new natural theology based on horizontal transcendence’, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 65(1), Art. #186, p. 1. DOI: 10.4102/hts.v65i1.186.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance Aristotle’s discussion of the Platonic Forms in the *Metaphysics*, Book Alpha and Book Mu, 990b - 993a and 1079b - 1080a (trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 33-38 and pp. 405, 406.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Order and History: Plato and Aristotle* (Missouri: University Press, 1999) p. 328.

Aristotle's appreciation for the dynamics of concrete existence. Aristotle was, in other words, deeply under the impression of the continuous process of change happening in nature, a process he explained in terms of a movement from potentiality to actuality.<sup>9</sup> Now, according to a certain line of interpretation, the Aristotelian notion of *kinesis* would be more faithful to the radicality of change and fluctuation in nature than would the Platonic notion of recollection, which tries to link the experience of changeable finitude back to transcendent and fixed ideas.<sup>10</sup>

The different approaches exemplified by Plato and Aristotle continued to be elaborated in the Christian era and were institutionalised in various traditions of thought.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, Christian intellectuals, reflecting on their faith, found in Platonic and neo-Platonic speculation about the transcendent a connection with Greek thought. Thus, Christian theology very naturally came to correlate transcendence with God and immanence with creation, and recognised them as ontologically distinct (though not necessarily separate.) The categories and logical *organon* bequeathed by Aristotle, however, also definitively shaped Western thought. Upon the re-introduction into the Christian West of many of Aristotle's works that were lost for a millennium, there was a lot of contention regarding the acceptability of the main tenets of Aristotle's philosophy. Throughout the thirteenth century and thereafter, theologians struggled with the challenge posed by Aristotle's perceived "naturalism", manifested, for instance, in teachings about the eternity of the world, the mortality of the soul and the primacy of sense knowledge in human cognition.<sup>12</sup> There were, however, also influential attempts at incorporating Aristotelian

---

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, II.1.192b and V.1.225. In the latter passage Aristotle mentions that there are three kinds of motion – qualitative, quantitative and local. Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye. In: Barnes, J (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume one* (Princeton, N.J.: The Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> For this line of argument, see John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics – Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> For an interesting discussion, within the context of the notion of time, on how Plotinus in turn criticized Aristotle in important ways, while effecting a synthesis of Plato and Aristotle that yet constitutes an individual position in its own right, see Eric Alliez, *Capital Times* (Minneapolis: University Press, 1996), chapter two: "The Time of Audacity: Plotinus." For a discussion of the development of the neo-platonic tradition in Saint Augustine, see the same book, chapter three. The interaction between the Platonic and Aristotelian heritage will be addressed again in chapters four and five of this study.

<sup>12</sup> Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1985), p. 334.

philosophy into a broader theological and platonic framework, the latter approach possibly of necessity leading to a theorising of transcendence in immanence.<sup>13</sup>

The attempts at synthesising Plato and Aristotle, thereby somehow thinking in terms of transcendence in immanence, were paralleled and later supplanted in influence by approaches that cast theology and philosophy in oppositional roles. Gradually, philosophy came to be regarded as a discipline separate from theology, and in many respects critical thereof. The emphasis on experimentation in the work of Roger Bacon, while not in itself necessarily implying all that followed, may be viewed as an early example of such an approach. From being the handmaiden of theology, philosophy was transformed into natural philosophy and, in many respects, associated itself with the methodology and rationality exemplified by the nascent natural sciences.<sup>14</sup> These developments go hand in hand with a radical separation of transcendence and immanence in the period of early modernity. While early modernity still by and large accepted an ontological transcendent, or “God”, it nevertheless gradually carved out an autonomous “secular” sphere governed by its own natural laws and accessible to a human rationality independent of any reference to such a transcendent. While theology in the West always assumed some notion of revelation associated with a transcendent God who initiates the relationship with creation, the radical separation of transcendence and immanence in modern thought led to revelation being regarded more in supernatural terms as something arriving entirely from “outside.” In some circles, revealed Scripture was seen as the only proper object of theological reflection. Philosophy and the natural sciences, on the other hand, assumed a freedom to reflect on a pure immanent nature along the lines of a purely immanent rationality.<sup>15</sup>

It would seem then that the question regarding the ontological status of transcendence could be seen as a debate between a theology that naturally regards transcendence as a separate ontological reality and a philosophy that only recognises an immanent reality. The situation is, however, not that simple. In an increasingly pluralistic society, there are theological approaches today that range

---

<sup>13</sup> In chapters four and five of this study it will be argued that such a theorizing of transcendence in immanence finds an exemplary expression in the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 75ff, 156ff.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. John Milbank, *Theology & Social Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), esp. parts 1 and 2.

from acceptance of an ontological duality and even a radical separation of transcendence and immanence, on the one hand, to a total rejection of ontological transcendence, thereby opting for some kind of ontological monism, on the other hand, and many positions in between.<sup>16</sup> Philosophy, on the other hand, if it insists on positing only an immanent sphere, must still explain our human experience of “more” and of mystery in some way or another. This usually takes place along the lines of some biological reductionism, whereby the experience of transcendence is explained as being some kind of epiphenomenon of consciousness.<sup>17</sup> It would seem then that while the question of the ontological status of transcendence has, in the past, perhaps been cast as a debate between theology and philosophy, it is also evident that the notion of transcendence in immanence is thematised inside both theology and philosophy, to the extent that they are regarded as distinct disciplines.

Nevertheless, it is possible to place the conversation about the ontological status of transcendence in a somewhat different context. This is, perhaps, the more “popular cultural” context of the question regarding the relationship between “faith” and “reason”. Although it has been argued that forms of faith exist that consciously function only on an immanent plane<sup>18</sup>, the view that the notion of faith is *generally* taken to imply some form of relationship with a transcendent divine would probably not be contested. The question then becomes one of to what extent claims regarding the ontological status of transcendence are proper to either “faith” or “reason”. Could it be assumed that faith, in general, holds to an ontologically separate reality (called “the divine”) and that reason, on the other hand, accepts no such ontological duality? Here as well, within the context of a discussion between “faith” and “reason” (if such an opposition is deemed valid at all), the situation is not as simple. As has already been noted, faith is not always associated with the acceptance of a transcendence that has some kind of separate ontological status. On the other hand, natural science, widely viewed as the apex and paradigm of

---

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Harvey G. Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009). p.2. See also: Cornel du Toit, “Shifting Frontiers of Transcendence in Theology, Philosophy and Science”, In: Du Toit, C.W. (ed.) *Homo transcendentalis? – Transcendence in science and religion: interdisciplinary perspectives* (Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, 2010). p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Sessions identifies six models of faith, at least one (the confidence model) of which does not proceed from any relationship whatsoever. W.L. Sessions, *The concept of faith – a philosophical investigation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). In his distinction between faith and belief, Harvey Cox also advances a position which sees faith as a “deep seated confidence”. (Ibid. p. 3).

human rationality, itself attests to encountering some kind of transcendence.<sup>19</sup> Cornel du Toit, working with the notion of transcendence as a “frontier”, notes that while ignorance is the only frontier recognised by science, a portal has nevertheless, in recent times, opened for speaking of transcendence within the language and style of the natural sciences. He goes on to say that:

“The openings/frontier posts found in science-theology debates where God can act (in a non-interventionist manner) are at the micro level of quantum uncertainty, complexity systems, the role of change in evolution, autopoietic (self-creating) cell systems in biology, and the notion of emergence.”<sup>20</sup>

The recognition that a notion of transcendence does have a role to play within the discourse of the natural sciences should, however, come with an important reservation. This has to do with the basis upon which such a judgement is made. To unquestioningly accept the natural sciences as the paradigm of rationality, and then to search for “openings” where traces of transcendence may be accommodated within the discourse of the natural sciences, would present a position that is vulnerable to serious criticism. This position simply accepts that a certain natural scientific worldview is the standard against which everything else is to be measured. Furthermore, this approach casts faith in an apologetic role - the burden of evidence now lies with faith to prove that it still has some role to play in the modern world. However, this argument is circular - a contender in the field is at the same time laying down the rules of the game and acting as judge of the outcome.

Having said this, it seems to be a fact that faith, understood as the relationship with a divine, which is regarded as being ontologically transcendent, has lost ground in the popular culture of much of the Western world today. In his monumental study, *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor traces the developments that lead to the conditions within the broader cultural consciousness being less and less conducive to faith in a

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Detlev Tönsing. “Transcendence in physics: an oxymoron”, In: Du Toit, C.W. (ed.) *Homo transcendentalis? – Transcendence in science and religion: interdisciplinary perspectives* (Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, 2010). p.41.

<sup>20</sup> Du Toit, “Shifting Frontiers of Transcendence in Theology, Philosophy and Science”, p. 16, 17.



transcendent God.<sup>21</sup> In the course of a lengthy development, we have, in much of the West, arrived at a point where it would be a better description to speak of the human person as a “buffered” self, rather than as a “porous” self. According to this sensibility it seems to be “axiomatic that all thought, feeling and purpose, all the features we normally can ascribe to agents, must be in the minds, which are distinct from the ‘outer’ world. The buffered self begins to find the idea of spirits, moral forces, causal powers with a purposive bent, close to incomprehensible.”<sup>22</sup> Taylor goes on to discuss a number of cultural indicators that accompany the rise of the monadic, “buffered” self. These indicators include an increased sense of interiority, exemplified by the growth of a rich vocabulary of interiority; an increased sense of privacy; a greater sense of individualism in general, including a stronger notion of individual responsibility; instrumental rationality; and, finally, a disenchantment of experiences of order and time.<sup>23</sup> The insight to be gained from the brief reference to secularisation seems to be that an evaluative position with regard to the historical development of a secular sphere is at least co-implicated in one’s position on the ontological status of transcendence, as well as in one’s standpoint with regard to the notion of transcendence in immanence.

This section has started by positing a shared intimation of transcendence in immanence as a possible ground for the conversation with Derrida on the meaning of space and time. A subsequent, somewhat retrospective, exploration of the notions of transcendence and immanence and, cursorily, of transcendence in immanence, has moreover revealed a myriad of different interpretations, especially with regard to the ontological status of transcendence, indicating that further refining of the initial hypothesis is necessary.

### **1.3 The conversation with Derrida**

Does Derrida himself use the expression “transcendence in immanence”? In accordance with his philosophical project, Derrida’s language has, over the years,

---

<sup>21</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 539. This development is explored in more detail in the next chapter of this study.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 539 – 544.

progressively moved away from the conventionally philosophical towards an experimentation with various neologisms and words chosen specifically for their ambiguity. However, early on, in his doctoral thesis, Derrida does use the expression “transcendence in immanence” at least once. Attempting to show the impossibility of Husserl’s quest for an absolute ground for phenomenological thought, Derrida repeatedly refers to a dialectical tension between identity and alterity, which, according to him, is evident throughout phenomenology:

“In the absolute identity of the [phenomenological] subject with itself, the temporal dialectic, *a priori* constitutes alterity. The subject appears to itself originally as a tension between the Same and the Other. The theme of a transcendental intersubjectivity establishing transcendence at the heart of the absolute immanence of the ‘ego’ is already announced. The ultimate foundation of the objectivity of intentional consciousness is not the intimacy of the ‘I’ with itself but Time or the Other, those two forms of existence which are irreducible to a single essence.”<sup>24</sup>

Hugh Rayment-Pickard remarks that Derrida later on, in the preface to the 1990 publication of his doctoral thesis, sees the dialectic between the same and the other, immanence pervaded by transcendence (as shown in the above quotation), as being a prefiguration of what he would later come to call *différance*.<sup>25</sup>

The hypothesis of a shared intimation of transcendence in immanence as a possible ground for conversing with Derrida on the meaning of space and time may gain further clarity when the notion of meaning itself is considered, specifically from a semiological point of view. As in the epistemological, ontological and cultural instances already discussed, a notion of transcendence in immanence may be hypothesised with regard to the intimation of meaning in the context of the operation of signs. Similarly, in the case of the intimation of meaning through the operation of signs, an experience of transcendence in immanence raises the question of whether the transcendent is to be regarded as somehow separate from the immanent,

---

<sup>24</sup> Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl, p. 29. Quoted in Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God – Derrida’s Theology* (London: Ashgate, 2003), p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

thereby accepting some kind of duality, or whether the transcendent is to be viewed as an epiphenomenon of the immanent, thereby favouring some kind of monism.

Making use of distinctions proposed by Umberto Eco in his *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*<sup>26</sup>, two different, and perhaps opposing, “logics” may be identified in the operation of meaning intimation. On the one hand, there is a monistic logic of meaning intimation. Where this logic is operative in the intimation of meaning, use is made of an *inferential* mechanism of meaning in some form or another. In other words, something *leads to something else*. According to Eco, this is the Philonian mechanism of implication,  $p > q$ , which, in the classical world, was expounded at length by the Stoics, and in contemporary thought, formed the centrepiece of C.S. Peirce’s theory of signs.<sup>27</sup> In the inferential category of the discovery or production of meaning, the occurrence of something intimates, implies or leads to something else. The inference may be synecdochic in character, which is to say that a part of something that is perceived and comprehended leads to an intimation of a greater whole. It may also be metonymic in character, in which case the proximity to or association with that which is perceived and comprehended allows for novel meaning to be arrived at. The inference may, however, also follow upon a fundamental rupture with, or conclusion of what has been going on. It may, in other words, derive from the arrival of something completely unexpected. In the words of Hugh Rayment-Pickard: “The items in a field of metaphors belong together not because they may substitute for one another, but because they bear both a *family resemblance* and a *necessary dissemblance* to one another.”<sup>28</sup> As will become evident later on, that kind of inference that is the death of every continuity – in other words, the coming of the radically other - is what is important to Jacques Derrida.

It is important to understand that the inferential mechanism assumes a singular, self-contained instance that nevertheless leads (or gives way) to a new position, and that this leading or traversal in itself supplies or comprises the novel meaning. The initial

---

<sup>26</sup> Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the philosophy of language* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 15,16.

<sup>28</sup> Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God*, p. 16.

point, seemingly, does not need anything else for meaning to emerge - it is self-contained within its horizon. This is its monism.

On the other hand, a binary logic may be assumed when attempting to conceive of the process of meaning intimation. Where a binary logic operates, the existence of two poles or points of reference is presupposed. In this regard, it is precisely in the interaction or relationship between the two “poles” that meaning is thought to be constituted. Therefore, some form of intersubjectivity, or at least relationality, is present in this logic. According to Eco, the mechanism of the discovery or production of meaning, in this case, works according to a relationship of equivalence,  $p \equiv q$  (rather than inference.) Some form of pre-established harmony (often described as a code) exists in signs of this category, which makes the intimation of meaning possible. A sender transfers meaning content to a receiver using an agreed upon code. In this case, it would therefore perhaps be more appropriate to speak of the transference, rather than the inference, of meaning. The prominent feature of a binary logic at work in the intimation of meaning is the assumed irreducibility of the relationship. The one “pole” cannot be reduced to the other.

The short diversion into semiotic theory allows us a point of entry into Derrida’s extensive work on linguistic meaning and structure. The notion of structure is of course a metaphysical notion *par excellence*. Akin to “idea”, “form” and “essence”, the notion of structure enables us to determine in what way structuralism may be regarded as a form of phenomenology: a structure is what appears within a network of signifiers, constituting a horizon, whereby a certain meaning is defined. Opposing himself to such a view, Derrida, in the essay “Force and Signification”<sup>29</sup>, to name but one, argues that a structure cannot pinpoint meaning in any fixed way - a surplus of meaning always remains. In this regard, one could agree with Rudolphe Gasché that Derrida’s thought is geared at systematically outwitting the opposition between the structural and its various others<sup>30</sup> (such as the network constituting a stable background meaning against which a structure appears.) Derrida’s way of moving beyond the binary opposition between structure and its other, whereby meaning can

---

<sup>29</sup> *Writing and Difference*, p. 1 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Rudolphé Gasché, *Inventions of Difference – On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 139.

purportedly be fixed, is by highlighting the “structural infinity” of language.<sup>31</sup> The latter expression would be one way of understanding textuality as such. Rudolphe Gasché paraphrases Derrida’s understanding of textuality, with specific reference to structural infinity, as follows:

“Marks, semes, states Derrida, are constituted differentially, diacritically. If such is the case, the marks, as they are deployed within the series which they designate (as well as designating all other marks of that same series), designate in addition, or, more generally, must blend into, or take the fold of, the asemic space of production or inscription that unfolds between the terms of the series. In addition, the marks of a text are, therefore, also descriptions/inscriptions ((*de*)*écrit*) of the structure and movement of the texture of the marks. They signify the movement of the very operation of signifying too. Yet, even though each mark, while referring to itself and the other marks of the series, also represents the spaced-out semi-opening (*l’entrouverture espacée*) ‘which relates the different meanings to each other,’ the valence thus added to the semes is not a supplementary meaning that would come to enrich the series. What is added to the series as it becomes re-marked by the asemic space of diacritical differentiation ... is, in truth, a non-sense, something which by right has no meaning, since it is itself the possibility of meaning.”<sup>32</sup>

What Gasché is emphasising by talking about the structural infinity of Derrida’s thought regarding language is the fact that there is always more than can be gathered under the umbrella of a specific structure. The “more” is, however, not the more of “semantic infinity” - in other words, the more of an infinite richness of meaning too great to be grasped by finite minds and language, but the “syntactic infinity” that focuses on the actual adding of diacritical marks *ad infinitum*, whereby a continuous spacing is effected.<sup>33</sup> To this distinction between the semantic and the syntactic infinite will be returned in the last chapter of this study. Suffice it for the present to point out that what Derrida attempts to illustrate is that language always

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 142. The quotation is from Derrida’s *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 252.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 139.

assumes its “other”. The present study will argue that this insight on the part of Derrida is a way of articulating transcendence in immanence.

It is noteworthy that a distinction between opposing “logics” at work with regard to the question of meaning – or meaninglessness – also forms an integral part of Derrida’s work, even though he would find it necessary to problematise the notion of a “logic” in general, due to its link with “logos” as a metaphysical master-word. In the opening manifesto-like pages of *De la Grammatologie*, Derrida speaks of the destruction of the concept of “sign” and its entire logic, as well as the urgent need for the construction of a new logic of the “supplement”.<sup>34</sup> It would appear, therefore, that to talk about different logics at work in an inferential and transferential mechanism of meaning intimation, as conjectured above, would not be to introduce something completely alien to Derrida’s own thinking to a conversation with Derrida. In a sense, this is what the entire deconstructive project is about. In the introduction to her translation of Derrida’s *Dissemination*, Barbara Johnson observes the following with regard to Derrida’s reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*.<sup>35</sup>

“What Derrida’s reading of Rousseau sketches out is indeed nothing less than *a revolution in the very logic of meaning*. The logic of the supplement wrenches apart the neatness of the metaphysical binary oppositions” (italics added.)

The opposition of a new logic of meaning to an outdated, metaphysical logic is evidenced throughout the Derridean corpus. In an essay on the work of Edmond Jabès, Derrida, for instance, uses the figures of the rabbi and the poet to exemplify two differing hermeneutical approaches - an opposition which, on further consideration, is perhaps rather similar to the two mechanisms of meaning intimation that were proposed as a point of entry into the discussion on the intimation of meaning. The Jews are a people who have received a “Book” from God, a part of which has quite literally been given in codified form as the Law. For the rabbi,

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Translator’s introduction to Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2004) p. xiii.

In his essay entitled “Plato’s Pharmacy”, Derrida calls the process of supplementation “an original kind of logic”, *Dissemination*, p. 96.

representing the people of the Book, the hermeneutical endeavour is an attempt to elucidate the Book, to help pass it on, and in so doing remain as faithful to the original Book as possible. For the rabbi, the code has been given, and the task of interpretation is merely one of clarifying the code and making sure that it is applied correctly to every situation that presents itself.

In contrast to the heteronomous (or binary) hermeneutics of the rabbi, the poet exemplifies an “impudent” and “autonomous” work of interpretation. The poet, while bound by language, celebrates the freedom of a new creation in his poem - a meaning not provided within the parameters of a prescriptive tradition. In Derrida’s words:

“In the beginning is hermeneutics. But the shared necessity of exegesis, the interpretive imperative, is interpreted differently by the rabbi and the poet. The difference between the horizon of the original text and exegetic writing makes the difference between the rabbi and the poet irreducible ... The original opening of interpretation essentially signifies that there will always be rabbis and poets. And two interpretations of interpretation.”<sup>36</sup>

The operation of two mechanisms of meaning intimation finds another exemplary expression in an essay by Derrida on *différance* (a notion which will be explored at length in later chapters.) Here, the classically determined structure of signs is discussed, in order to “irrevocably surpass” it by explicating another process or logic at work.<sup>37</sup> According to the widely held classical conception, a sign is put in the place of the thing itself, where “thing” may designate a sense or referent. “When we cannot take hold of or show the thing, let us say the present, the being-present, when the present does not present itself, then we signify, we go through the detour of signs.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, on the one hand, there is the metaphysical conception of the sign, according to which its meaning is determined by an absent thing which is deemed to be true presence and which the sign merely tries to represent. In deconstructing this

---

<sup>36</sup> *Writing and Difference*, p. 81. Cf. John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 116.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* p. 135.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 138.

conception, Derrida then proposes a mechanism of meaning that moves past the distinction between absence and presence by taking difference to be primordial:

“Différance is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be ‘present,’ appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. This trace relates no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it is not...”<sup>39</sup>

The trace is neither fully present, nor fully absent. It manifests an alternative approach to meaning than that proposed by the binary logic of the classical sign. What we are left with in the wake of the brief discussion on meaning in the context of the working of signs is, seemingly, a choice between an approach that presupposes some kind of monism (the inferential approach), and an approach that presupposes a duality (the transferential approach). At first glance, this situation seems to be corroborated by the oppositions postulated by Derrida, namely an opposition between a binary conception of the sign on the one hand, and the trace as a substitution of the classic concept of the sign on the other; or, again, between two interpretations of interpretation. Derrida subverts the language of classical metaphysics by using it against itself. He does this by showing the inherent undecideability in the binary oppositions used by metaphysics to impose an arbitrary order on what is rather to be understood as primordial flux. Would one be justified in saying that the first approach, presumably favoured by Derrida, attempts a consistent immanentism, while the latter approach tries to accommodate some kind of transcendence? Once again, the situation is more complicated than that.

In the first place, it should be noted that to speak of an inferential mechanism of meaning intimation that implies some kind of monism, and a transferential mechanism of meaning intimation that presupposes an irreducible binarity, is to establish inaccessible idealities. Neither of these logics can operate in complete

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 142.



isolation. The meaning mechanism of equivalence cannot stand on its own in any absolute way. This is the case because no code can mediate perfectly between two communicating subjects (if this were the case, would it still be possible to speak of *two* subjects, or would they instead collapse into one?) There is always an excess of meaning that is not covered in an established code's definition of its signs. This situation implies that all communication, of necessity, involves interpretation, which is a form of inference.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, to claim sole legitimacy for a mechanism of inference in the *aliquid stat pro aliquo* of the sign is far from unproblematic. In interpreting the meaning of that which is taken to be a sign, the subject has to accept a certain meaning constellation as stable, in order to proceed from there to novel, inferred meaning. In other words, in moving from p to q (in  $p > q$ ), the subject has to make certain choices about the meaning of p based upon various factors, such as the context in which it occurs. The inference cannot be made without a relatively stable constellation of background meaning being assumed. The stable background meaning may be the result of previous inferences in an infinite regress, but the act of assuming their stability at the moment of inference implies a relation of equivalence – the meaning is agreed upon; some kind of transcendent horizon is accepted. In this sense, equivalence – some kind of binarity - is also always present in the intimation of meaning.

“Derrida both recognizes the necessary *resemblance* of a theme and observes the tendency of all *resemblance* (simulation, mimesis, metaphor, and so on) to break down into dissimulation and difference. The quality of *resemblance* is therefore an indeterminable combination of similitude and dissimilitude, continuity and discontinuity, life and death.”<sup>41</sup> This formulation by Hugh Rayment-Pickard could be interpreted as being another way of recognising the presence of the theme of transcendence in immanence in Derrida's thought.

---

<sup>40</sup> Eco, *Semiotics*, p. 173.

<sup>41</sup> Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God*, p. 16.

#### 1.4 The hypothesis refined: temporal and theological transcendence in immanence

We are now finally in a position to reassert the hypothesis formulated at the beginning of this section, in order to refine it further. The hypothesis is that a shared notion of transcendence *in* immanence may form the basis of a conversation with Derrida on the meaning of space and time. To speak of a choice for a radical immanence and a rejection of transcendence in Derrida's thought would be to interpret it in terms of too facile an opposition. Rather, this study asserts that it makes much more sense to appreciate Derrida's thought as a thought of transcendence *in* immanence. In fact, in his earliest writings, with a more conventional philosophical vocabulary, Derrida uses this exact expression. In his master's thesis, with the English title *The Problem of Genesis in the Philosophy of Husserl*, we find the following passage (already previously quoted):

“In the absolute identity of the subject with itself, the temporal dialectic, a priori, constitutes alterity. The subject appears to itself originally as a tension between the Same and the Other. The theme of a transcendental intersubjectivity *establishing transcendence at the heart of the absolute immanence of the 'ego'* is already announced. The ultimate foundation of the objectivity of intentional consciousness is not the intimacy of the 'I' with itself but Time or the Other, those two forms of existence which are irreducible to a single essence.”<sup>42</sup>

But in that case the question becomes one concerning the nature or character of transcendence in immanence. In this regard, a further assertion of this study also finds a *verbatim* ground in the above quotation. The assertion is that Derrida's thought may be understood as one of *temporal* transcendence in immanence, and that the conversation on the meaning of space and time will receive ample profile by juxtaposing this notion with one of *theological* transcendence in immanence.

---

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God*, p. 22. Italics added.

Temporal transcendence in immanence, as it emerges in Derrida's thought, is a thought of infinite finitude. It is a thought supremely sensitive to difference and change. Every seemingly stable spatio-temporal constellation is actually inherently unstable, as it is not fully present to itself. It is haunted by the alterity of an absolute past that cannot be gathered into the present. Similarly, the present is always waiting for the arrival of a totally unforeseeable future. Thus, absolute and infinite temporality manifests a transcendence in every immanent constellation.

The notion of theological transcendence in immanence, which this study proposes in comparison to Derridean temporal transcendence in immanence, is in need of careful delimitation. As has been mentioned before, there is no unequivocal "theological" stance on transcendence and immanence and their (possible) relationship. The notion of theological transcendence in immanence is therefore to be understood in terms of the specific profile it is given in this study. By qualifying the notion of transcendence in immanence advanced in the conversation with Derrida as "theological", this study seeks to highlight the fact that there are ample resources available within the tradition of Christian metaphysical thought<sup>43</sup> to deal with the experiences of finitude, change, difference and diversity in ways that are at least as sensitive as in the temporal transcendence proposed by Derridean thought. In contrast to an approach that deals with the experience of transcendence in terms of temporality, a theological notion of transcendence in immanence suggests that it is precisely due to its participation in divine, infinite Being that finite (immanent) reality is experienced as ecstatic (that is, as permeated by transcendence).

Different understandings of the nature of transcendence in immanence in turn lead to differing conceptions of the meaning of space and time. Taken as an objective genitive, the expression "the meaning of space and time", from the perspective of temporal transcendence in immanence, does not make sense. A spatio-temporal constellation does not comprise any fixed meaning. There is, in fact, no fixed meaning. The becoming space of time and the becoming time of space ensure that meaning continually bleeds away. Taken as a subjective genitive, the expression

---

<sup>43</sup> Underlying the notion of theological transcendence in immanence advanced in this study is an assumption about the futility of speaking in general and abstract terms about "theology" and "religion." Theology is always a *logos* about *theos* embodied in a specific tradition, in this case the tradition of Christian experience and theological reflection in particular.

“the meaning of space and time” would, in a sense, point to a radical ontological monism. All that there “is” is the infinite stream of the becoming space of time, and the becoming time of space.

From the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence, the meaning of space and time, viewed in an objective sense, is likewise radically open. Yet, instead of exploding meaning altogether in the direction of meaninglessness, theological transcendence in immanence proposes an understanding of meaning as ever-increasing, ever deepening. Finite being, in a sense, as concentrated in the human soul, may be regarded as a journey of meaning that is also a traversal of the infinite. It can therefore never rest in an assumed complete grasp of the meaning of being, but is infinitely beckoned to new depths and more fullness of meaning. The subjective sense of the expression “the meaning of space and time” is represented by an understanding of space and time as the radically contingent finitude of the finite, compared to infinite being, on which it is completely dependent. Space and time constitute the manner in which finite being participates in infinite being, which is neither spatial nor temporal, but should rather be regarded as an infinite presence.

### **1.5 Where to the conversation?**

Having suggested different answers to the question of the meaning of space and time, the question now becomes one regarding the possibility of rational dialogue *per se*. Is there a limit and, if so, what is the absolute limit of conversation between a notion of temporal transcendence in immanence and one of theological transcendence in immanence? Viewed within a semiological context, what is the absolute limit of conversation between a monistic and a binary logic with regard to the intimation of meaning? Such a terminal point may not be easy to determine. It has, after all, earlier been stated that inference and transference cannot be rigidly separated. What is more, since Plato and Aristotle, the available logical and rhetorical arguments have been rehearsed many times in the conversation between the monistic and binary logics of the intimation of meaning. It would be a matter of course, for example, to test the internal consistency of each view. To try, in some way or another, to show that the other point of view can be included in one’s own

argument, may be more conclusive. This is in fact what Derrida attempts to do with his deconstruction of theology.<sup>44</sup>

At the rational limits of conversation, logic may give way to persuasion. This may simply be to say that the rhetorical thrust that is present in all argumentation now features more prominently. In acknowledging the rhetorical side of arguments, one would also not be straying from the Western tradition of intellectual discourse. Since antiquity, beauty has been one of the transcendentals, and a narrative that argues that intersubjective meaning arising from the participation between divine transcendence and created immanence is simply more beautiful than a narrative that accepts a minimalist logic of infinite temporal inference makes perfect sense. In arguing eloquently for the terrifying solitude of immanent will, Nietzsche made a similar argument from the premise of a monistic logic of meaning intimation.

This study concludes with the suggestion that the conversation between the temporal and theological notions of transcendence in immanence, in all probability, has no conclusive end. However, interminable conversation does not imply indecision. In fact, when it comes to meaning, it may not be possible *not* to make a decision. In entering the conversation, one either works with a logic proceeding from the premise of pure inference – in other words, transcendence is some kind of non-ontological epiphenomenon of pure immanence, or one works with a logic proceeding from the premise of intersubjective transference – in other words, transcendence is accorded some kind of ontological status. There are no meta-criteria, independent of either of the options, against which to test the rationality and validity of the choice that is made.

The fact of having juxtaposed the notion of theological transcendence in immanence to a notion of temporal transcendence in immanence, as analysed in the thought of my conversation partner, Jacques Derrida, clearly shows that this study decides in favour of the former option. A theological notion of transcendence in immanence, when understood correctly, is not susceptible to the allegations of fixation and violence levelled against ontotheology and much of modern thought. While being

---

<sup>44</sup> Cf. in *Of Grammatology*, p. 47: "The 'theological' is a determined moment in the total movement of the trace."

sensitive to difference and change, such an approach rather saves the notion of meaning, while giving a beautiful orientation to space and time. As will be argued later, this is the orientation of proportion in progression and progression in proportion.

The chapter following this introduction is devoted to an analysis of spatialisation, a state of affairs characteristic of much of modern thought. Whereas there is agreement with Derrida on the existence of a state of spatialisation, it will be argued that, based on different assumptions about the intimation of meaning, it is possible to construe a different genealogy of spatial dominance from that proposed by Derrida. Derrida places modern spatialisation towards the end of a long tradition of Presence, and criticises it, along with this whole construed tradition, as “logocentrism”. It is, however, also possible to argue that for much of its existence, Christian thought did not hold to such a rigid fixation of meaning, but rather reckoned with an analogical construal of meaning, and that it was only with the demise of an analogical worldview at the beginning of modernity that the door was opened for epistemological spatialisation in its mature, modern form.

The third chapter of this study begins by exploring Derrida’s deconstruction of structuralism and Husserlian phenomenology. The notions of *différance* and the trace, which emerge from this analysis, will in turn establish a perspective on the functioning of time and space in Derrida’s thought. As will become apparent, his is an ontology of radical temporality, a temporality that can never be gathered under the form of the present. Time is always anachronistic or “out of joint”<sup>45</sup>, whereby Derrida says that the present is always contaminated by the haunting of an absolute past or the arrival of an absolute future. Concomitantly, there is no absolute interiority of the experience of time, as proposed in the transcendental tradition. Every transcendental interiority, together with the consciousness of time that appears within it, is always “contaminated” by empirical reality, that is, by exteriority. To communicate this idea of contamination, Derrida makes use of the notions of “spacing” and of the trace. After briefly exploring the relationship between Derrida’s

---

<sup>45</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 3.

temporal ontology and that of Martin Heidegger, the chapter concludes by bringing Derridean space and time to bear on the notion of transcendence in immanence.

The fourth chapter of this study aims at establishing an alternative perspective on the meaning of space and time to that of Derrida. Proceeding from a discussion of the emergence of a concept of real divine transcendence in the thought of the Cappadocian fathers, this chapter seeks to articulate a binary logic of meaning intimation that nevertheless allows for genuine difference and change. Another way of formulating this approach would be to say that it aligns itself with recent attempts at salvaging the notion of analogy for philosophy and theology. Within a binary logic of meaning intimation, informed by an orthodox Christian thought of transcendence, space and time may firstly be construed as the condition of finitude, that is, as the border between finitude and infinitude. Space and time go hand in hand with materiality and embodiment as basic characteristics of the creaturely relation to the divine. Proceeding, in turn, from the notion of a creaturely, embodied relation to God, the meaning of space and time may be sought in characteristics such as rhythm, proportion and orientation, all of which play an important role in liturgy. A second perspective on the meaning of space and time from within a binary logic of meaning intimation is established by focusing not on the practices of the creaturely/embodied “pole” of the relationship, but on the relationship itself. From this perspective, space and time are in a sense the ontological “distance” between the triune God as infinite being and his finite creation. This in turn may be related to the concept of beauty in the Christian tradition: space and time are the distance of beauty, and the beauty of distance. Creation, especially as represented in humanity, in regarding God’s glory, traverses the infinite distance of His beauty. Precisely because of this journey, this pilgrimage into the infinite, the possibility of an appreciation for genuine change and difference opens up.

The fifth and final chapter of this study surveys the conversation with Derrida on the meaning of space and time, and again explores the theme of the limits of rational discussion. It will be noted that there are indeed many points of affinity between Derrida’s understanding of the meaning of space and time and an ontology deriving primarily from a binary (analogical) logic of meaning intimation. Chief amongst these is the thought of the permeation of immanence by transcendence. In Derrida’s

words, this would be a thought of contamination. The question then, however, becomes one of the nature of the transcendence that permeates immanence. Should it be seen as the absolute past that haunts every present, or should it be seen as an infinite that gives creaturely being to be? In other words, is it a matter of temporalising the transcendent, or of transcending the temporal?

Having surveyed both temporal transcendence in immanence and theological transcendence in immanence, this study concludes with the suggestion that the two positions in the conversation, due to the intrinsic nature of transcendence in immanence, would not be satisfied if they were left lying separately transcendent<sup>46</sup> to each other. In other words, the methodology of transcendence in immanence itself does not agree with a conclusion that juxtaposes two points of view without attempting some kind of resolution after the fashion of transcendence *in* immanence. In the light of this situation, the possibility of temporal transcendence in immanence inhabiting theological transcendence in immanence after the fashion of transcendence in immanence is firstly considered and rejected. Thereupon, the reverse option, namely that of theological transcendence in immanence making use of temporal transcendence in immanence, while at the same time transcending it (the methodology of transcendence in immanence) is considered and judged to be a suitable provisional outcome of the conversation with Derrida. It is provisional because the conversation can never be conclusively decided: if one chose to do so, it would always be possible to propose a deconstruction of the conclusion reached by this study.

---

<sup>46</sup> I get the notion of “separative transcendence” from an essay by Catherine Keller, “Rumors of Transcendence – the movement, state and sex of ‘beyond’” in John D. Caputo & Michael J. Scanlon (eds.), *Transcendence and Beyond*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 131. The expression will be used extensively in the final chapter of this study.



## Chapter 2 Speaking of spatialisation: modernity and its discontents

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the conversation revolves around the analysis of a certain affliction of modern thought that may be characterised as spatialisation. Spatialisation is not, by any means, the most prominent notion used by Derrida to highlight and explain the ills of Western metaphysics, but the categories of space, as well as time, which are involved in this notion result in it being eminently suitable as an introduction to the problematic relationship between transcendence and immanence identified with the pathology of modern metaphysics. An analysis of spatialisation will, in its turn, serve as an introduction to the very important concept of “Presence” in Derrida’s thought, as well as its spatial and temporal implications. Derrida’s overview of Western metaphysics as a metaphysics of presence will subsequently lead to the introduction of the concept of “*différance*” which, according to him, is another way of indicating the (auto)-deconstruction of a metaphysics that relates transcendence and immanence in a problematic manner.

After looking at Derrida’s analysis of spatialisation, the second part of this chapter attempts an alternative reading of the phenomenon of spatialisation. Modern spatialisation as such is equally negatively judged, but the stereotyping thereof as just another example of the metaphysics of presence that immobilises the whole of Western thought since antiquity is rejected. It will be suggested that the particular pathology of modern thought is to be found in its radical separation of transcendence and immanence, which goes together with the epistemological turn that inaugurates modernity. However, this situation cannot simply be projected onto the whole history of Western metaphysics. This study argues that another way of relating transcendence and immanence is possible - one that has in fact, at times, been present in the tradition of Western thought since antiquity.

## 2.2 Spatialisation: structuralism

Spatialisation may be described as the situation whereby the elements of the world are thought to be comprehensively definable and fixable. Once defined, the entities that make up the world are deemed to be in fixed relationship to one another. The experience of change is understood against the background of a deeper, underlying stability. According to this worldview, the fixed order of reality is also open to exhaustive rational investigation. The world becomes flat and spread out (spatialised), and hovering over it - or over against it - is an analysing reason performing the function of a patient cartographer. The result of reason's cartographic activity is knowledge representing reality "as it is", somewhat like a two-dimensional map reflected in a (two-dimensional) mirror.

According to Jacques Derrida, that special epoch in the history of thought, where thought as language became self-conscious and problematised itself, provides an important opportunity for gaining insight into the general characteristics of spatialisation as described above<sup>47</sup>. An avenue into the problematisation of language, and concomitantly into an analysis of spatialisation, is afforded Derrida by way of the analysis of structuralism as a twentieth century theoretical movement. Along with phenomenology, Derrida's treatment of which will be discussed below, structuralism may be viewed as an important manifestation of the becoming self-conscious of language.<sup>48</sup>

Derrida emphasises that the notion of structure is as old as Western philosophy itself and that, as such, it is intimately connected with concepts such as *epistēme*, truth and form.<sup>49</sup> Before turning to structuralism and its pivotal or liminal position in the emerging self-consciousness of language, the notion of structure and structurality itself, together with the spatial and chronological references involved, must be investigated. In the essay entitled *Force and Signification*, Derrida proposes that structurality gains prominence in proportion to the diminishment of force:

---

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 1, 353; *Grammatology*, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> Other salient tributaries to the "linguistic turn" are the analysis of the unconscious, pioneered by Freud, and the logical analytical investigations of language resulting in the so-called analytical strain of philosophy, pioneered by the likes of Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 351.

“In the future [structuralism] will be interpreted, perhaps, as a relaxation, if not a lapse, of the attention given to *force*, which is the tension of force itself. *Form* fascinates when one no longer has the force to understand force from within itself.”<sup>50</sup>

Derrida’s essay continues to argue for a renewed appreciation of the restless force that continually disturbs the structural moment (in a sense by itself), but this is to get ahead of the argument. What is important to recognise here is that structure, and especially the negative, spatialised manifestation thereof, dominates in the absence of force, or to use Derrida’s word play, through the force of weakness. It is worth quoting him at length in this regard:

“The force of our weakness is that impotence separates, disengages, and emancipates. Henceforth, the totality is more clearly perceived, the panorama and the panoramagram are possible. The panoramagram, the very image of the structuralist instrument, was invented in 1824, as Littré states, in order ‘to obtain immediately, on a flat surface, the development of depth vision of objects on the horizon.’ Thanks to more or less openly acknowledged schematization and spatialization, one can glance over the field divested of its forces more freely or diagrammatically. Or one can glance over the totality divested of its forces, even if it is the totality of form and meaning, for what is in question, in this case, is meaning rethought as form; and structure is the *formal* unity of form and meaning.”<sup>51</sup>

The isolation of a structure is thus, according to Derrida’s interpretation of structuralism, to identify the meaning of something in terms of abstract defined forms and their relations. In *Force and Signification*, Derrida devotes much attention to the reading of a work by the literary critic, Jean Rousset, which he views as being exemplary of such a structuralist approach. Rousset would, for instance, identify a structure in the work of Corneille, and then trace the development of this structure through various stages of Corneille’s writing. Derrida observes that the structure that

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 3. (italics in the original).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

Rousset identifies is quite rigorously geometrical (in the case of Corneille, it is a helix), and then remarks that such a geometricism comes naturally to a structuralist approach. Even though the notion of structure refers *strictu sensu* to space - geometric or morphological space, the order of forms and sites in the architectural or topographical sense of structure was soon – for instance, already in Aristotle - metaphorically applied to language and argumentation as well.<sup>52</sup> It is, however, precisely the metaphoricity (understood as merely figurative) of the spatial and geometric notions inherent to structure that Derrida wants to destroy. The spatiality of linguistic structure – and of metaphoricity - should be noted. Language, after all, determines things by spatialising them – spreading the signifiers out.<sup>53</sup> It is because of this spatialising function of language that the concept of structure is also natural in linguistics and literary criticism.

To restate - identifying a structure is thus to identify the meaning of something in terms of defined forms and their relations. The identification of meaning in terms of structure, however, involves a certain kind of abstraction or extraction: the form has to be separated from the content, which together with it constitutes a living whole. As Derrida says: “[T]he relief and design of structures appears more clearly when content, which is the living energy of meaning, is neutralized.”<sup>54</sup> A binary opposition now emerges - the opposition between form and content. This opposition is one of many binary oppositions which, according to Derrida, structures Western metaphysical thought. In these binary oppositions, there is, according to him, always a hierarchy at work - one of the terms is suppressed or dominated by the other. In the case of the spatialisation effected by structuralism, it is content that is subjugated by form. Form sits on top of content - its idealised and generalised character makes for easy application in various contexts, and increases the manipulative power of the rational agent that abstracts the form in the first place.

The form-content opposition is related to another central distinction in structuralism, namely that between signifier and signified. Ferdinand de Saussure, in his inauguration of modern structuralist linguistics, continued this distinction, which is

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 17. The non-metaphorical character of spatialisation and spacing in language (if by metaphor a *mere* figure of speech is implied) is emphasised repeatedly by Derrida.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

central to Western metaphysics, by accepting that a linguistic sign consists of two sides: a material signifier and an intelligible signified that belong together like the two sides of a leaf of paper. Saussure's breakthrough lay in the assertion that each particular signifier is not connected to a discrete signified meaning, but that signifiers signify precisely through their interaction with all the other signifiers in a linguistic system. The structure as a whole, as well as the intricate relations between the signifiers, should therefore be studied. Saussure's structuralism leaves the distinction between a material signifier and an intelligible signified intact, however, which is precisely what Derrida finds extremely problematic.

The subjection of the signifier to a transcendent meaning is nothing but violence, according to Derrida. This is the case even if the meaning does not lie in any single element of a structure, but in the structure as a whole. To abstract the form of a linguistic discourse from its content and then to privilege meaning as form above the material content is to arrest the living flow of the discourse, and thereby to commit violence. The violence of spatialisation is in a sense violence committed against time. Time is disregarded in favour of a snapshot of formal relations, which are then analysed. Derrida formulates this as follows:

“[S]imultaneity is the myth of a total reading or description, promoted to the status of regulatory ideal. The search for the simultaneous explains the capacity to be fascinated by the spatial image: is space not the ‘order of coexistences’ (Leibniz)? ... In this demand for the flat and the horizontal, what is intolerable for structuralism is indeed the richness implied by the volume, every element of signification that cannot be spread out into the simultaneity of a form.”<sup>55</sup>

The spatialisation effected by structuralism is, in Derrida's reading, another instance of a binary opposition established in order to subject one aspect of the opposition to the other. In this case, it is time subjected to a certain notion of space - space as a formal structure of elements in certain fixed relations to each other. Another dualism

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

underlies this notion of meaning - a subject outside of the structure oversees it and intimates its meaning.

### **2.3 Spatialisation: phenomenology**

The other important tributary of what was called the becoming self conscious of language, or the linguistic turn, which Derrida analysed during the 1960's, is phenomenology. Though apparently embarking on different projects – structuralism pursuing a theory of language and culture, while phenomenology is a philosophy of interior consciousness – Derrida nevertheless extracts the similarities in both, the correspondence between them being a state of spatialisation based on a shared metaphysical allegiance. In the case of phenomenology, the spatialisation is to be intimated in the binary oppositions introduced, followed by the promotion of one side of the opposition over the other, resulting in the one hovering above the other, so to speak.

In his exposition of the phenomenological method, Edmund Husserl more or less consciously followed the problematic already addressed in a methodological manner by Descartes.<sup>56</sup> As will be discussed in the second part of this chapter, the latter sought to establish certainty by a reduction of being to thought. This reduction was facilitated by Descartes' postulation of a *res cogitans*, a thinking substance, and a *res extensa*, the material world, the latter standing, in a sense, over against thought. Once so divided, the great quest of modern thought was cast as the search for a way in which to bridge the gap between subjective thought and the rest of the world, in such a way that certainty could be achieved and scepticism avoided. Descartes' option was to reach for certainty from within thought itself, that is to say a rationalist option. Clear and distinct thoughts provide the secure footing for bridging the gap to the world. On the other hand, and maintaining the premise of a split between a thinking subject and the rest of the world, empiricism proposed that the things themselves will report in such a way that the gap will be bridged. The

---

<sup>56</sup> Chakravorty Spivak. Translator's introduction to *Of Grammatology*, p. li.

epistemological gap will, as it were, be bridged from “the other side”, thereby establishing certainty.

According to Derrida, Husserl rejected as one-sided both the rationalistic proto-structuralism (for example, Dilthey’s *Weltanschauungsanalysen*), and the vulgar empiricism, espoused, for example, by positivism, which was present in theoretical thought at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>57</sup> Instead, Husserl ceaselessly attempted to reconcile the structuralist demand (which leads to a comprehensive description of a totality, of a form or a function organised according to an internal legality, in which elements have meaning only through the solidarity of their correlation or opposition), with the genetic demand (that is, the search for the origin and foundation of the structure)<sup>58</sup>. Derrida describes Husserl’s alternative to the structure - genesis opposition as follows:

“[Husserl] had to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of logicizing structuralism and psychologistic genetism ... He had to open up a new direction of philosophical attention and permit the discovery of a concrete, but nonempirical, intentionality, a ‘transcendental experience’ which would be ‘constitutive’, that is, like all intentionality, simultaneously productive and revelatory, active and passive. The original unity, the common root of activity and passivity is from quite early on the very possibility of meaning for Husserl.”<sup>59</sup>

Thus, Husserl attempted a resolution of the subject-object divide, as well as the rationalism-empiricism divide, by means of a transcendental reduction of thought, following the direction indicated by Kant. Everything belonging to the merely local or contingent in experience has to be expelled. Anything that belongs to a particular individual or situation is a matter of individual psychology. The fundamental structures of the mind have to be universal and transcendent. Correspondingly, the focus cannot be on the experiential object itself, but on the transcendental object as it appears in consciousness, subsequent to the bracketing out of all particularities

---

<sup>57</sup> This is the introductory scenario sketched by Derrida in his essay “Genesis and structure” and phenomenology. *Writing and Difference*, p. 191 – 202.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 197.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 199.

and non-essentialities. Meaning emerges from the intentional relationship between the transcendental subject and object in consciousness.

The apparent difference to, as well as eventual similarity with, the structuralist project should be noted at this point. On the face of it, the conception of meaning in structuralism appears to be very different from that of phenomenology. Whereas structuralism focuses on meaning as it arises from the relationship between the elements of a system, for instance language, phenomenology holds that meaning arises in interior consciousness. However, relation is as important in the emergence of meaning for phenomenology as it is for structuralism. In the case of phenomenology, it is the singular, intentional relationship between the transcendental subject and object in consciousness. Furthermore, this relationship is, as in the manifest aim of structuralism, also analysed as a definite structure in phenomenology. Derrida identifies the structure of transcendental intentionality in Husserl's thought as the noetic-noematic correlation. According to this structure, the noema, "which is the objectivity of the object, the meaning and the 'as such' of the thing for consciousness", while present in consciousness, does not belong to consciousness in a real way.<sup>60</sup> The noema is neither the determined thing itself in its raw existence (the noema is precisely the *appearing* of this thing), nor is it a moment belonging only to subjective thought. "It is neither of the world nor of consciousness, but is the world or something of the world *for* consciousness."<sup>61</sup> To grasp how the noema appear in the intentionality of transcendental thought is, according to Derrida, to simultaneously see how it is the condition of every structuralism and how ephemeral and disappearing every structure is, situated neither in the object nor in thought.<sup>62</sup>

What is important here is to realise that the concept of structure and the analysis of structure, together with the stasis that it implies, play an important role in Husserl's thought. As mentioned above, Husserl continually attempted to reconcile the structuralist demand with the restless energy of becoming (genesis.) That he was conscious of the disabilities of structuralism alone is evidenced, according to Derrida,

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 204.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 205.



by another oppositional pair that Husserl made use of, namely that between *hyle* and *morphe*. While the noema is an intentional and non-real element, the hyle is a real but not intentional element of the experienced. "It is the sensate (experienced and not real) material of affect before any animation by intentional form. It is the pole of pure passivity, of nonintentionality without which consciousness could not receive anything other than itself, nor exercise its intentional activity."<sup>63</sup> Hyle is primarily temporal matter. As such, it is the force that brings every structure into a crisis. Husserl was aware of the need for a "transcendental aesthetic" in his thought, which would be able to accommodate the temporality of matter. According to Derrida, it is this realisation on the part of Husserl that gave rise to the numerous displacements of the eidetic reduction (manifested, for example, in the journey from the *Logische Untersuchungen* to *Ideen I*). Husserl was constantly attempting to reconcile structure with genesis.

What is apparent to Derrida, however, is precisely the existence of this opposition between structure and genesis, which is equivalent to the opposition between structure and force in structuralism. While in various ways trying to account for the temporality of matter - the naked factuality thereof - Husserl nevertheless privileged the meaning of objects as it appeared in the structure of transcendental intentionality. The spatialisation of phenomenology is effected through the separation of meaning and fact, subjecting the latter to the former.

Phenomenology's spatialisation is the spatialisation of meaning. External, "worldly" space is first reduced to nothing in order that, from within the transcendental reduction, the ideal space of meaning may emerge. In the external world of objects, space involves mediation (there is, for instance, a distance between two points of reference.) However, the living presence, the pure auto-affection of transcendental thought, involves no mediation. According to Husserl, there is absolute proximity between the self and the meaning it wishes to express. In the essay entitled *Speech and Phenomena (La Voix et le Phénomène*<sup>64</sup>), Derrida says the following in relation

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and other essays on Husserl's theory of signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 77.

to the distinction between indication and expression, which will be discussed in more detail below:

“When I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that I *hear myself... at the same time* that I speak. The signifier, animated by my breath and by the meaning-intention (in Husserl’s language the expression animated by the *Bedeutungsintention*), is in absolute proximity to me... It does not risk death in the body of a signifier that is given over to the world and the visibility of space.”

The absolutely pure auto-affection occurring in the living presence of the phenomenological subject to itself is therefore the absolute reduction of space in general. From within this reduction, the ideal space of meaning now emerges. This space *is* meaning, and outside of it is non-meaning. But how can space be meaning? Because it is what is opened up, what appears from within a certain attitude. Meaning is what is lighted up, or comes to light, in the light of reason. At this point, Derrida emphasizes the undisputable Greek ancestry of Husserl’s thought.<sup>65</sup> As for Plato, as well as for Aristotle, so for Husserl the theoretical thought attitude reveals the essence of things. Like a balloon or net, it also binds all that is thus revealed together into a whole. This binding together of truth in its appearance does not, however, simply constitute a synchronic space - it is also diachronic. The whole history of truth thus revealed in the light of reason is regarded by phenomenology as the space of meaning, thereby taming and neutralising the naked force of time. Derrida formulates this as follows:

“Reason, thus, unveils itself. Reason, Husserl says, is the *logos* which is produced in history. It traverses Being with itself in sight, in sight of appearing to itself, that is, to state itself and hear itself as *logos*”.<sup>66</sup>

He adds the following:

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 100 – 105.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p. 208.

“Logos is nothing outside history and Being, since it is discourse, infinite discursiveness and not an actual infinity, and since it is meaning.”

To use another metaphor and to touch on a point to which we shall return later - the space of meaning is that space which is lighted up by the light of reason. In being lighted by a single *logos* it is constituted as a single whole. It is also constituted as an inside that excludes an outside. What lies outside is non-meaning, unreality, irrationality.

Husserl’s analysis of the structure of transcendental thought is intimately related to his idea of the functioning of language. Derrida meticulously traces the operative binary opposition in Husserl’s theory of signs – specifically in Husserl’s earlier work, the *Logische Untersuchungen* – that parallels the other binary oppositions in his (later) work.<sup>67</sup> According to Derrida, there is an immensely important distinction in Husserl’s theory of language that is not subjected to critical reflection by him: the distinction between indication (*Anzeigen*) and expression (*Ausdruck*). Indication involves all occurrences of signs in the natural, empirical world. It also denotes the physical vehicle of a sign (the signifier), whether it is the physical voice or a written symbol. According to Husserl, indication comprises a certain motivation or movement: it is what moves something “such as a thinking being” to pass by thought from something to something else.<sup>68</sup> Indication would therefore necessarily be involved as the medium by which inter-subjective communication takes place. The problem with indication, which arises from its very nature as part of the world out there, is that it can deliver no certainty or absolute truth. In Husserl’s view, certainty, truth and indeed meaning are the exclusive reserve of the expression.

Prefiguring what will later become the eidetic and transcendental reductions of thought, Husserl abstracts from the general signification of what he calls indication a special kind of signification, which is called expression. Expression takes place when a living subject wants to express something. It is signification vivified by the intention to express<sup>69</sup> of a living subject. Only expressions are truly meaningful.

---

<sup>67</sup> *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 30.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 28. Quotation from Husserl in Derrida’s text.

<sup>69</sup> “*vouloir dire*” in Derrida’s own words.

They provide the original charge of meaning carried by the signification of indication. Derrida summarises as follows:<sup>70</sup>

“Pure expression will be the pure active intention (spirit, psychē, life, will) of an act of meaning (*bedeuten*) that animates a speech whose content (*Bedeutung*) is present. It is present not in nature, since only indication takes place in nature and across space, but in consciousness.”

Expression occurs purely in consciousness. It does not take into account any state of affairs of the real world, or even the existence of other subjects. What matters is the intentional meaning advanced by the thinking subject with regard to an object inside of thought. How is this certain? How is this absolutely truthful, without need for further clarification? According to Husserl, the key is the living self presence of the subject. The thinking subject, the ego of transcendental consciousness, is absolutely present to itself. As such, it is absolutely present to the intentional expression of meaning. This is ideal meaning - nothing more is needed. Because the intentional meaning of an expression is ideal, it is also infinitely repeatable. Inside of consciousness, there is no loss of meaning or truth in repetition. This is the case because the intention of meaning expressed in transcendental consciousness is not a communication of meaning. It is only when the expression is externalised in the physical vehicle of indication that communication is introduced.

The consideration of Derrida's treatment of the Husserlian theory of language has confirmed the earlier conclusion at the end of the discussion of the transcendental reduction in general. Phenomenology wants to reconcile the thinking subject and the object of thought by reducing both to transcendental consciousness. From the foothold in transcendental consciousness, the space of meaning opens up. This space is an interior which is rigorously shielded from an exterior of non-meaning and non-being. Even though Husserl was radically opposed to dogmatic metaphysics and advocated scientific investigation, the nature of his whole project places him, in Derrida's opinion, squarely within the grand tradition of metaphysical thought:

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 40.

“[Philosophy] is the twilight of forces, that is, the sun-splashed morning in which images, forms, and phenomena speak; it is the morning of ideas and idols in which relief of forces becomes repose, its depth flattened in the light as it stretches itself into horizontality.”<sup>71</sup>

It is, however, precisely this “repose of forces” in the philosophical moment that, according to Derrida, harbours a deeper violence: the violence of a specific truth being fixated, a form imposed at the expense of other possibilities - the violence of time in its flow arrested.

## **2.4 Presence**

The notion of presence provides Derrida with a vital means of analysing what he takes to be the fixated nature of the whole tradition of western metaphysics. Before attending to Derrida’s discussions of presence, it may be helpful to note the spatial, as well as the temporal, freightedness of the term. Presence implies being situated in space and time - it implies a here and now. From the perspective of space, presence would imply proximity, even absolute proximity. From the perspective of time, presence indicates simultaneity. It is also very difficult to separate the spatial and temporal aspects of presence in any absolute way. Spatial presence implies the proximity of reference points at a given moment, and therefore also implies simultaneity. Temporal presence implies simultaneity with regard to some fixed moment, and it is precisely this fixedness that invokes notions of spatiality. This section will examine Derrida’s analysis of presence in phenomenology, linguistics and theology, while continually trying to bear in mind the spatial and temporal references inherent to the term.

In order to gain insight into Derrida’s perspective on the functioning of the notion of presence in phenomenology, we may start by asking why Husserl finds it necessary to employ this notion. With what end in mind is it used? According to Derrida,

---

<sup>71</sup> *Writing and Difference*, p. 33.

presence, in Husserl's view, is intimately linked to being. Presence is what opens up the experience of being as such. It is the gateway to the most authentic life:

“[W]hat is signified by phenomenology's 'principle of principles'? What does the value of primordial presence to intuition as source of sense and evidence, as the *a priori of a prioris*, signify? First of all it signifies the certainty, itself ideal and absolute, that the universal form of all experience (*Erlebnis*), and therefore of all life, has always been and will always be the *present*. The present alone is and ever will be. Being is presence or the modification of presence.”<sup>72</sup>

Being is what is present, and focusing on what is present therefore opens up an experience or intuition of true being. To be present to being is to have certainty and access to the fullness of life. Formulated with specific philosophical questions in mind, presence to being is the holy grail of the quest for the unification of rationalism and empiricism - it is nothing less than the reconciliation of the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*.

In Husserl's view, presence to being is achieved in the absolute self-presence of the subject of transcendental thought. At a certain level, the thinking subject is absolutely transparent to itself, its intuition and its will. Here, Derrida remarks, phenomenology differs profoundly from psychoanalysis, which proceeds precisely from the assumption that an important part of subjectivity is unconscious, and that conscious decisions are influenced by forces from the unconscious.<sup>73</sup> According to Husserl, presence to self stems from the pure auto-affection of the subject. The intuition of a transcendental object of thought – be it an object in the world, a state of the subject or a memory – is absolute. In the world of indication, communication is necessary. A certain state of affairs has to be communicated from one subject to another. In other words, signs have to be used. A sign is precisely that which has to supply meaning where full meaning is lacking. However, in the pure auto-affection of the subject of transcendental thought, no communication, and therefore no signification, is necessary. The fullness of meaning is immediate and absolute.

---

<sup>72</sup> *Speech and phenomena*, p. 53.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p. 63.

It is important to note what happens to space and time in Husserl's presence as self-presence: both are reduced. As has been described above, space is completely reduced, only to re-emerge as the spatialised space of meaning. Time is, however, also reduced. It becomes the "now" of absolute proximity to self. Derrida formulates this as follows: "Self-presence must be produced in the undivided unity of a temporal present so as to have nothing to reveal to itself by the agency of signs."<sup>74</sup> This undivided unity of a temporal present has the character of a point, of the now as *stigmē*. This "now" becomes the source point for pure auto-affection, for absolute proximity to self.<sup>75</sup> And yet, as Derrida observes, Husserl cannot but introduce a series of oppositional pairs into his description, thereby complicating his description of the now as "primal form" (*Urform*) of consciousness:<sup>76</sup> "[transcendental phenomenology] describes the living present as a primordial and incessant synthesis that is constantly led back upon itself, back upon its assembled and assembling self, by retentional traces and protentional openings."<sup>77</sup> The deconstruction of the temporal "now" of phenomenology will be examined again in the next chapter.

While presence resides in the pure auto-affection of the subject (the intuition of meaning), it also resides in the purity of the expression of meaning. As has already been mentioned, Husserl protects presence by making a radical distinction between expression and indication. Indication involves an incomplete transfer of meaning, and puts processes such as interpretation into play, but expression is animated by the living presence of the subject to itself - in the case of expression, no loss of meaning is incurred. According to Husserl, the present is always the living present. This means an expression is "backed up" by an intentional subject that wants to express that meaning here and now. If the living will to say something ("*vouloir dire*") is not present – for example, when an expression is written down – then it has fallen from presence and is in need of re-animation.

It is precisely to protect the notion of presence and the privileged access to being that it provides according to him, that Husserl has to make a radical distinction

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 53.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 63, 64.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 152.

between speech and writing, and to privilege the former above the latter. In speaking, the subject hears himself speak – is completely present to himself speaking. This ensures the animation of the expression by the will of the subject. In contrast, writing is second-hand - it is removed from the living will of the expressing subject. Transposing an expression into written signs exposes it to death: it has become mortal, and is no longer in direct contact with being. To make a radical distinction between life and death, between expression and indication, between speech and writing, and then to elevate the one side of the distinction above the other: this is the price of presence, according to Derrida's reading of Husserl.

Phenomenological presence is intimately related to ideality. The meaning that is expressed from out of the living intuition of the transcendental object is an ideal meaning. It is the essence of the object that is expressed. Because it is ideal, it is infinitely repeatable - without the loss of meaning, collateral to the drag of interpretation in inter-subjective communication. Derrida's interpretation of phenomenological ideality reads as follows:

“But this ideality, which is but another name for the permanence of the same and the possibility of its repetition, *does not exist* in the world, and it does not come from another world; it depends entirely on the possibility of acts of repetition. It is constituted by this possibility. Its 'being' is proportionate to the power of repetition; absolute ideality is the correlate of a possibility of indefinite repetition. It could therefore be said that being is determined by Husserl as ideality, that is, as repetition.”<sup>78</sup>

The concept that emerges, as it were, out of the repetition of the ideal as a means of protecting presence is that of re-presentation. The now of presence has to be affirmed and then re-affirmed from moment to moment. Each new moment must re-establish that presence is there and that it is identical to the ideal essence present in transcendental thought. The “re-” in the continuing reiteration of representation is,

---

<sup>78</sup>Ibid. p. 52. Italics in the text. See also *Dissemination*, p. 112, for a discussion of ideality and repetition in the context of Plato's thought.



according to Derrida, the Trojan horse inside of presence that will shake the whole of this spatialising structure.<sup>79</sup>

In Derrida's view, it is this chain of presence-ideality-repeatability-representation that indisputably links Husserl to the grand tradition of Western metaphysics. Even though Husserl himself was critical of unfounded metaphysical assumptions, and rejected Platonic realism with regard to the world of ideas, he nevertheless maintained that ideality is a way of being that is irreducible to sensible existence or empirical reality and their fictional counterparts. In determining the *ontos on* as an *eidos*, Plato and Husserl are, according to Derrida, affirming the same thing.<sup>80</sup>

The insights gained from listening to Derrida's treatment of Husserl may be expanded into an understanding of Derrida's problematisation of Western metaphysics in general.<sup>81</sup> As has already been observed, the closure of the age of presence is indicated at the beginning of *De la Grammatologie* with a manifesto-like conviction and references to a "necessity" that strangely belie the anti-teleological stance of Derrida's thought.<sup>82</sup> While this observation will have to be taken up again later, we remain for the moment with Derrida's treatment of the epoch of presence, in order to gain further insight into its profile.

The epoch of presence is, according to Derrida, the epoch of the Logos, of *epistemē* and of truth. Wherever the fullness of experience is referred to an organising Logos, there presence may be said to reign, as the Logos is inevitably conceptualised as some final master-word that is taken to be the organising principle of what exists. The Logos is an enduring pattern or constellation of meaning. As such, it is presence itself - it becomes the point of orientation for all experience. The Logos is what makes *epistemē* as scientific knowledge possible: that knowledge that is certain because it conceptualises the essence of the experienced things – an essence that these things have precisely because of their relationship to the Logos

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 50, 52.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 53.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Chakravorty-Spivak: "The importance of the text of Edmund Husserl for Derrida lies precisely in its self-conflict. Husserl seems to Derrida to be a more than usually resolute suppressor of the more than usually astute grammatical suggestions implied by the Husserlian text." Translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*, p. li.

<sup>82</sup> *Of Grammatology*, p. 6,7.

as presence. This relationship to the Logos is also what constitutes the truth of beings. Beings are true to the extent that they share in the truth of Being, which is another word for presence. Being expresses its meaning as Logos, whereby everything is bound into a unity.

The epoch of presence, in which experience is referred to a master-word or logos, is therefore, by its very nature, the epoch of the sign. A sign is what refers to something else (Being; Logos) in order to lay claim to its presence in the here and now, even though the fullness of that presence is absent in the here and now. The sign is what bridges the interval between what is experienced and what is taken to be the absolute point of orientation – or presence. This formulation confirms the most traditional metaphysical description of the sign as consisting of two “sides”: a signifier and a signified. In explaining why he prefers *on a certain point* the Nietzschean text as less metaphysical than the Heideggerian, Derrida states the following (wherein the metaphysical character of the sign emerges):

“...Heideggerian thought [on Being] would reinstate rather than destroy the instance of the logos and of the truth of being as ‘*primum signatum*.’ the transcendental signified (‘transcendental’ in a certain sense, as in the Middle Ages the transcendental – *ens, unum, verum, bonum* – was said to be the ‘*primum cognitum*’) implied by all categories or all determined significations, by all lexicons and all syntax, and therefore by all linguistic signifiers, though not to be identified simply with any of those signifiers, allowing itself to be precomprehended through each of them, remaining irreducible to all the epochal determinations that it nonetheless makes possible, thus opening the history of the logos, yet itself being only through the logos; that is, *being nothing* before the logos and outside of it. The logos of being, ‘Thought obeying the voice of Being,’ is the first and last resource of the sign, of the difference between *signans* and *signatum*. There has to be a transcendental signified for the difference between signifier and signified to be somewhere absolute and irreducible.”<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> *Grammatology*, p. 20. Derrida’s quotation here is from Heidegger’s postface to *Was ist Metaphysik?* Italics in Derrida’s text.

The transcendental signified is the meaning for which the empirical signifier (be that a word or an experience) is a placeholder. And therefore, via the sign, all experience is referred to presence. In being a reference to a presence that is not a plenitude in the here and now, the sign is, however, according to Derrida, also precisely a representation. This representation in the service of presence and of meaning makes of the sign an accomplice to a fixating, dominating regime: through its representation of a transcendent presence, the sign holds all of reality subject to some grand master-meaning. The result of the hegemony of presence is spatialisation: reality is conceived of as bound together, yet spread out before presence, somewhat like the lands of a feudal lord are spread out before and around his castle.

If the epoch of presence is the epoch of the sign, it may also, according to the same logic, be described as the epoch of the phonē, the *spoken* sign. Because there exists a presence to which everything else is referred, it follows that certain referents may be closer to original presence than others, and should therefore be taken to be superior or more pure signs. In the same vein, Derrida analyses the whole history of the priority – even dominance – of the phonic signifier. Aristotle is taken to be a classic example.<sup>84</sup> According to Aristotle, the voice, as the producer of the first symbols, has an essential and immediate relationship with the mind. The signifiers produced by the voice are not merely signifiers amongst others - they are the privileged signifiers of mental experiences, which themselves reflect or mirror things by natural resemblance. Things or beings are reflected naturally in the mind, and these mental experiences are then first and foremost represented in speech as phonic signifiers.<sup>85</sup> In every situation, according to Aristotle and the subsequent metaphysical tradition, the voice is closest to the signified, whether the latter is determined strictly as sense (be that thought sense or lived sense) or more loosely as a thing. However, if certain signifiers (the phonic) are taken to be most proximate to the logos as meaning, it follows that other signifiers are less proximate, secondary and derivative. This insight affords Derrida the opportunity to analyse the repressed status of the written signifier in the age of phonocentrism, which will be discussed below.

---

<sup>84</sup> *Grammatology*, p. 11.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Here, Derrida refers to *De Interpretatione*, 1, 16a 3.

For all his attention to the constitutive role of difference in the working of language, Ferdinand de Saussure is nevertheless taken by Derrida to be an important twentieth century exponent of the logocentric tradition, which is also a phonocentric tradition.<sup>86</sup> Saussure defines the project and object of general linguistics as follows: “The linguistic object is not defined by the combination of the written word and the spoken word: *the spoken form alone constitutes the object.*”<sup>87</sup> This is the case because the spoken form is self-contained and capable of bearing the full burden of signification. The spoken word is already a unity of sense and sound, of concept and voice, of signified and signifier. In the unity of the thought-sound, the intimation of meaning by way of reference is successfully achieved.

Alongside, or rather behind, language as speech, follows a second *distinct* system of signs – that of writing. The function of the written sign, according to Derrida’s analysis of Saussure, is to be a sign of a sign. It has to represent, in an external manner, the presence signified by the spoken sign in an internal manner (because of the alleged natural proximity of sense and sound in the spoken word.) The radical distinction between an outside and an inside (itself spatial designations), equivalent to the radical distinction between writing and speech, may be explained in terms of the notions of space and time, which are of specific interest to the present study. According to Derrida, it is no coincidence that writing in Western culture developed as a linear form of signification. Because writing is representing in a spatial, exterior way the signification effected by speech in a temporal medium (that of sound), the written signifiers are linked in a linear consecutive chain, thereby in a sense representing consecutive moments of presence. This representation has an interesting effect. While the phonic signifier, which in its materiality is temporally ordered, is privileged, the representation practised by the written sign has a spatialising effect: signification and meaning is linearised and stretched out. The radical distinction between inside and outside, enforced by the metaphysical epoch of logocentrism and phonocentrism, therefore appears to lead to a parallel radical distinction between space and time. While being radically distinguished, space and time nevertheless mirror each other: spatialisation is the mirroring representation of

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 31, as quoted by Derrida. Italics added by Derrida.

the temporally ordered voice in its proximity to presence.<sup>88</sup> The metaphysics of presence, on the other hand, leads to a “vulgar concept of time”<sup>89</sup>, in that history is spread out in a past, present and future bound together by a centre (a spatial notion), which is the logos. As will become apparent later, Derrida, in his deconstruction of presence, favours a notion of space-time whereby, in ways that remain to be investigated, a parallel with developments in twentieth century physics – particularly relativity theory – emerges.

In Saussure’s view, writing’s natural place is therefore as an auxiliary, non-necessary re-presentation of the primary system of signification, which is speech. In making this distinction, he is, according to Derrida, following a well-travelled metaphysical path that starts at least with Plato. In his essay entitled *Plato’s Pharmacy*, Derrida in fact mentions De Saussure as an heir of Plato with regard to the subsidiary position of writing in relation to speech.<sup>90</sup> In a fashion similar to his treatment of Saussure and Husserl, Derrida analyses Plato as an exponent of the Western metaphysical tradition. Due to Plato’s position at the earliest articulations of this tradition, and also because of “the incomparable subtlety and force of his conceptualization” of it, Derrida acknowledges that the whole of this metaphysical tradition with which he is in dialogue may in a sense be termed Platonism.<sup>91</sup>

The defining characteristic of Plato’s system, according to Derrida, is its binarism, which he traces in the form of a chain of binary oppositional metaphors that are utilised throughout Socrates’ many discourses. With regard to the structure of the myth of writing in the *Phaedrus*, Derrida summarises Plato’s binarism as follows:

“Plato had to make his tale conform to structural laws. The most general of these [are] those that govern and articulate the oppositions speech/writing, life/death, father/son, master/servant, first/second, legitimate son/orphan-

---

<sup>88</sup> See *Dissemination*, p. 111, where Derrida mentions “the space of writing, space as writing”.

<sup>89</sup> *Grammatology*, p.72. Derrida is here quoting Heidegger’s use of the expression towards the end of *Being and Time*.

<sup>90</sup> *Dissemination*, p. 141.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* p. 82.

bastard, soul/body, inside/outside, good/evil, seriousness/play, day/night, sun/moon etc...”<sup>92</sup>

In a painstaking and brilliant manner, Derrida analyses many of the mentioned oppositions in Plato’s thought. The analysis of the ontological import of the father/son oppositional metaphor is a salient example. In *Plato’s Pharmacy*, Derrida devotes a section to “The Father of Logos.”<sup>93</sup> Logos is meaning. It is what binds the disparate and variable impressions of reality into a coherent experience, which at the same time spreads it out into a single landscape with a single horizon (spatialisation.) The statement that Logos is meaning should, however, be further refined. It would be more accurate to say that Logos is the articulation of a meaning that arises from somewhere else. The Logos is the word of the Father. The Father is the origin of the Logos and the one that animates the Logos. Because of its origin in the presence of the Father, the Logos is a *logon zoon*, a living word. In the Platonic discourse, the Father is referred to by many names. In the myth of the origin of writing in the *Phaedrus*, the Father is also the Sun God, Ammun-Ra. The Sun-God is the creator of everything through his sun-filled voice. His light illuminates everything. Sometimes, the Father is described as the Good, sometimes as the *epekeina tes ousias* - that which surpasses all being.

This last, well known expression by Plato is important, as it provides Derrida with a point of entry into the structure of the binary logic operating in Platonic thought. Precisely because the Father is *epekeina tes ousias*, He is in a sense unmentionable in terms of being. Like another metaphor for Him, the sun, which cannot be looked at with the naked eye, the Father cannot be grasped directly. He can only be mentioned by way of His son, the Logos. The Logos is the articulation of meaning, and in the articulation of meaning the fatherhood of the Father is taken for granted. The Logos is an expression of the presence of the Father, who is in Himself absent, because He cannot be grasped - He is beyond articulation.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 80 ff.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. 88.

Thus, the Logos is a good son, a royal son that faithfully presents the Father in all matters and thereby maintains the Father's dominions in a single unity, both spatially and temporally. This is the case for as long as the Logos is a *logon zoon*. However, here too, as Derrida suggests, as soon as meaning becomes inscribed as writing, it loses its vitality. Contrary to Saussure, who saw in writing a system of signification distinct from speech, Plato holds writing to be half-dead speech:

“There is only a *logos* more or less alive, more or less distant from itself. Writing is not an independent order of signification; it is weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living-dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath ... the simulacrum of living discourse is not inanimate; it is not insignificant; it simply signifies little, and always the same thing.”<sup>95</sup>

The best that can be said of writing is that it is a technical skill, a mere hypomnemonic aid to speech. In the worst case scenario, writing is a devious poison (a *pharmakon*, in one of its meanings) that seeks to invert the God-ordained hierarchical order and to supplant meaning.<sup>96</sup> To use another metaphor, writing is the bastard son of meaning that wants to commit parricide. Derrida grabs hold of this notion of the supplementing activity of writing, which is in fact a supplanting, and argues that this is always the case. Writing is in fact more originary and there is a completely different logic from the binary to be recognised with regard to the intimation of meaning. The deconstruction of the metaphysical tradition which, according to Derrida, is built on a binary logic of meaning intimation by the logic of writing, will be discussed in the next chapter. Let us for the moment content ourselves with a summary of the binary logic of meaning intimation which, according to Derrida, is responsible for the spatialisation of meaning, as analysed in various texts.

In Derrida's view, the whole edifice of Western metaphysics is built on the assumption of an all-important signified to which all of experience is referred. This point of reference is the highest being and the most original presence. Its presence

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 144.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 112.

is not, however, a presence consummated in experience. Experience and presence do not constitute a single unity- instead, they constitute two poles of an irreducible duality. The referral – or transferral – of experience to (absent) presence is what constitutes meaning, according to this logic. This is precisely the function of the sign in the binary logic of Western metaphysics. The binary sign allows for meaning intimation by being made up of two sides: a material signifier and an ideal signified, which are taken to be two sides of the same thing. In itself, the sign effects the traversal from the one pole to the other. Derrida formulates this as follows:

“The reassuring evidence within which Western tradition had to organize itself and must continue to live would therefore be as follows: the order of the signified is never contemporary, it is at best the subtly discrepant inverse or parallel – discrepant by the time of a breath – from the order of the signifier. And the sign must be the unity of a heterogeneity, since the signified (sense or thing, noema or reality) is not in itself a signifier, a trace: in any case is not constituted in its sense by its relationship with a possible trace. The formal essence of the signified is *presence*, and the privilege of its proximity to the logos as *phonē* is the privilege of presence.”<sup>97</sup>

According to Derrida, the binary logic of meaning intimation, as described by him, is the underlying mechanism that facilitates the violence inherent to metaphysics. Because the sign represents a fixed presence, experience has to conform to this presence. This, according to Derrida, always leads to the systematic exclusion of some part of the rich variety of experience. There is always a supplement that is not covered by the sign used, and that is then repressed and excluded. In Derrida’s view, this malady is evidenced in the hierarchical oppositions effected by a binary logic of meaning: one pole of the opposition is always subordinated to the other.

Under the reign of the binary sign, space and time manifest their fixatedness: they are two separate realms that mirror each other in their re-presentation of presence. In Derrida’s analysis, the phonic signifier is taken to be naturally the closest to the signified presence. As the phonic signifier is a temporally ordered signifier, presence

---

<sup>97</sup> *Grammatology*, p. 18.



may be said to be first and foremost temporally fixated. The phonic signifier is, in its turn, externalised in space – for example, in the written sign. The written sign represents the spoken sign, and in a linear fashion spreads out that which follows one another consecutively in the order of time. The result is a spatialisation of presence: the whole of experience is spread out before presence. The mirroring between space and time results in time, in its turn, being spatialised as well: this is the origin of history as a bound-together whole with a past, present and future.

In the second part of this chapter, an alternative analysis of spatialisation will be proposed. On the one hand, the fixating violence of spatialisation will be judged equally negatively. What Derrida has analysed in terms of a binary logic of meaning intimation will be understood in terms of the radical distinction and separation of transcendence and immanence, which gained cultural and philosophical prominence at the beginning of modernity. The analysis in terms of transcendence and immanence will also afford the opportunity to suggest a different genealogy for the phenomenon of spatialisation. Contrary to what Derrida believes, it will be suggested that the whole of Western thought does not go hand in hand with a radical separation of transcendence in immanence. Derrida's proposal (which will be examined in the next chapter) of an ontology, epistemology and semiology of transcendence in immanence does have historical precedents. Ultimately, however, the question has to do with the *kinds* of transcendence in immanence that are suggested by the historical precedents, as interpreted in the present study, and by deconstruction respectively.

## **2.5 On the contrary: an ecstatic Platonism and a high scholastic theology of participation in the infinite**

An alternative reading of the history of Western thought to the one suggested by Derrida is possible. According to this alternative reading, Western metaphysics may not be dismissed *tout court* as the history of the fixating violence of logocentrism and Presence. The proposal of an alternative reading does not, however, imply that the whole of the Derridean analysis is deemed to be invalid. Derrida's indictment of the spatialisation wrought by modern thought is shared, and in many respects,

endorsed. The shared sentiment extends to the analysis of the modern rational subject standing as it were over against the rest of reality given in its experience, and mapping it onto a rational and technically manipulable grid. Yet, Derrida's generalisation of his analysis of the presence of modernity into a similar diagnosis of the whole of Western thought can and should be met with an alternative proposal. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to the exploration of alternative readings of Plato and Aquinas, followed by an alternative genealogy of the spatialisation that is characteristic of modern thought.

In the previous section, it was noted how Derrida, especially in his essay entitled *Plato's Pharmacy*, attempted to indicate a fixation on a static and rigid presence in Socrates' speeches, and furthermore alleged that this fixation became the dominant theme of Western metaphysics. An alternative understanding of Plato's legacy does, however, exist and has recently been articulated again by a British philosopher of religion, Catherine Pickstock. The first chapter of Pickstock's book, entitled *After Writing*,<sup>98</sup> performs a meticulous reading mainly of Plato's *Phaedrus*, which explicitly refutes Derrida's reading of this dialogue and of Plato in general. Pickstock points out, firstly, that Plato/Socrates himself is in fact precisely *attacking* presence as manifested in the instrumentalisation and commodification of language by the sophists. Secondly, her rebuttal of Derrida's reading attempts to show the generalisations present in the Derridean reading of Plato. Thirdly, Pickstock's analysis seeks to provide an alternative reading of the project of Platonic thought – one that does not fall prey to the accusation of fixatedness due to an attachment to metaphysical presence.

The first point to be made then, following Pickstock, is that Socrates, far from advocating a spatialisation through the referencing of eternal ideas, is actually attacking spatialisation as it is manifested in the implications of sophistic thought. A sophistic sensibility, as exemplified by *Phaedrus* in the dialogue of the same name, seeks to use language to its own advantage.<sup>99</sup> Thus, the written version of Lysias' speech becomes a means to provoke Socrates into delivering a rival speech. The

---

<sup>98</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing – on the liturgical consummation of philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). The argument in the following section relies on Pickstock's work.

<sup>99</sup> Pickstock, *After Writing*, p.8-10.

speech itself, as well as Socrates' initial rival "sophistic" speech, extols the advantages of non-commitment. Phaedrus is eager to hear Socrates' speech on the same subject, not for its own sake, but so that he may augment the effectiveness of his appeal when using this speech, as well as that of Lysias, in the future. Both the way in which Lysias' speech functions in the dialogue and the content thereof suggest an instrumentalisation and commodification of language. The written character of the speech makes it transferable to many different situations. Furthermore, the person to which the non-erotic speech would be addressed, in order to convince him of the excellence of a purely contractual relationship, is in fact reduced to an object. He is being manipulated for the pleasure and advantage of the one making the speech. The written rhetoric of the sophists, exemplified by Phaedrus and specifically manifested in the manner in which he uses Lysias' speech, is the object of Socrates' sarcasm, as well as serious critique. Phaedrus' use of language is revealed as self-serving, merely in the interest of the pleasure of the subject using it. In the end, such use of language reduces it to nothing but manipulation, mastery and control – and therefore to violence. In addition, it excludes any true inter-subjectivity. The contractual view of interpersonal relations implies that the other becomes a means to an end, and not an end in him-/herself.

Although Lysias' speech and the rival sophistic speech that Socrates delivers initially both purport to allow for more difference, therein that this attitude will not result in the subject becoming tied to only one lover, this attitude in fact bears witness to an even greater indifference. The practice of moving from one addressee to another implies that all recipients of the sophistic speech are in the end regarded as merely the same: they are not appreciated for their individuality - they are commodities to be used for the pleasure of the one delivering the speech.

What emerges from Plato's dialogues is therefore, in Catherine Pickstock's view, a distinctly negative judgement of the underlying ontology and epistemology of the sophists. Regarding the latter, the sophistic consciousness may be said to be a proto-Cartesian consciousness, in that it explicitly establishes the subject as agent over against other entities, which are treated as objects or commodities to be

manipulated.<sup>100</sup> Such an approach excludes true inter-subjectivity and is unable to accommodate uniqueness. The result is indifference - a univocal and purely immanent ontology grounded in the language of the fixed subject.

According to Pickstock, a distinctly different view of language, knowledge and reality emerges from Socrates' second, "erotic" speech in the *Phaedrus*, and from the platonic corpus in general.<sup>101</sup> Pickstock notes that far from being a defence of Presence, as Derrida alleges, the Socratic preference for orality is primarily linked to an account of the subject as doxological.<sup>102</sup> Doxology, praise of the divine, first and foremost implies that the divine is seen to exist as an *other subject*. Doxology, at its most basic level, presupposes inter-subjectivity. The divine as subject is there and is not reducible to an object to be manipulated. In fact, in seeing the primary inter-subjective relationship as the relationship with the divine, as opposed to first and foremost a relationship with other humans, the human subject relinquishes the initiative and becomes an ecstatic subject.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates narrates the myth wherein the soul (of gods as well as men) is likened to a winged chariot drawn by two horses and driven by a charioteer (246a.)<sup>103</sup> With regard to the wings of the soul, he says the following:

"The natural property of a wing is to carry what is heavy upwards, lifting it aloft to the region where the race of the gods resides, and in a way, of all the things belonging to the sphere of the body, it has the greatest share in the divine, the divine being beautiful, wise, good and everything which is of that kind (246 d5, e1)."

---

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> In a recent essay in *Modern Theology*, Pickstock elaborates further on a reading of the "other Plato" that differs from the "terminal Plato" of Derrida and others, as well as from the "epistemological Plato" of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy. Catherine Pickstock, "The Late Arrival of Language: Word, Nature and the Divine in Plato's *Cratylus*", *Modern Theology*, 27:2, April 2011. For a critique of Pickstock's reading of Plato, see Eli Diamond, "Catherine Pickstock, Plato and the Unity of Divinity and Humanity: Liturgical or Philosophical?" in Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley (eds.), *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 1ff.

<sup>102</sup> *After Writing*, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> *Phaedrus*, translated by Christopher Rowe (London: Penguin, 2005). All further references to the *Phaedrus* appear in parentheses in the text.

As in this passage, the divine, to whom the human subject stands in relation, is often described by Plato as the good (also the beautiful, the true, etc.) The good, according to Plato, is a transcendent good - it cannot be grasped or completely fathomed. The good always exceeds all characterisations thereof. Pickstock's reading of the good in Plato clearly contradicts Derrida's reading, in which the good is seen as an unapproachable and therefore fetishised ideal.<sup>104</sup> The good, as *epekeina tes ousias*, is not an absent presence represented firstly by oral, and derivatively by written, signs. To see the *epekeina tes ousias* in this way, as Derrida does, is to think of it in immanent or ontic terms, whereas it should in fact be regarded as a transcendent and always overflowing plenitude. The good is beyond the distinction of presence and absence. "The fact that it cannot be grasped by a *mathēma* and is unsayable does not identify it with absence. Rather its mode of 'presence' is articulated through the gifts which it bestows, the beyond being which, as difference, gives things to be..."<sup>105</sup>.

Pickstock goes on to interpret Plato's portrayal of the transcendence of the good as a kind of contagion, due to the fact that its plenitude spills over into immanence, in such a way that the good is revealed in the beauty of physical particulars.<sup>106</sup> In the immanent realm of physical particulars, all things share to some extent in the good, because they derive from the transcendent good which, in its plenitude, overflows into immanence.

The fact that all things participate in the good means that all things, to the extent that they are good, refer back to the transcendent good from which they derive. Their participation in the good imparts to all physical particulars a character of doxological reference. While all of immanent reality may be said to have a doxological character, this attitude of praise finds its highest expression in the human subject. Upon observing the beauty of a particular object, the will is stirred by desire (*ēros*). It is *ēros* that brings the soul into motion and lifts it up on the way to the good. The non-fixated, always overflowing character of the divine is thus inter-subjectively

---

<sup>104</sup> *After Writing*, p. 11.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

participated in by the human subject who is, precisely because of this participation, equally mobile, that is, non-fixated.

What emerges out of the foregoing paragraphs is an image of the human subject as an ecstatic subject: its reference is doxologically outside of itself in the divine. Because the divine is always overflowing, the *ekstasis* of the human subject similarly always evades fixation. The contrast between the ecstatic platonic subject and the proto-Cartesian sophistic subject is analysed by Pickstock in the different attitudes of Socrates and Phaedrus.<sup>107</sup> The latter's mercantile sensibilities lead him to use the speech of a non-citizen, Lysias, in an instrumental way, in order to gain a secure footing from where to manipulate and turn matters to his own advantage. Socrates, on the other hand, who is a citizen of Athens (autochthonous), is paradoxically much more appreciative of the surroundings where the interlocutors find themselves outside the city walls. Socrates' doxological attitude allows him to better appreciate the novel experience of the beautiful place where they find themselves. The beauty of the particular things that he observes refers Socrates' gaze to the good wherein they participate, and brings him to honour the gods. In Pickstock's words: "By leaving the city walls behind, both literally and figuratively, Socrates has *not* become indifferent to place, in the manner of the Phaedrean *mathēsis* which can operate anywhere, but rather sees places all the more intensely."<sup>108</sup>

The ontology that emerges from Pickstock's doxological reading of Plato has, as its main feature, a transcendent, but always overflowing good that gives immanent reality to be. Immanent reality, and eminently the human subject, is reciprocally mobile therein that through participation in the good, it is always on a doxological journey to the good. Participation in the transcendent, overflowing good allows appreciation of real differences between particulars, without conceding to absolute and relationless difference. Pickstock makes the last point as follows:

"Dialectical differentiation is quite other from sophistic classification because it is thus combined with *synopsis*, which sees things together as one and only thereby as different, and exhibiting novelty through time... Both recognition as

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 43, 44.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 45.

self-knowledge and recognition as knowledge of everything else are matters of seeing together and separating out. Thus we only glimpse the differences of the finite in their orientation towards, and yet separation from, the transcendent realm.<sup>109</sup>

The epistemology concomitant with the ontology that emerges in this alternative reading of Plato is equally itinerant. The movement whereby the will is propelled by *ēros* to the good in the perception of beauty has already been described, but how is this to be rhymed with platonic recollection (*anamnesis*), an important building block of platonic epistemology? In this regard, it should be noted that there is a complex process of dialectical recognition at work in the erotic subject. When the philosopher-lover glimpses the good in the physical world, he receives from without what he recognises from within his memory – that which at one time he had received from a transcendence without, at the time when his soul was in harmony with the good.<sup>110</sup> The memory recollected here is not by way of the retrospective repetition of an experience of the pre-existent soul, but a non-identical repetition in the inhabited present.<sup>111</sup> The act of recognition is initially triggered from without by some element of the physical world, but the resulting recognition is simultaneously and ambiguously internal and external – self-knowledge and memory of the good respectively. Pickstock comments that in this yoking together of memory and perception, eternity seems more contemporaneous than the present moment.<sup>112</sup> The harmony with the good which the soul recollects is part of its eternal giftedness, and not the repetition of an experience which it had as an already separately existing and completely sealed off interiority. Recollection stems from inter-subjectivity and *ēros* is doxologically on its way to fuller inter-subjectivity. Furthermore, according to this scheme, it becomes impossible to assign pure activity or pure passivity to the thinking subject. Rather, the erotic gaze hovers between activity and passivity as it receives into itself by way of recognition that which offers itself to be recognised in its giftedness.

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p. 17, 18.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

In summary then, the Platonic/Socratic preference for orality and suspicion of writing should be understood in light of the doxological nature of language, and not according to a rigid, binary distinction between presence and absence, as proposed by Derrida. Upon this alternative reading, the spoken word has priority, not because of its purported proximity to full presence, whereby it may be used as a dominating master word, but precisely because of its mobility. The spoken word has priority to the extent that it is more properly liturgical, doxological and erotic - in other words, to the extent that it is more mobile and on the way to the good. All language that is separated from doxology results in a sophistic "virtual reality" or realm of mere fiction, which is manipulable, ironic and uninhabited.<sup>113</sup> Due to the facile commodifiability of a written text, the danger of this happening is greater in written language, but it may also happen in oral discourse, for example where rhetoric loses its connection with dialectic in un-erotic speech. Likewise, written language is not always unliturgical and therefore bad. Socrates' dialogues are after all handed down in written form. As Pickstock notes, "the interplays between son and father, writing and speech, moon and sun are not violent or incompatible spatial oppositions but enact a kind of asymmetrical reciprocity, or non-identical repetition."<sup>114</sup> Even if the initiative lies with the one side of the distinction (father, son, speech), the non-identical repetition effected by the other side affords true appreciation of difference, and not the violent suppression thereof.

The above reading of Plato has been advanced in order to argue that a monolithic reading of the history of Western metaphysics, as fixated on presence, may be unwarranted. In the same way, a reading of the high scholastic theology of participation in the infinite, as articulated by Thomas Aquinas, will now be attempted. Unlike in the case of Plato, direct engagement with Aquinas' thought is all but absent from the Derridean corpus. This being so, Derrida nevertheless makes references that seem to include Thomistic theology in his indictment of Western metaphysics. In a telling passage from *Grammatology*, Derrida makes the following general statement about onto-theology:

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p. 42.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p. 35.



“The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude, such are the gestures required by an onto-theology determining the archaeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence, as parousia, as life without difference: another name for death, historical metonymy where God’s name holds death in check. That is why, if this movement begins its era in the form of Platonism, it ends in infinitist metaphysics. Only infinite being can reduce the difference in presence. In that sense, the name of God, at least as it is pronounced within classical rationalism, is the name of indifference itself. Only a positive infinity can lift the trace, ‘sublimate’ it... We must not therefore speak of a ‘theological prejudice,’ functioning sporadically when it is a question of the plenitude of the logos; the logos as sublimation of the trace is *theological*. Infinitist theologies are always logocentrism, whether they are creationisms or not.”<sup>115</sup>

With regard to Christian theology God, as infinite being, functions as guarantor of presence. The fixating violence of presence is safeguarded by sublimating it into a transcendent infinite – such, at least, is deconstruction’s allegation. This being the case, the charge continues, there is structurally no difference between the rationality exemplified by Christian theology and that of ancient Platonism. Furthermore, what aggravates the situation with regard to Christianity is that it purports to be a message of universal peace. While preaching peace and goodwill, Christianity, however, in fact commits violence in the form of a universal fixation of its own particular conception of presence.<sup>116</sup>

The accusation that the rationality of Christian theology masks a metaphysics of presence by sublimating it to an infinite transcendent is, however, susceptible to serious criticism. While it may be readily accepted that Christian theology proceeds from a binary logic of meaning intimation, in that it does accept a transcendence over and within the immanent, the inference that this inevitably leads to a structurally violent fixation can and must be met with the proposal of a different logical inference,

---

<sup>115</sup> *Grammatology*, p. 71.

<sup>116</sup> See, with regard to this accusation, *The Beauty of the Infinite* by David Bentley-Hart, who shows that Derrida continues a line taken by Nietzsche.

as well as a different reading of the history of Christian theology. The argument that follows suggests that the binary logic of meaning intimation present in the theology of Thomas Aquinas functions in a non-fixating way. If this is indeed the case, the implication for the conversation with Derrida is that his reading of the history of Western metaphysics is open to a charge of structuralist generalisation.<sup>117</sup>

Almost since its inception, Christianity articulated its belief in the relationship between God and his creation, as expressed in the Old and New Testaments, also in terms of the Hellenistic intellectual apparatus prevalent at that time.<sup>118</sup> The appropriation of Hellenistic sensibilities, and especially certain forms of neo-Platonism, may be seen in the discussion around and resolution of the prominent Trinitarian and Christological controversies during the early Christian centuries. Thus, Augustine and Boethius insisted that God is absolutely simple, so that no distinctions can be made between God's essence and his existence, or between God himself and his properties, such as His goodness, wisdom and truth. Indeed, such is the perfection of God that no real distinction is allowed between one perfection, such as goodness, and another, such as truth (the celebrated doctrine of the convertibility of the transcendentals.<sup>119</sup>) What may be termed this neo-platonic tradition of Christian theology was further characterised by the emphasis of a number of Greek theologians, most importantly the Pseudo-Dionysius, on the absolute transcendence of God. Thus, nothing positive can really be affirmed of God - all affirmation necessarily falls short, since God is always greater than what we can say of Him (the approach that, in time, came to be known as negative theology).

The rediscovery of the greater part of Aristotle's writings posed a major challenge for the traditional platonistic theology of the Middle Ages. Until the early twelfth century, Aristotle's influence extended only to the discipline of logic (the so-called *logica*

---

<sup>117</sup> Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 10.

<sup>118</sup> In a lecture delivered at the University of Regensburg in 2006, Pope Benedict XVI suggested that the encounter between the Biblical message and Greek thought did not happen by chance, but that "there exists an intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry." Available at:

[www.http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html)

<sup>119</sup> Although the general notion of transcendentals was first raised by Parmenides and then Plato, it was Aristotle who called them transcendentals, since they transcended (*uperbainein*) each of his ten categories.

*vetus*), the *Categories* and *On Interpretation*, supplemented by a few other works, including the *Introduction* by Porphyry and some commentaries by Boethius, being the only parts of his work that were available. Between 1130 and 1170, the remainder of Aristotle's logical works were introduced to the West (the so-called *logica nova*.) Moreover, during the course of the next hundred years, Latin translations of Aristotle's natural scientific writings, his political and literary treatises, and most importantly, his philosophical writings (*On the soul*, the *Metaphysics*, the *Ethics*) reached Europe, so that by 1270, Latin Christendom possessed practically the entire extant Aristotelian corpus.<sup>120</sup> Aristotle confronted the West with a coherent view of reality that owed nothing to specifically Christian sources of inspiration. Thus, throughout the thirteenth century, theologians wrestled with the issues posed by Aristotle's "naturalism." Some scholars, following Averroës, considered Aristotle's teaching to be the supreme and final truth and sought to purge it of all neo-platonic "contaminations." The best known of the radical Aristotelians were two masters at the arts faculty of Paris in the 1260's and 1270's: Siger of Brabant and Boetius of Dacia.<sup>121</sup> Another movement within scholasticism, however, considered it possible to combine Aristotelianism with the Christian neo-platonism of Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius (in the process modifying both the Aristotelian and the Platonic elements<sup>122</sup>), thus softening the impact of Aristotle's naturalism and rendering it more acceptable for traditional philosophical purposes. The enormous scope of the systematic work of Thomas Aquinas undoubtedly earns him the first place among the ranks of the latter school of thought. According to Aquinas, what people may assert in faith cannot and should not be without an intelligible basis in the general structure of the human experience of reality. With this point of departure of Aquinas in mind, Rudi te Velde argues that an important thrust of the Thomistic project has been to interpret and transform the Aristotelian conception of *prima philosophia* as the study of being *qua* being precisely in order to thematise the inherent intelligibility of a creation in relationship with its Creator.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Edinburgh, T & T Clark Ltd, 1992). p.332.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* p. 334.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. the comments made in this regard by John Milbank in *Truth in Aquinas*, p. 23, 41. John Milbank & Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>123</sup> Rudi te Velde, *Metaphysics and the Question of Creation: Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Us*, In: Peter M. Candler jr. and Conor Cunningham (eds.), *Belief and Metaphysics* (London: SCM Press, 2007). p.76.

A point of entry into Aquinas' thought may be acquired by bearing in mind that Aquinas proceeds from an assumed ontology, and explicates epistemological questions from within this prior assumed state of affairs of the world. This is different from a modern understanding, which no longer sees any way open to reality, save through the clarification of prior epistemological issues.<sup>124</sup> While ontology and epistemology cannot be separated rigorously, and while any such attempts remain inevitably stereotypical, it will be argued later that the shift from starting with ontology to starting with epistemology has been one of the major shifts in Western intellectual activity. Even though he at some stage advances certain intellectual "proofs" for the existence of God (which may also be taken to be arguments for the intelligibility of creation), Aquinas nevertheless, in important ways, simply accepts that God is the ground of all that exists, and that all of reality given in experience should be referred back to this final cause.

Aquinas expounds his understanding of the relationship between God and creation by way of a number of traditional philosophical distinctions, of which the main one may be taken to be the distinction between existence and essence (or *esse* and *essentia*.) Existence pertains to sheer being there, whereas essence seeks to answer the question: "*what* is there?" God is the only one that exists in the fullest sense of the word. This fullness of existence may be described in another way by stating that God is infinite, always excessive being; He is be-ing itself (*ipsum esse*.) Furthermore, God is what he is essentially. This means that apart from being existence itself, God is also all predications of being in his own being: He is goodness itself, wisdom itself, truth itself, etc. The distinction between existence and essence therefore serves its first purpose for Aquinas in the affirmation that in God, there is no distinction between them: in God, existence and essence coincide. As being itself, God is also infinite goodness, truth and beauty. God is not some abstract and void ground of being (as, for example, in Heidegger) - He is precisely also infinite form and so, in a sense, contains all form in Himself.

---

<sup>124</sup> *Truth in Aquinas*, p. 4,5.

Whereas the being of God is a “real identity” of essence and existence, the being of creatures is constituted by a “real distinction” (*distinctio realis*) between essence and existence.<sup>125</sup> Creaturely existence has its origin in God, to the extent that He contingently gives to be something which is not Himself and which is finite and dependent in its mode of existence. That which God gives to be is existent, good, wise, true and beautiful in a radically dependent way: all of these predications may be said of it only to the extent that it shares in God’s existence, goodness, wisdom, etc. The real distinction between existence and essence is an expression of the radical contingency and dependence of the creature on God. The formal essence of a creature (it’s *quidditas*; what it is) *informs* the fact of its existence (it’s *haecceitas*), but at the same time implies that the creature exists outside of itself, is incomplete in itself. In the words of John Betz: “[A creature’s] essence is at once immanent to its existence and beyond it (or transcendent), so that existence itself is only given as the coming to be of essence.”<sup>126</sup> The real distinction between creaturely existence and essence presents itself as a tension between a being that is “there” and “such”, yet whose “such” in fact remains to be attained, so that in its purity it is never really “there”.<sup>127</sup>

A second distinction that is made alongside the first in Aquinas’ thought is the distinction between actuality and potentiality. Aquinas understands being from the perspective of actuality. According to him, “to be” primarily means “to be in act.” This provides another way to think of God as the highest be-ing: God is also the most actual being. In God, there is no potentiality, as He is always completely actualised in His infinity. Creaturely existence, however, is a mixture of actuality and potentiality. The more the potentiality inherent in something is actualised, the closer it moves to realising the *telos* it was created for, and therefore, the higher the degree to which it participates in the divine being.

Thirdly, and intimately connected with the previous distinctions, a general theory of causality informs Aquinas’ ontology. According to this theory, every agent produces something like itself. Agent causality and similarity cannot be separated. Thus,

---

<sup>125</sup> See *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 88, a. 2 – 4, as well as I, q. 3, a. 4 corp.

<sup>126</sup> John R. Betz, “Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (part 2),” *Modern Theology*, 22:1, January 2006, p. 21.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* Betz is here paraphrasing Erich Przywara.

creation, as caused by God, in some sense participates in his being, and is at the same time also drawn to God as it becomes more actual.

The distinctions between infinite being and finite being, existence and essence and actuality and potentiality provide the means for speaking of the radical distinction, as well as intimate community, between God and His creation or, philosophically speaking, between transcendence and immanence. On the one hand, God as infinite being radically transcends His finite creation. God is always more - He can never be grasped or defined - His is an overflowing fullness of being. On the other hand, God's transcendence is not an absolute transcendence, in the sense that He is completely alien to His creation. Creaturely being, to the extent that it exists in actuality, refers to infinite being, in whom it has its cause and finds its completion. Prior to all distinctions between substance and accidents, genera, species and subsistents being as being participates in infinite being to the extent that it exists and has actuality.

In the words of Rudi te Velde:

“God is conceived of [by Aquinas] as the universal principle and origin of that concrete totality of all things sharing in the common perfection of being (*ens commune*.) In so far as the totality of all beings is not intelligible in itself, it must be understood as the multiplied and differentiated effect of that original fullness of being in relation to which the whole of reality becomes intelligible as being. The differentiated *esse* of the many things, constituting the world, is not intelligible unless as derived from that which is *ipsum esse*. So it is from this perspective that one can affirm and uphold the concrete and substantial reality of the world without identifying it with the ultimate reality.”<sup>128</sup>

An eminently useful means of describing the shining through of transcendence in immanence, even while the ontological remove of immanence from transcendence is also maintained, is afforded by the notion of analogy. This is so in spite of the fact that Aquinas rarely uses the term “analogy” as such. What one finds in Aquinas is a

---

<sup>128</sup> *Metaphysics and the Question of Creation*. p. 79.

general division of terms into the categories “equivocal”, “univocal” and “analogical”, and he presents this threefold division as if he is simply using the divisions, definitions and examples with which everyone is familiar.<sup>129</sup>

Whereas analogy was known in the platonic tradition as the manner in which material beings participate in ideal forms, the Aristotelian distinctions with regard to the different kinds of analogy provided Aquinas with a sophisticated means to describe the participation of immanence in transcendence, as well as the modulations existing within creaturely being. In the *Metaphysics* 4.2 (1003a), Aristotle raises the general problem of the word “being” and its different senses, and he also introduces what is known as *pros hen* (*ad unum*) equivocation – the idea that different senses may be unified through a relationship to one central sense:

“There are many senses in which being can be said, but they are related to one central point [*pros hen*], one definite kind of thing, and are not equivocal. Everything which is healthy is related to health ... and everything which is medical to medicine...”

This type of analogy became known as the analogy of attribution, and in the thirteenth century its special mark was being said in a prior and a posterior sense (*per prius et posterius*).<sup>130</sup> Another type of analogy is, however, also described in the *Metaphysics*<sup>131</sup> - one that understands the relationship of being to beings as a proportion of mutual otherness ( $\omega\varsigma$   $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\omicron$   $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$   $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\omicron$ , litt.: “one thing to another.”) Whereas a proportion exists, this proportion is not quantifiable, and therefore not able to be fixed in any way. Analogy may now further involve the comparison of two proportions or relations. Thus, “principle” was said to be an analogical term when said of a point and a spring of water, because a point is related to a line, just as a spring is related to a stream. This type of analogy came to be known as the analogy of proportionality.

---

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Ashworth, E.J. 2004. Medieval Theories of Analogy. In: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/analogy-medieval/> (Accessed on 25-06-2008). Also E.J. Ashworth, “Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth-Century Logic: A Preface to Aquinas on Analogy”, *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, vol. 1 (1991).

<sup>130</sup> Ashworth, *Medieval Theories of Analogy*, who mentions that the phrase “in a prior and a posterior sense” seems to have been derived from Arabic interpretations of Aristotle.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. *Metaphysics* 4.6 (1016b).

In explaining the relationship between God and his creation in terms of analogy, Aquinas had to revise Aristotle's *pros hen* analogy (*analogia attributionis*), because the good or the being or the wisdom that can be said of God and creatures *per analogiam* is obviously not a *tertium comparationis* that is other than God himself.<sup>132</sup> Thus, the analogy of proportionality must be incorporated into the analogy of attribution - although there is a similarity between God and his creatures, there is also always an unquantifiable dissimilarity.

Given that the being of God is a real identity of essence and existence, while in the being of creatures, there is a real distinction between essence and existence, the relationship between God and creation is necessarily one of analogy, indeed a relationship of ever greater dissimilarity, in spite of all similarity. The theological formulation of the material content of the notion *analogia entis* hails from the time of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), some two decades before Aquinas' birth. According to a canon accepted at this council, "...one cannot note a similarity between Creator and the creature, however great, without the necessity of noting a greater dissimilarity between them."<sup>133</sup> This adage is one of the underlying premises of Aquinas' thought. John Milbank points to the following passage from the *Summa Theologiae* as a substantiation of the fact that one may speak of *analogia entis* in Aquinas as an ontological and not merely a linguistic or conceptual category (I.Q.4 a. 3 resp):

“... if there is an agent not contained in any genus, its effects will still more distantly reproduce the form of the agent not, that is, so as to participate in the likeness of the agent's form according to the same specific or generic

---

<sup>132</sup> The analogy between God and creature is not an analogy of proper proportionality, as Cajetan and the Thomist tradition after him have claimed. According to Cajetan, the likeness between God and creation is a proportional one: a similarity among sets of relations. While Aquinas had indeed used the analogy of proper proportionality in his earlier works, he soon abandoned the notion. It now appears that, after a number of shifts – not always mutually compatible – he settled on an analogy of causal participation, which combined the analogy of attribution and the analogy of proper proportionality in a single synthesis. Cf. Gerald A McCool, S.J., “An Alert and Independent Thomist”, *The Universe as Journey – Conversations with W. Norris Clarke, S.J.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988), pp. 26,27.

<sup>133</sup> As quoted in Betz, *Beyond the sublime* (part 2), p. 13.



formality, but only according to some sort of analogy, as existence is common to all.”<sup>134</sup>

*Analogia entis* thus provides a mediating third way between absolute equivocity and absolute univocity of being. “This is because,” once again in the words of John Milbank, which also hint at the formulation of the Fourth Lateran council, “the transgeneric height of remoteness (all we know is even more unlike pure being, pure unity, etc. than one species or genus is unlike another) is nonetheless an equal closeness to everything, which reveals a hidden bond between finitely remote things and categories.”<sup>135</sup> *Analogia entis* means that there is no absolute equivocity, since all differences between beings, regardless of how far apart they may be in the hierarchies of genera and species or even as absolute particularities, still derive from infinite transcendent Being. And yet, genuine difference is not hereby abrogated, but may be even more emphatically affirmed. Because creatures receive their being as a free and contingent gift from God, from whom they, as finite, are always more different than alike – even though they participate distantly in His being - creatures are also genuinely different from one another and not reducible to any overarching ontic designation. Analogy allows respect for the genuine irreducible distinctness of creatures (their *haecceitas*) to be affirmed – there is no “presence” to which they refer – while at the same time holding that they nevertheless participate in an unquantifiable way in the transcendent Being of God (unquantifiable precisely because infinite).

What Aquinas has done is to take Aristotle’s metaphysics of being, with its appreciation for the immanent sphere, and to incorporate it into a platonic scheme that works in terms of a participation of immanence in transcendence and concomitantly, a movement of immanence to transcendence, which is driven by desire. The result of this fusion is that metaphysics, as the science assuming the intelligibility of being, becomes “less architectonic and more artisanal.”<sup>136</sup> Metaphysics cannot simply purport to provide an overarching framework of substances, genera and species into which all of reality may be pigeon-holed.

---

<sup>134</sup> *Truth in Aquinas*. p. 127, note 110.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* p. 47.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40-42.

Rather, metaphysics now has the task of painstakingly appreciating (making use of categories, etc.) how each particular being uniquely participates in divine being. However, because divine being is infinite, the description of this analogical relationship can never be completed, and the uniqueness of an individual can therefore never be disregarded. This is the reason why presence may not be said to be fixated in Aquinas - metaphysics is an endless description and re-description of an infinite number of particulars – metaphysics becomes history<sup>137</sup>.

Analogy, as materially derived from the theology of Thomas Aquinas, allows for the adherence to what Derrida describes as a binary logic of meaning intimation, without thereby submitting to the charge of fixation because of the existence of a prior established code. While experience is referred to God as *ipsum esse*, and meaning is therefore intimated in an appeal to this reference, this does not invalidate the endless task of interpretation. Precisely because He in whom an experience participates is infinite form, the experience can never be fathomed completely - the task of interpretation is ongoing.

Despite the promise that analogy holds, as a modification of the binary logic of meaning intimation, it has nevertheless been rejected as merely another manifestation of the metaphysics of presence. The most prominent philosophical<sup>138</sup> rejection of analogy in recent times – a rejection that is undoubtedly echoed by Derrida - has been that of Martin Heidegger. According to Heidegger, “*die Analogie gehört zur Metaphysik*” firstly, in the sense that a being “speaks” of another, highest being, and secondly, in the sense that similarities and generalities are expounded on the basis of this speech.<sup>139</sup> Because of the metaphysical mooring of reality to a highest “analogon”, the radical difference between being and beings cannot be thought, resulting in a forgetfulness of being in its radical eventfulness (*Ereignis*).<sup>140</sup> Betz argues that the best reply to Heidegger’s criticism of the analogy of being would be to point to the dogmatism present in his own thought. Whereas Christian theology in its Thomistic guise strives to think the relationship between existence and

---

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. p. 40.

<sup>138</sup> Harsh criticism against the *analogia entis* has been voiced in the twentieth century, from a certain Protestant theological perspective, by Karl Barth (see Betz, *Beyond the sublime* (part 2), pp. 3-11.)

<sup>139</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der Menschlichen Freiheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1971), p. 233.

<sup>140</sup> Danie Goosen, *Die Nihilisme – notas oor ons tyd* (Dainfern: Praag, 2007), p. 424.

essence, Heidegger demolishes every relationship. Existence becomes an empty abyss: *Das Nichts*, while essence becomes the fleeting *Seiendes* on the surface of experience. In the end, Heidegger can offer no rationally more compelling argument for his approach, as opposed to that of Aquinas.

## **2.6 The epistemological turn**

The preceding suggestions regarding the possibility of alternative readings of Plato and Aquinas have been offered in order to question Derrida's general indictment of the whole of the Western metaphysical tradition as a metaphysics of presence. This, however, does not imply a general dismissal of Derrida's analysis. Indeed, Derrida's reading of the spatialisation wrought by structuralism and Husserlian phenomenology, and by modern thought in general, provides an outstanding introduction to the postmodern condition, to borrow a phrase from Lyotard. Following Heidegger and Derrida, the modern epoch may indeed be described as an age of the fixation of presence. The spatialisation resulting from the fixation of presence is, in modernity, accompanied by specific convictions as to the meaning of space and time (the genitive once again being understood subjectively, as well as objectively).

It is against the background of the question regarding the origin of this state of spatialisation and the resolution of this situation that the real dialogue with Derrida is profiled. It may well be that certain irreconcilable differences with regard to the meaning of space and time will emerge as differing suggestions with regard to the resolution of the gridlocked state of spatialisation are offered in the dialogue. This is the context of the next two chapters of this study. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an alternative reading of the origins of modern spatialisation to that of Derrida.

The counter-proposal to that of Derrida about the origin of spatialisation proceeds from the assertion that an important change in perspective gradually took shape during the philosophical moment when late medieval thought was giving way to early modernity. This change in the dominant intellectual perspective would never at the

time have been described in all too radical terms, but as its consequences were drawn ever more radically in the intervening centuries, the claim that nothing short of a revolution took place can now confidently be made. The inversion, which will be referred to as the epistemological turn<sup>141</sup>, involves a dislocation of human reasoning from a prior place embedded in a chain of being, and a coagulation of human reason into an autonomous thinking and judging subject.<sup>142</sup> Henceforth, matters regarding a certain kind of knowledge – the representational kind – were to be the point of departure in philosophical, as well as theological, discourses. This prioritisation of epistemology over ontology was, however, first made possible by certain underlying theological and ontological decisions.<sup>143</sup>

For a millennium, until the advent of late-Scholasticism, a Christianised version of Platonism has in one form or another been prominent in Western metaphysical thought, even when synthesised with a rediscovered Aristotelianism. A major characteristic of this tradition is the notion of a fundamental co-inherence<sup>144</sup> and community between empirical, created reality and what is regarded as divine transcendence. According to this worldview, created being participates in an analogical way in God's own being. While being finite and after the fall subject to corruption, creation nevertheless exists as God's word of love, a word that is at the same time an invitation to answer in love and adoration. This holds true of human subjectivity as well. As representative of creation, humanity finds its identity in being

---

<sup>141</sup> The epistemological turn has also been described as the transcendental turn; cf. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 135. The prioritisation of epistemology described in the following section should be understood as the result of a bracketing out of all access to reality, save what is available to a transcendental subjectivity.

<sup>142</sup> Heidegger understands this coagulation in terms of the etymology of the word "subject": "We must understand this word *subiectum*, however, as the translation of the Greek *hypokeimenon*. The word names that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself." Martin Heidegger, *The Question concerning technology and other essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 128.

<sup>143</sup> The point that specific theological decisions underlie the new approach to epistemology and science is made succinctly by Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the scientific imagination – from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). See also Hart, *ibid.* p. 133. As this study employs semiological considerations in working with the notions of space and time, it is at this point also worthwhile to cite Umberto Eco's conclusion at the end of a discussion on the nature and function of symbols: "In any case, behind every strategy of the symbolic mode, be it religious or aesthetic, there is a legitimating theology, even though it is the atheistic theology of unlimited semiosis or of hermeneutics as deconstruction. A positive way to approach every instance of the symbolic mode would be to ask: which theology legitimates it?" (*Semiotics and the philosophy of language*, p.163).

<sup>144</sup> The word "co-inherence" has been used to translate the Greek *perichoresis*, cf. Brown and Loades, *The sense of the sacramental – movement and measure in art and music, place and time* (London: SPCK, 1995), p.13.

addressed by God, and by answering in adoration. The relationship between God and His creation, as understood in the grand metaphysical tradition of Christian thought, may be described as one of asymmetrical reciprocity.<sup>145</sup> This expression indicates real community between God and creation, while nevertheless maintaining that the one party in the relationship is radically dependent on the other.

Another way of typifying this tradition would be to point to the co-inherence of ontology and epistemology. A commitment to the interdependence of ontology and epistemology proceeds naturally from convictions about the being of God. In God, infinite being and complete knowledge are one and the same. Human knowledge, as an incomplete tracing of the divine ideas in creation that ends in the beatific vision, is therefore viewed as inextricably linked to the nature of being.<sup>146</sup>

Although it is of course difficult and dangerous to identify the advent of a broader cultural sensibility with a single person, the epistemological turn finds a certain preliminary culmination in the thought of John Duns Scotus, a theologian who lived around the turn of the fourteenth century. Critical of the encyclopaedic synthesis of Thomas Aquinas, to which an analogical worldview is central, Scotus propounded two seminal theses: the first on the univocity of being, and the second on the formal distinction of essences.<sup>147</sup> Scotus believed that without a unified conception of being, theology as a science would be impossible, and we would have no natural knowledge of God. He argued that the fact that contradiction would arise when a term was affirmed and denied of the same thing was sufficient reason to discard the notion of analogy and to work only with univocity. Concomitantly, he rejected the view held by the Thomists that for a term to be univocal, it had to be a strictly categorial term, picking out some natural kind or other (a genus or species or property, for example). Following the implications of this approach to its consequences, he then argued that 'being' (*ens*) was a univocal term subordinated

---

<sup>145</sup> Cf. John Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity: Part Two, Reciprocity Granted", *Modern Theology*, Vol. 17:4, October 2001. See also Danie Goosen, *Die Nihilisme – notas oor ons tyd* (Dainfern: Praag, 2007), pp. 177, 178.

<sup>146</sup> Milbank & Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 4. John R. Betz, *Beyond the sublime: the aesthetics of the analogy of being* (part 2), p. 23.

<sup>147</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing – on the liturgical consummation of philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) p.122. See also: Catherine Pickstock, *Duns Scotus: his historical and contemporary significance* (*Modern Theology*, 21:4, 2005), pp. 543-574.

to a single univocal concept.<sup>148</sup> Scotus' thesis on the univocity of being implies that there is a conceptual category of neutral being as such that is prior to the distinction between finite and infinite being. Even though there is an infinite quantitative separation between God, as transcendent being, and His creation as immanent being, both transcendence and immanence share in the neutral conceptual category of being. The positing of this prior category of being opened the way for the analysis of being apart from any theological considerations, and therefore opened up the possibility of a purely immanent space.

The second thesis for which Scotus is known further exemplifies the shift towards the priority of epistemology over ontology. Until his time, medieval theories of signification were complicated by the metaphysical problem of common natures (essences). For some scholastics, the primary significate of a common noun was the common nature, and the secondary significate was the thing having that nature. According to Aquinas, who did not want to give common natures any kind of intermediary existence independent of both concepts and actual things, the significate (*significatum*) of a term was the intellect's conception (whether simple or definitional) of the thing signified- the thing signified (*res significata*) was usually the property or the nature characterising individual external objects, and the referent (*suppositum*) was the individual external object itself, viewed as the bearer of the property or nature.<sup>149</sup>

What was needed, Scotus argued, was a way of enabling the concept to enjoy some kind of unity, while allowing the word to have a significate that was not a simple, common nature. Having established the univocity of being, Scotus thought that the answer to this problem should be looked for in the notion of a mental language superior to spoken language, where concepts, as parts of this mental language, could themselves be regarded as having signification.<sup>150</sup> And so, a distinction between formal and objective concepts was made. The formal concept was the act of mind or conception that represented an object, and the objective concept was the object represented. According to this scheme, acts of mind acquired their own

---

<sup>148</sup> E.J. Ashworth, Medieval Theories of Analogy (In: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2004) p.

9.

<sup>149</sup> Ashworth, *Medieval Theories of Analogy*, p. 2.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2, 9

separate existence as mind-dependent objects that nevertheless have an objective being - the being of being thought (*esse objective, esse cognitum*). The result of this thesis of formal distinction was that the bond between the essential form and the actual existence of things, which was up until then taken to be natural, was broken. Whereas Thomistic thought made a real distinction between essence and existence, the two now became completely separate. Even if something exists in a particular material form, this does not, according to Scotus, exclude the *possibility* of it having other forms. It is logically possible to conceptualise a thing as having other forms. Thus, by prioritising virtual possibility over actual existence, Scotus furthers the theoretical shift towards dogmatic epistemological priority, since the possible is, by definition, only given in thought.<sup>151</sup>

The move towards the prioritisation of epistemology over ontology gained momentum with the rise of nominalism, associated with the name of William of Occam. Also known as terminism, nominalism holds that there are no such things as universal essences. The general terms with which we refer to classes of things (for instance, “tree” or “dog”) are nothing but generalisations based on our experience of individual things, to which a linguistic sign is then accorded.<sup>152</sup> Nominalism contributed greatly to the disenchantment of nature. Henceforth, nature was to be examined with the instrument of inferential reason and, at least initially, in light of the positive revelation of Scripture, a revelation which – contrary to the analogical tradition - in itself did not seem to necessarily have an inner, rational rapport with creation, as it simply sprang from the inscrutable divine will. In the words of David Bentley-Hart:

“... Western theology made its own, quite substantial contribution to modern ‘nihilism’: when nominalism largely severed the perceptible world from the analogical index of divine transcendence, and thus reduced divine freedom to a kind of voluntarism and theophany to mere legislation, such that creation

---

<sup>151</sup> Pickstock, *After Writing*, p.127.

<sup>152</sup> John Milbank, *The Thomistic Telescope: Truth and Identity* (The Centre of Theology and Philosophy online papers, 2006), p. 8. Available at: <http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk> (Accessed on 03-12-2007).

and revelation could be imagined only as manifestations of the *will* of a god who is at most, a supreme being among lesser beings...<sup>153</sup>

The epistemological turn received a mature, early modern expression in the thought of René Descartes. He explicitly divided reality into a *res cogitans* and a *res extensa*, and sought to gain a secure knowledge of everything by starting in his own thought. These moves were symptomatic of a massive chasm that opened up between the thinking, conceptualising subject on the one hand, and a neutral, objectified reality on the other. Henceforth, the human mind fulfilled the role of a wonderful mirror in which the complexities of nature would be faithfully reflected.<sup>154</sup> Logic, as a faculty of the mind, subsequently came to be regarded as a powerful instrument for isolating and cataloguing the elements of the world out there, and then identifying the relationships between these elements. The result of these machinations of the mind would be a *mathesis universalis*, a universal method according to which reality should be approached, but also at the same time a kind of map of reality<sup>155</sup>. These developments would greatly facilitate human intervention in the world. Whereas there is always a legitimate way in which reason can be seen as the coping tool par excellence of the human organism, the result of the epistemological turn was an almost exclusively instrumentalist view of rationality.<sup>156</sup> The instrument of human reason was to be the scales on which all of being would be judged.

The changed role of rationality goes hand in hand with a changed view of the world, which is reflected in the mind. It is, in the first place, a disenchanted world. The secrets of the world are secrets only because they have not yet been discovered using the dissecting scalpel of reason. It is a world that accords no place to the mystery of immanence pervaded by transcendence. Everything is taken to be

---

<sup>153</sup> Bentley-Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 133. Cf. also Peter M. Candler, *Theology, rhetoric, manuduction – or reading Scripture together on the path to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>154</sup> For a by now classical description of knowledge as the mirror image of nature, see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

<sup>155</sup> The Enlightenment encyclopaedist, D'Alembert, explicitly uses the metaphor of the map when speaking of human knowledge (As cited in Eco, *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*, p.83).

<sup>156</sup> Heidegger's description of the rise of instrumental reason remains influential. Cf. esp. *The Age of the World Picture* and *Science and Reflection* In: Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). See also Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.166 and Goosen, *Die Nihilisme*, p. 61.



immediately present to itself and in principle to the perceiving cogito. In short, it is the world of univocity: being is simply the meaning of being. It is, in the second place, a flattened out world. As the mind came to be seen as a mirror of nature, and a physical map as a representation of this representation, so nature itself came to be regarded in terms of these two dimensional metaphors. Functional hierarchies may be identified, but under the synoptic gaze of reason, no ascending or descending chain of being is allowed. In the third place it is an atomistic world - a world comprised of isolated elements that may be analysed in their different relations, but where the totality nevertheless only equals the sum of the parts.

What has in fact happened with the epistemological turn is that the demarcation of the transcendent from the immanent has shifted. Whereas in the Christian metaphysical tradition, the transcendent was regarded as that which exceeds immanent being, while nevertheless pervading it and sharing in its life, in the wake of the epistemological turn, it came to function first and foremost as that which transcends experience or consciousness. The epistemological transcendent is that which lies outside of human experience. It is the noumenal, in Kantian terms, as opposed to the phenomenal. The metaphysical transcendent, on the other hand, was pushed further and further away from an immanence that was increasingly deemed independent, that is, capable of being regarded on its own. The rise of the epistemological transcendent may be described in other terms by saying that a classical, transcendental metaphysics (e.g. in Plato and Aristotle) was supplanted by a modern metaphysical transcendentalism (e.g. in Kant.)<sup>157</sup> In the wake of the epistemological turn, Christian thought, which came under its influence, while still recognising an ontological transcendent, radically separated the transcendent and the immanent and tried to reconcile them in an extrinsic manner. The dominant conception came to be that transcendence and immanence are dialectically related rather than analogically - immanence comprises a world of substances that exhaust their meaning in their finitude, while transcendence “can arrive among these substances only as a self announcing paradox.”<sup>158</sup> For Christian thought, in its modernist guise, the separation between the ontological transcendent and immanent

---

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Betz, *Beyond the sublime* (part 2), p. 25.

<sup>158</sup> Bentley-Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 136.

came to be identified with the separation between the epistemological transcendent and immanent.

Seeing that the overarching context of the present discussion is a conversation with Jacques Derrida on space, time and meaning, it may be pertinent at this point to try and establish what the development towards epistemological dominance may mean in semiological terms. The opening up of a chasm between the reasoning subject and an objectified, spatialised reality over against it, as the epistemological turn was described above, may also be associated with a shift in the assumptions about the discovery – or production – of meaning.<sup>159</sup> The connection between the epistemological turn and the process of meaning intimation will be determined in terms of the two logics of meaning intimation hypothetically proposed in the introductory chapter, the one – seemingly – favouring a purely immanent approach, and the other – seemingly – favouring a radical distinction between immanence and transcendence in the operation of the sign. What has been proposed in the introductory chapter may be restated in summary by once again using Umberto Eco's elucidation of the sign.<sup>160</sup>

Eco, discussing various customary ways in which a sign is taken to mean something, distinguishes a number of broad categories in this regard. The first category is characterised by the fact that the *aliquid stat pro aliquo* relationship is based on an inferential mechanism ( $p > q$ .) In the inferential category of the discovery or production of meaning, the occurrence of something intimates, implies or leads to something else. The inference may be synecdochic in character, which is to say that a part of something that is perceived and comprehended leads to an intimation of a greater whole. It may also be metonymic in character, in which case the proximity to or association with that which is perceived and comprehended allows for novel meaning to be achieved.

---

<sup>159</sup> I take meaning to be a matter of both finding and making (cf. Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning – a liturgical Theology for Late Modernity*. (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), p. 63ff for a discussion on the relation between the finding and making of meaning).

<sup>160</sup> Eco, *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*, p.15,16. Eco eventually distinguishes six broad categories of meaning, the first three of which are used here.

The second category of signs distinguished by Eco is where the sign is taken to be a gesture produced with the intention of communicating. Presupposed in this category is some form of intersubjectivity. A sender transfers meaning content to a receiver using an agreed upon code. According to Eco, the mechanism of the discovery or production of meaning in this case works according to a relationship of equivalence (rather than inference):  $p \equiv q$ . Some form of pre-established harmony (often described as a code) exists in signs of this category, which makes the intimation of meaning possible. In this case, it may be more appropriate to speak of the transference than of the inference of meaning.

According to Eco, there is a “clear opposition” between these first two categories, an opposition that is then upset by the introduction of a third category, namely that of symbol. A symbol may appear to be as arbitrary as the conventional signs of the second category, yet the perceiver of a symbol is able to move along certain operations that lead to modified meaning content. Symbols then, are signs that presuppose intersubjectivity – they intend to communicate – yet, they also incorporate the mechanism of inference ( $p > q$ .) Eco calls these signs iconic or analogical. After identifying these different possible, and sometimes customary, categories of the sign, Eco himself goes on to argue that the identified categories are not all equally basic. Following C.S. Peirce he identifies in the sign mechanism of inference ( $p > q$ ) the most basic dynamic of sign production, and subsequently identifies this mechanism as the field of study of a general semiotics.<sup>161</sup>

The three categories of sign-function identified above may be used to trace the fate of semiological reasoning in the wake of the epistemological turn. On the one hand, and ontologically speaking, the shift towards departing from the perspective of the transcendental subject resulted in a dogmatic adherence to the sign mechanism of inference. Ontologically speaking, the sign mechanism of equivalence, whereby immanent creation signifies a transcendent creator, was no longer available.

Within a worldview that assumes the co-inherence of transcendence and immanence, meaning, at its most basic ontological level, would be regarded as being

---

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* p. 38.

rooted in intersubjectivity. God gratuitously and lovingly establishes a relationship between Himself and his creation, this being the act of creation itself. This *exitus*, or Ur-kenosis of God in his Son, and the *reditus* of redeemed creation in the Son through the Spirit, is a *perichoresis* that shares in the *perichoresis* of the Trinity. In a worldview characterised at its most basic level by such an intersubjective community, meaning may be said to be a manifestation of communication. In terms of our hypothetical sign mechanisms, this would be a scenario where, on an ontological level, Eco's sign relationship of equivalence takes precedence. Christian metaphysical thought up until the late Middle Ages simply assumed that ontologically meaning was rooted in such a sign relationship of equivalence. The Christian neo-platonic sensibilities of Augustine, for instance, led him to regard the whole of created reality as a sign.<sup>162</sup> Creation points past itself to God, in whom it continues to exist from moment to moment. Having said this, with regard to meaning, the relationship between God as infinite Being and finite creation cannot be presumed to be one of strict equivalence. Transcendence cannot be grasped or comprehended - there is always an overflowing of meaning with regard to finite subjectivity. Two observations should now be made: the transference of meaning in intersubjective communication between God and His creation cannot be said to be based on a *mutually* agreed upon code. There exists an asymmetrical reciprocity in the establishment of the code. The operative logic here is more that of the gift than of the convention. God gives the meaning, and in intimating it, creation gives it back to God. This leads to the second observation, which states that with regard to meaning in its most basic ontological manifestation, it may be more appropriate to speak of the *anaphoresis* of meaning than of the inference or transference of meaning. The meaning of creation and every part of it is precisely this anaphoric<sup>163</sup> pointing towards God. Meaning is to be viewed as a direction, even as a semiotic journey, and this also holds true for the sign as such.

The turn towards the priority of epistemology inaugurated a shift in the ontological mooring of meaning. With ontological transcendence being very distant, the initiative for the production or discovery of meaning now rested on the autonomous thinking

---

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 6,7.

<sup>163</sup> The Greek word "Anaphora" (ἀναφορά) suggests a "carrying back" or a "carrying up", and so an "offering", hence its liturgical use in reference to the offering of sacrifice to God. Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anaphora> (Accessed on 03/03/2008).

subject. Starting with itself, the epistemological subject interprets itself and everything else. This corresponds in a strict sense with Eco's sign relationship of inference, namely  $p > q$ : departing from its own experience, the cogito infers or intimates the meaning of itself and the world. Meaning is rooted in the subjectivity of the cogito, which hypothesises about the world. On an ontological level, the ubiquity of the sign relationship of inference may be said to characterise the modern, as well as post-modern, epochs.

Modern science may be regarded as a formalisation and institutionalisation of the logic of the sign mechanism of inference. As theorising about the scientific method gained sophistication, the emphasis shifted from simple induction to an appreciation of the role of the scientific hypothesis, a process of meaning formation that C.S. Peirce, in expounding it, called abduction.<sup>164</sup> The inferential mechanism of induction works on the basis of repeated instances of a similar experience leading to the postulation of a general rule. When the next instance is encountered, it is then assumed to fall under the same rule. It should be noted that the experiences comprising the individual instances of the inductive process are never in themselves "brute facts" - they themselves are interpreted within the speculative horizon of a hypothesis. Gradually, the logic of this "most daring of inferences, that of *abduction* or *hypothesis*"<sup>165</sup> became clear to theoreticians of the scientific method: given a specific experience, and accepting that a certain stability in background meaning has to be assumed, a rule or model may be postulated, of which a certain state of affairs is an instance, with the experienced phenomenon being the result of this state of affairs. The experienced phenomenon is therefore deduced from a hypothesized general law and case instance. Holmes Rolston describes this so-called hypothetico-deductive model of scientific reasoning as "a theory (the hypothesis) arising out of the facts, followed by deduction back down to further empirical-level expectations, those then being related back to observations to confirm or disconfirm the theory, more or less, and to generate revised theory, from which new conclusions are drawn, after which the facts are again consulted."<sup>166</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> Hughes, *Worship as meaning*, p. 34,35; Eco, *Semiotics*, p. 39.

<sup>165</sup> Eco, *ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> Holmes Rolston, *Science and Religion – a critical survey* (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 2.

The “opposition”<sup>167</sup> between a sign relation of equivalence and a sign relation of inference may provide a perspective on the alienation between reason and faith, or reason and revelation, which has been one of the defining characteristics of modern and post-modern thought. Seeing no other recourse on an ontological level but to work exclusively with a sign relation of inference, modern secular thought regards the convictions of faith as dogmatic, ideological and in the service of the abuse of power. Inversely, as the option of analogy grew dimmer in the wake of the demise of an analogical worldview, conservative theological thought worked exclusively with a sign relation of equivalence, resulting in various forms of fideism and pietism. However, these opposing narratives share common assumptions even in their opposition, namely that being is univocal and that transcendence and immanence are to be regarded as radically separate.

Whereas the sign mechanism of equivalence in modernity became unavailable on an ontological level, this is precisely not the case on an epistemological level. In the wake of the epistemological turn, the sign relation of equivalence was drafted into the service of an ideological ideal of subjective certainty, to the effect that immediacy exists between what is perceived and its basic meaning. While no intrinsic relationship between subjective thought and the world out there is accepted (epistemologically speaking, transcendence and immanence are radically separate), it is nevertheless accepted that an equivalence between the immanent and the transcendent poles of meaning intimation is achievable.

This ideal of Presence has been successfully criticised in what came to be known as post-modernity, and it may be assumed that Eco broadly shares in these post-modern sensibilities. There is always an excess of meaning that is not covered in an established code’s definition of its signs. In other words, all communication involves interpretation, which is a form of inference. The sign relation of equivalence, especially in the form it takes in the wake of the epistemological turn, may rightly be criticised. The fact of interpretation being always present does not, however, detract from the importance of intersubjective communication in the intimation of meaning, and of the possible insights to be gained in proceeding from an ontological point of

---

<sup>167</sup> Eco, *Semiotics*, p. 16.

departure that cherishes the participatory community between ontological transcendence and immanence.

In the following parts of this chapter it will be argued that the epistemological turn, with its semiological ramifications, had a determining influence on the way in which space and time are approached in modernity. The main characteristic of this relationship to space and time is that they are regarded as inherently neutral, indifferent and meaningless. In keeping with the divide between an objectified reality “out there” and a thinking, judging subject in opposition to it, space and time are regarded as extension and duration on the one hand, and as neutral categories of thought on the other. Between these subjective and objective notions of space and time a mirroring takes place.

The fate of space and time in modernity is eminently demonstrated in the work of Isaac Newton. Newton founded classical mechanics on the view that space is something distinct from body, and that time is something that passes uniformly, without regard for whatever happens in the world. For this reason, he spoke of absolute space and absolute time, in order to distinguish these entities from ways in which we measure them (which he called relative spaces and relative times.)<sup>168</sup> Absolute space extends uniformly in all directions, and is perfectly geometrical in character. Time, in its uniform flow, is likewise perfectly mathematical. Newton’s view of space is often described as substantivalist<sup>169</sup>, because in his view, absolute space, in distinction from material body, may in some respects be regarded as a separate substance. Space (as well as time in later interpretations) may be mapped according to the Cartesian system of axes. An x, y and z axis extends infinitely from whatever point in absolute space is taken to be the point of reference.

Meaning does not pertain to modern notions of space and time in an intrinsic manner. Rather, it is reserved for the thinking, judging subject to ascribe meaning to specific regions of space and time. Until this happens, one region of space is completely isomorphic to the next. In this regard, the contrast with notions of space

---

<sup>168</sup> For a discussion, see Robert Rynasiewicz, *Newton’s View on Space, Time, and Motion* (first published Aug,2004) In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/newton-stm/>

<sup>169</sup> Nick Huggett, *Space from Zeno to Einstein* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 129.

and time prior to the epistemological turn becomes apparent when the category of motion is considered. Aristotelian thought, as appropriated in the Christian tradition by Aquinas, may be characterised as fundamentally teleological. Aristotle discerns in nature an urge to move from potentiality to actuality, from pure matter to matter realised in form. There is therefore in nature an inherent principle of motion; even stronger: nature may be defined as an inherent principle of motion.<sup>170</sup> Aristotle insists that motion is always between two poles or opposites: from something to something else - it is never a nondescript “wandering” without an identifiable origin and destination. Aquinas follows Aristotle in this regard, and as a result, Aristotle-Aquinas is able to distinguish between so-called “natural” and “violent” motions. Oliver describes the distinction as follows:

Natural motions are those characteristic behaviours which are produced by a being in a given environment ... For example, the fall of a heavy body to earth is a natural motion. By contrast, a violent motion is one in which there is no intrinsic intentionality of that motion or by the being itself.<sup>171</sup>

The point is that motion is not an indifferent category. From this perspective, it is perfectly natural to distinguish between good or bad, better or worse, proper or improper motions. Motion is meaningful, and therefore the space and time being traversed are meaningful. The qualitative distinction between natural and violent motion, going hand in hand with an inherent meaningfulness of space and time, was, however, rejected in modernity.

In Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, motion is a simple category well known to all, requiring little, if any, reflection on its meaning or purpose. Motion is nothing beyond the predictable spatial movement over time of particular material bodies.<sup>172</sup> Motion is completely neutral. In fact, according to Newton, a body will maintain its current state of motion or rest infinitely, unless acted upon by a specific force. This is the well known principle of inertia. Force thus becomes the operative notion in

---

<sup>170</sup> Simon Oliver, Motion according to Aquinas and Newton (In: *Modern Theology*, 17:2, 2001), p. 166. Cf. Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (London: Routledge, 2005). This discussion about meaningful motion relies on Oliver's account.

<sup>171</sup> Oliver, *Motion according to Aquinas and Newton*, pp. 167,168.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 164.



Newtonian dynamics. At any given moment, the resultant movement of a body is the vectorial sum of the forces operating on it. Space and time may be regarded as the neutral containers – or, taken together, as the arena - for the conflict of forces. And so conflict, even violence, becomes the natural state of affairs in the Newtonian world, but of course, to describe nature as violent is itself deemed to be subjective. It remains the judgement of the thinking ego, and may not be said of nature inherently.

It has been stated that the fate of space and time subsequent to the epistemological turn was to be reduced either to the Cartesian *res extensa* or to the Cartesian *res cogitans*, these two “sides” in any case effecting a kind of spatialised mirroring of each other. If Newton’s substantivalist notion of space may be viewed as a case in point of the former kind of reduction (to pure extension), it finds its counterpart reduction in the transcendental ideality of space and time propounded by Immanuel Kant.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant makes a number of celebrated distinctions with regard to human knowledge. After making the distinction between a priori knowledge, which does not depend on experience, and a posteriori knowledge, which has its source in experience, Kant distinguishes between analytic and synthetic judgements of reason. Whereas analytic judgements are purely explicative, the predicate of a statement adding nothing which is not already contained in the subject, synthetic judgements are ampliative - the predicate of a statement contains an element that is outside of the subject. The distinctions between a priori and a posteriori knowledge and between synthetic and analytical statements form the groundwork for the Kantian project of overcoming the epistemological deadlock, in which the factions of empiricists and rationalists were caught. The solution to the standoff between rationalism and empiricism proposed by Kant was by way of a novel reference to the transcendental subject. Experience is always experience ‘for me’, the experiencing subject. I can only say something about *my* experience, and in the process of articulating my experience, some stable categories will begin to emerge. “I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects as with our manner of cognizing objects so far as it is meant to be possible a priori. A system of such concepts would be called

transcendental philosophy...<sup>173</sup> Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is an endeavour to show what knowledge is, in order that objects can conform to knowledge, as well as to show that some synthetic knowledge is possible apart from experience, that is, a *priori*.

According to Kant, the object, as object of *our* sense, must conform to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, otherwise there would simply be no experience. We have to concern ourselves with appearances, not with the things in themselves. The section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that deals with perception is called the Transcendental Aesthetic. Human perception is possible because of our faculty of intuition (*Anschauung*). With regard to intuition, Kant has the following to say:

“Intuition takes place only so far as the object is given to us, which requires, with human beings at least, that it affects the mind in a certain way. The capacity (receptivity) for obtaining presentations according as we are affected by objects is called sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*]. By means of sensibility, therefore, objects are given to us, and it alone furnishes intuitions; these are thought, however, by the understanding [*Verstand*], and from it arise concepts.”<sup>174</sup>

Within the framework of perception thus explained, Kant has to explain how the *a posteriori* and *a priori* elements of knowledge relate and combine in the transcendental subject. This he accomplishes by making a further distinction: between matter and form. The matter of appearance is that which is related to sensation, and consequently is *a posteriori*. The form of appearance, on the other hand, is the relational ordering thereof and is *a priori*. “Since that in which alone sensations can gain order and be placed in a certain form cannot itself be sensation, the matter of all appearance is given to us only *a posteriori*, its form, however, must lie ready for all sensations, *a priori*, in the mind and therefore lend itself to be considered apart from sensation.”<sup>175</sup> The transcendental aesthetic is the science of

---

<sup>173</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* trans. Wolfgang Schwarz (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1982), p.13. Cf. Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of nihilism* (London: Routledge, 2002) p. 75.

<sup>174</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 16.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

all principles of *a priori* sensibility, and it is here, as pre-experiential forms in the mind, that Kant locates the categories of space and time.

Space, according to Kant, is a pure form of sensibility. This view, according to Cunningham, distinguishes Kant from both Newton and Leibniz, who variously held that space was absolutely real and self-subsistent (Newton, as became apparent in the foregoing discussion), or merely relational (Leibniz).<sup>176</sup> “By means of the outer sense (a property of our mind) we present to ourselves objects as external to us, and all of them in space.”<sup>177</sup> Categorised in space, the shape, magnitude and relation of objects to one another are determined or determinable. Space is then *a priori* and not empirical. As such, it is the subjective condition of sensibility. Space does not refer to things in themselves, because it does not pertain to “objects” as such. The resultant notion of space is that it is both empirically real and yet transcendently ideal.<sup>178</sup>

Time, just as space, is a pure form of sensibility. According to Kant, “inner sense, through which the mind views itself or its inner state, does not give an intuition of the soul itself as an object; but the intuition of its inner state is nevertheless possible only under a determinate form so that everything internal is presented in relations of time.”<sup>179</sup> Time is not something which is subject-independent. Time, as inner sense, may be described as the passage of the subject. Space is required to enable a subject to persist, but this persistence is, in a sense, marked off by time.<sup>180</sup> The way in which an object of experience persists in the time of the subject may be further explained, according to Kant, by noting that time has three “modes”: duration, succession and coexistence.<sup>181</sup> These modes of time provide human consciousness with the frame of reference to perceive continuity (substance), alteration (change), causality and the interaction between simultaneous entities. Without them, consciousness, as the site of finite unity, would be impossible.

---

<sup>176</sup> Cunningham, *Genealogy of nihilism*, p. 77.

<sup>177</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 17.

<sup>178</sup> Cunningham, *Genealogy of nihilism*, p. 79.

<sup>179</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 17.

<sup>180</sup> *Genealogy of Nihilism*, p 81.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82, 83.

The transcendental ideality of Kantian space and time supports the argument that the modern notion of space and time, subsequent to the epistemological turn, may be characterised as being spatialised. Human subjectivity spreads itself out over all of experience, providing stability and unity. Thus, whereas spatialisation starts off as a characterisation of the modern world, it ends up in a curious mirroring, as a characterisation of subjective consciousness. If modernity is also characterised by an obsession with the passing of time, this historicism may nevertheless itself be characterised as a kind of spatialisation. In modernity, the movement of time is frozen into the pseudo-eternity of the moment. Plato characterised time as the moving image of eternity<sup>182</sup>, while Augustine, in his Christianising of Plato's metaphysics, knew the distension of time in the soul. For Augustine, there is no isolated present moment. The present is complemented by the past, as well as the future. In the wake of the epistemological turn, time in modernity becomes a series of discrete moments, each of which has to be seized and experienced for its own sake. The present, that moment which is currently actual, becomes the only moment there is.<sup>183</sup> Yet, every moment is also inherently the same as the next.<sup>184</sup>

This, finally, brings us back to the question of the meaning of space and time. The only meaning allowed for space and time in modernity is the spatialisation that follows in the wake of the epistemological turn. From the perspective of the subjective genitive, in the construction "the meaning of space and time", space and time are regarded as inherently meaningless - neutral categories of thought relating the subject to experience, or otherwise as the disenchanting container of the universe. From the perspective of the objective genitive, the meaning of space and

---

<sup>182</sup> Timaeus par. 37. In: *Plato – Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 51.

<sup>183</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, p.170. See especially Ward's extrapolation to consumerism and the market.

<sup>184</sup> The features of space and time in modern social theory bear many resemblances to its counterparts in natural science, as discussed above. Modernity sees the rise of the nation state, which is in fact nothing but a space dominated by a homogenising, centralised power. The nation state is characterised by a flattening out: over against a population of contracting individuals lies the absolute power of the state. This stands in contrast to the so-called complex space of pre-modernity, populated by all kinds of social institutions (e.g. guilds and monastic orders), in which community is mediated.

The neutrality and indifference of time as a series of isomorphic moments become visible in the machine-like functioning of the modern state. The state becomes a self-perpetuating machine; its apparatus grinding on, with little regard for the comings and goings of people or generations. The conclusion has to be that in modern societies, space and time are characterised by a neutrality and indifference that awaits the imposition of meaning by the nation state as subject.

time in modernity is regarded solely in inferential terms: departing from its own experience, the epistemological subject infers or intimates the meaning of itself and the world. The movement of that inference is marked out in space and time.

Notwithstanding the fact that he situates the phenomenon of spatialisation within another narrative to that with which this chapter has ended, the phenomenon itself has been astutely analysed by Jacques Derrida. In the following chapter, Derrida's deconstruction of spatialisation will be analysed. Thereafter, the notions of space and time that emerge from this deconstruction will be examined.

## Chapter 3 Derrida: spacing and the infinite finitude of temporality

### 3.1 Introduction

Jacques Derrida's interrogation, as explored in the previous chapter, highlighted the spatialisation which, according to him, necessarily ensues whenever a structuralist impulse informs the study of history, culture, literature and language in general. Following Derrida, spatialisation may be described as a certain objectification and ordering of experience, whereby experience itself first and foremost becomes a field of objective knowledge, and thereafter is ordered according to some kind of unifying principle. Thus, experience is separated from, and somehow spread out before thought, as it were, two-dimensionally. On the other hand, thought itself, in representing this reality, becomes two-dimensional and spread out.

This chapter is devoted to Derrida's reading of the demise of spatialisation and the metaphysics of presence. This, of course, in itself constitutes a reading of Derrida's reading. It would therefore be prudent to make a few preliminary remarks about the different lines of Derrida interpretation, in order to position the present study in relation to existing scholarship.

In the introductory chapter to his 2003 book, entitled *Impossible God – Derrida's Theology*, Hugh Rayment-Pickard suggests that there are two basic approaches to the interpretation of Derrida's work: a cognitivist and a non-cognitivist approach.<sup>185</sup> To start with the latter, the non-cognitivist approach holds the view that Derrida's work cannot and should not be read as philosophy proper. This is the case because, on the one hand, Derrida's work has irrevocably problematised the philosophical project as such. It is not possible to do philosophy like before in the wake of deconstruction, and therefore, naturally, deconstruction itself should not be subject to the criteria that it itself criticised. The American philosopher, Richard Rorty, may be regarded as an exponent of such a non-cognitivist approach. In his view, Derrida's work consciously adopts a more literary and playful style, to such an extent that it

---

<sup>185</sup> Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God – Derrida's Theology* (London: Ashgate, 2003), p. 8ff. The following overview of Derrida's scholarship is indebted to Rayment-Pickard.

may even be asked whether Derrida really wants to communicate something and not rather simply rejoice in his own private language game. In Rorty's words:

"I take it that Derrida does not want to make a single move within the language game which distinguishes between fantasy and argument, philosophy and literature, serious writing and playful writing – the language game of *la grande époque*. He is not going to play by the rules of somebody else's final vocabulary."<sup>186</sup>

Another exponent of a non-cognitivist approach to Derrida, albeit in a completely different register, is the German Jürgen Habermas. In contrast to Rorty, Habermas evaluates such a literary approach, whereby Derrida "works on Husserl and Saussure no differently than on Artaud", very negatively. For Habermas, such an approach implies that the subject of knowledge be sacrificed. Henceforth, the analysis is directed at an anonymous occurring of language, an occurring "that releases worlds from within itself and swallows worlds back up."<sup>187</sup> Despite the cult-like status that Derrida's work achieved amongst his followers, the nett result of Derrida's writings, in Habermas' opinion, amounts to little more than some kind of mystification.<sup>188</sup>

In the opposing camp to the non-cognitivists is a grouping of Derrida scholars who, according to Rayment-Pickard, emphasise the thematic and structural coherence in Derrida's philosophy.<sup>189</sup> Eminent amongst this grouping are scholars such as Rudolphe Gasché and Christopher Norris.<sup>190</sup> Whereas the non-cognitivists readily point to the so-called literary texts produced by Derrida, chiefly in the 1970's (the "Genet column" in *Glas*, the "Envois" section of *The Post Card*, "Tympan" in *Margins of Philosophy*), the cognitivists argue that Derrida's earlier writings explicitly address

---

<sup>186</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (Cambridge: University Press, 1989), p. 133.

<sup>187</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell – Polity Press, 1992), pp. 206, 209.

<sup>188</sup> Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God*, p. 10.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11. This is the approach that Rayment-Pickard himself favours.

<sup>190</sup> See Rudolphe Gasché, *Inventions of Difference – On Jacques Derrida*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994) and Christopher Norris, "Deconstruction, Postmodernism and Philosophy", In D. Wood (ed.), *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

the major philosophical *topoi*, and that the theoretical arguments he proposed as early as the 1960's are developed and elaborated on throughout his career.

This study aligns itself with that approach to Derrida interpretation which takes the thematic and structural coherence in Derrida's work seriously. In other words, it is accepted that Derrida's position is broadly coherent and that it can be engaged in a philosophical and theological conversation, such as this study purports to be. Once this point of departure is accepted, the question arises as to whether or not certain periods in Derrida's career are to be distinguished. While such an endeavour may be undertaken, by pointing to the major influences at different times during Derrida's career (variously, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger and Levinas), this study nevertheless also accepts that no major *kehre* may be distinguished in Derrida's career. Having said this, this study acknowledges that Derrida's earlier writings, especially those published during his *annus mirabilis*, 1967, present an especially clear picture of Derrida's philosophical project. The focus will therefore be on a reading of Derrida's earlier writings.

After exploring Derrida's deconstruction of structuralism and Husserlian phenomenology, this chapter turns to the implications of deconstruction for space, time and meaning, before concluding with a review of what has been said in light of the hypothesis of a shared intimation of transcendence in immanence in the conversation with Derrida.

### **3.2 Deconstructing structuralism**

According to Derrida, the moment at which thought as language starts to think itself – that is, to objectify itself – has a special poignancy, as it is then that insight may be gained into spatialisation itself, as well as into the necessary process of its demise: “Does the fact that language can determine things only by spatializing them suffice to explain that, in return, language must spatialise itself as soon as it designates and reflects upon itself?”<sup>191</sup> Instead of using it as a heuristic instrument to intimate the

---

<sup>191</sup> *Writing and Difference*, p. 17, 18.



thrust of an utterance or event, structuralism makes structure itself into the object of theorising. Structure itself becomes what is studied. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, this, according to Derrida, is only possible at the cost of a certain weakening or absence of force.

One way of describing the meaning accorded to space and time during the epoch where spatialisation reigns, would be in terms of identity and difference. Space is viewed as that which opens up the identical - that which may be gathered around a single identifying and unifying principle. However, where spatialisation holds, *everything* is gathered under such a unifying principle: the totality is deemed to be graspable and radical difference is therefore excluded in principle. Time, on the other hand, in the form of an absolute past or an absolute future, is what opens up true difference. However, as that is excluded in principle, time is in a sense reduced to space - it is spatialised. Derrida describes this spatialised form of time in terms of the notion of simultaneity: "simultaneity is the myth of a total reading or description, promoted to the status of a regulatory ideal." He then goes on to remark as follows: "The search for the simultaneous explains the capacity to be fascinated by the spatial image: is space not the 'order of coexistences' (Leibniz)?"<sup>192</sup>

Thus, to the same extent that spatialisation may be viewed as violence against difference, it may be considered to be violence against time. It is the elevation of space above time or, conversely, the subjection of time to space. Of this spatialisation, structuralism is, according to Derrida, an eminent witness. Moreover, this witness may be interrogated in order to show the untenability of the hierarchy enforced by structuralism. To this interrogation we now turn. The following quotation will provide the point of departure:

"Structure then can be *methodically* threatened in order to be comprehended more clearly and to reveal not only its supports but also that secret place in which it is neither construction nor ruin but lability. This operation is called (from the Latin) *soliciting*. In other words, *shaking* in a way related to the

---

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

*whole* (from *sollus*, in archaic Latin ‘the whole,’ and from *citare*, ‘to put in motion’)<sup>193</sup>

The suggestion that structure should be methodically threatened in order to reach a state where it is neither structure nor ruin is important. It would be easy to assume that Derrida simply wants to bring all structuralist thought to ruin, whereas his aim is precisely to move beyond the opposition of structure and ruin. His aim is to arrive at a place of *lability*, the characteristics of which will be investigated shortly. The term “lability” is closely related to the well-known concept of “deconstruction,” widely used to describe Derrida’s intellectual labour. Deconstruction similarly wants to move beyond the simple opposition of, and subsequent choice between, construction and destruction. It wants to point to a process of construction, which always already bears the seeds of its own destruction within itself, the result of this destruction in its turn being a construct that already bears the seeds of its demise within itself.

It is therefore not simply a matter of turning the tables - that is, of elevating difference above identity, time above space. Derrida wishes to expound a thought of *contamination*: in all identity there is difference - every spatial constellation is also radically temporal. While this thought of the contamination of identity with difference is Derrida’s manifest purpose, it should nevertheless, at this point, be asked in a preliminary way whether the inevitable result of such a thought is not an approach that elevates difference above identity, and – within this grammar – time above space.

Derrida’s thought of contamination is articulated in many ways. Remaining with the image of contamination, it may firstly be said that all thought is contaminated by experience (or equally, that all experience is contaminated by thought). It is not possible to identify or locate two realms which are distinct from each other - on the one hand, the realm of uninterpreted experience, and on the other hand, the realm of thought or language. It is not possible to abstract subjective thought from what is taken to be objective experience, in order to identify an essence - a principle that unifies the experienced. Language is the reality and the index of this co-implication

---

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. p. 4, 5. See also *Of Grammatology*, p. 13, 14, 24.

of thought and experience. As will be discussed later, Derrida uses the concept of writing to explain such a functioning of language and culture in general.

With regard to structuralist thought in particular, the notion of contamination is brought to bear on the opposition between form and content. Once again, the form or structure of a cultural utterance can only be fixated at the expense of the living energy of meaning. Form becomes the object of thought at the price of a certain relaxation of force. According to Derrida, it is precisely this which is not tenable. Form is always irredeemably contaminated by content, where content has the character of a force - the energy of becoming. Whereas the structuralist impulse tends to fixate form, Derrida proposes a thought of form contaminated by duration, "that which is pure qualitative heterogeneity within movement."<sup>194</sup>

Structuralist thought may even try to neutralise the process of becoming itself by identifying objective forms within that process. This may be witnessed, for instance, in the proposal of universal laws of history. Such a view of history is, however, according to Derrida, a tamed and spatialised conception (or, precisely, a weak conception of history<sup>195</sup>). The time of becoming is, on the contrary, a time that is out of joint: there is a qualitative heterogeneity between the present and the past, or between the present and the future. In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida uses the image of haunting to explain the contamination of the present by an absolute past and an absolute future. The present can try as it may to abjure the ghosts of the past, but these ghosts always return to haunt it. They do this precisely as ghosts - that is, not fully present, but not absent either. The past and the future may not be tamed in the form of a present past and a present future. The past is always an absolute past that nevertheless contaminates the present in the manner of a haunting. The future is always an absolute future that nevertheless contaminates the present in the manner of a messianism without reserve.

---

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. p. 23, 24.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. *Of Grammatology*, p. 10: "History and knowledge, *istoria* and *epistémè* have always been determined ... as detours for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence." Cf. also *Writing and Difference*, pp. 367, 368. While this is Derrida's manifest point of departure, it should be borne in mind that Derrida's characterisation of the whole history of Western metaphysics as a history of presence is itself prone to an accusation of structuralist generalisation.

With regard to the notions of space and time, Derrida's deconstruction of structuralism proposes the notion of spacing as an alternative to the fixation of spatialisation. The infinitive, used as a noun, designates the contamination of space by time: every constellation of simultaneity necessarily slips away into a new, qualitatively heterogeneous constellation. Forcefully undermining "presence" through the concept of spacing, Derrida states that:

"Spacing (notice that this word speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming time of space and the becoming space of time) is always unperceived, the nonpresent, and the un-conscious."<sup>196</sup>

What will have to be investigated later is precisely this displacement towards becoming that is evidenced in Derrida's words, and the fact that, even though there is a reciprocity in terms of space becoming time and time becoming space, the emphasis on becoming favours a radical conception of temporality.

Apart from the opposition of form to content, the other great opposition advanced by structuralist thought is the opposition between signifier and signified. The genius of Ferdinand de Saussure was to have introduced a thought of difference into structuralism: "Signs are governed by a principle of general semiology: continuity in time is coupled to change in time..."<sup>197</sup> Accordingly, meaning is constituted by a network of signifiers as a whole, and precisely by the difference of one signifier to another in the network as a whole. According to Derrida, the breakthrough to a thought of difference did not go far enough, however, as the distinction between a material signifier and an immaterial, ideal signified still allowed for a binary opposition, whereby a structure of thought is placed, as it were, on top of a structure of experience.

"The reassuring evidence within which Western tradition had to organize itself and must continue to live would therefore be as follows: the order of the signified is never contemporary, is at best the subtly discrepant inverse or parallel – discrepant by the time of a breath – from the order of the signifier ...

---

<sup>196</sup> *Grammatology*, p. 68.

<sup>197</sup> As quoted by Derrida in *ibid.*, p. 53.

The formal essence of the signified is presence and the privilege of its proximity to the *logos* as *phonè* is the privilege of presence.”<sup>198</sup>

The last sentence in the above quotation is significant, as it hints at another hierarchical opposition that runs parallel to the opposition between signifier and signified. The thought of presence needs to safeguard the ideality of the signified, while still allowing for some kind of link to the world of experience. This is accomplished by making a qualitative distinction between two kinds of signifiers. By making the primary material signifier the vocal sound (due to its proximity to lived experience), a hierarchical system is introduced whereby the written signifier is relegated to a place of secondariness: it is regarded as a mere mnemonic aid.<sup>199</sup> The dismantling of this hierarchy will be discussed below.

In the same fashion as he argued with regard to the form-content opposition, Derrida now argues for the untenability of the signifier-signified opposition. The signifier and signified cannot be separated radically from each other - here also, it is a matter of contamination. The signifier and signified must be thought together. Under the tyranny of metaphysical presence, the signifier-signified distinction went hand in hand with an opposition between a privileged inside and a secondary, derived outside.<sup>200</sup> The inside is the realm of ethereal, immediate signification, whereas the outside is the material but non-necessary support of this meaning by way of representation. Undermining this opposition, Derrida heads a telling passage in *Of Grammatology* with the statement “The Outside is the Inside,” where he places the “is” “under erasure.”<sup>201</sup> What Derrida is trying to do in making use of the, according to him, “is”-language of metaphysics, is to express the inseparability of outside and inside. The materiality of a signifier expresses its meaning in its, as it were, horizontal movement towards another signifier. There is no separate, “vertical” reference to an immaterial signified. In Derrida’s words (once again referencing the opposition between speech and writing, to which we shall return):

---

<sup>198</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. p. 11, 12.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. ibid. p. 31-33.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. p. 44.

“Now we must think that writing is at the same time more exterior to speech, not being its ‘image’ or its ‘symbol,’ and more interior to speech, which is already in itself a writing. Even before it is linked to incision, engraving, drawing, or the letter, to a signifier referring in general to a signifier signified by it, the concept of the *graphie* [unit of a possible graphic system] implies the framework of the *instituted trace*, as the possibility common to all systems of signification.”

The concept of the trace, emerging as it does in this last quotation, is important. In undermining the, according to him, metaphysical logic of the opposition between signifier and signified, Derrida introduces a whole constellation of new concepts, notable amongst which is that of the trace. In its manifestation, the trace undermines the opposition between presence and absence, between materiality and ideality. Somewhat like the notion of haunting, the trace is neither here nor not here. It is neither the full presence of the thing itself, as it is a trace thereof, nor is it simple absence: there “is” precisely a trace. The trace is a material expression of a contamination of the present by an absolute past that is itself already being radically superseded by an ungraspable future:

“The trace, where the relationship with the other is marked, articulates its possibility in the entire field of the entity [*étant*], which metaphysics has defined as the being-present starting from the occulted movement of the trace. The trace must be thought before the entity. But the movement of the trace is necessarily occulted, it produces itself as self-occultation. When the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself.”<sup>202</sup>

According to the logic of the trace, nothing can be exhaustively defined, as it is always already becoming something else. In addition, the consciousness or subjective thought trying to define the thing is inextricably bound to the same becoming: it has no stable vantage point from which to attempt an objective

---

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. p. 47. Cf. also p. 62.

definition. The trace is a thought of alterity - it is the contamination of the same by the other in a completely immanent process.

We are now in a position to appreciate that other, very important concept in Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, namely the concept of writing. Writing has a sense much broader than the technical inscribing of letters on some kind of medium using some kind of writing instrument. In Derrida's work, writing becomes a name for an alternative mode of meaning inference to that prevalent in a metaphysics of presence. Many of the concepts already discussed (e.g. that of the trace, the sign, experience and meaning) feature prominently in Derrida's elaboration on what writing entails, as does writing in the explanation of those concepts. In listening to Derrida's thoughts on writing, we would therefore inevitably have to rehearse some ground covered already – also, precisely because Derrida's thought is one of contamination.

Structuralist linguistics, as represented by the thought of Ferdinand de Saussure, departs from a stated preference for phonic signs, as opposed to written signs. The phonic sign uttered by the human voice occupies a space of intimate proximity to lived experience. So close is the vocal signifier to lived experience, according to this approach, that one may be justified in presuming that what is grasped in such a sign is nothing less than the truth. Of course, in attempting to frame the vocal signifier as an absolute representation of lived experience, structuralism reveals its phenomenological lineage. This will be discussed in the next section.

Within a logic dominated by the phonetic preference, the written signifier is deemed to be of much lower value. Writing functions as a mere technical support for the vocal sign. Whereas there is an almost (but not quite, as Derrida would say) negligible distance between the vocal signifier and what is signified, the written signifier is an inferior representation of what is signified, first and foremost, by the voice. According to Derrida, however, this hierarchy that exists between the vocal and the written signifier is untenable. In fact, upon close scrutiny, it becomes apparent that there is another, more original logic, according to which writing takes priority. This logic is the logic of the trace, which was elaborated on above. According to this logic, lived experience and signified meaning do not represent each

other in a binary (vertical, simultaneous) sign, but all meaning is instead (horizontally, diachronically) contaminated by experience. The materiality of the signifier cannot be sublimated, but rather, its constitutive role should be recognised and even celebrated. Within this context, the meaning of the trace is worth quoting again:

“Without a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the pure movement which produces difference. The (pure) trace is difference. It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such plenitude. Although it does not exist, although it is never a being-present outside of all plenitude, its possibility is by rights anterior to all that one calls sign (signified/signifier, content/expression, etc.)...”<sup>203</sup>

What Derrida proposes with his concept of writing is therefore not merely somehow the elevation of the technical operation of writing above speech, but a form of meaning intimation that comprises vocal, as well as written, signification in a movement of contamination: form contaminated by content, meaning contaminated by experience, the present contaminated by the past. The way in which this inscription occurs is called writing. Writing understood thus is *de jure* anterior to all imposed binary oppositions.

The deconstruction of phonocentric linguistics into writing can once again be brought to bear on the notions of space and time. The age of the *phonè*, which is the age of the *logos*, which is the age of metaphysics in general, is dominated by the present. Starting from the present, the past and the future are delimited as present-past and present-future - they are understood in terms of the present.<sup>204</sup> Concomitantly, the movement from past to present to future is deemed a linear movement. In a similar

---

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. p. 62.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. p. 67.



vein, departing from the present as the here, space is seen as being spread out around and before the present as a point of reference.

Within the logic of writing and of the trace, however, space and time assume a different character. If the articulation - the inscription that is the trace - is understood to be the experience of space and time, it is also what allows the difference between space and time to appear as such in the unity of that experience.<sup>205</sup> Whereas the spatial is the corporal, the tactile, the temporal is the metamorphosis of this into something new, something different. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that, as a contamination, the two can never be separated. If the trace is the articulation of space and time, it is also the articulation of difference. This is, as already mentioned, evidenced in Derrida's use of the term spacing.

Two characteristics of Derridean time emerge in the course of this discussion. The first is the fundamental passivity of time. Time cannot be actively gathered in a present moment. The point of departure for thinking time is rather the absolute past: the trace arrives from an ungraspable past on its way to something ungraspably different. This characteristic of time will be discussed again in the context of the discussion regarding Husserlian phenomenology. The second characteristic of Derridean time is its nonlinearity. In what will be discussed again below, when the influence of Heidegger's critique of the "vulgar concept of time" is analysed, Derrida describes the age of metaphysics as an age when a linear concept of time resulted in the linearisation of writing.<sup>206</sup> Dogmatically linear writing may be taken to be yet another symptom of the ordering of writing according to presence. However, from within a writing informed by the logic of the trace - that is a writing inscribing time as absolute passivity - the necessity for linear writing breaks down. What emerges out of the breakdown of linear writing is a "pluri-dimensional symbolic thought."<sup>207</sup> Of this pluri-dimensional thought, Derrida says the following:

The access to pluri-dimensionality and to a delinearized temporality is not a simple regression toward the 'mythogram;' on the contrary, it makes all the

---

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. p. 85.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. p. 86.

rationality subjected to the linear model appear as another form and another age of mythography. The meta-rationality or the meta-scientificity which are thus announced within the meditation upon writing can therefore be no more shut up within a science of man than conform to the traditional idea of science. In one and the same gesture, they leave *man*, *science*, and the *line* behind.”<sup>208</sup>

What emerges here may be described, using Deleuze’s image, as a rhizomatic rationality - a rationality that grows simultaneously in different directions. With respect to the remark in the quotation that this kind of rationality is not a simple regression to the “mythogram,” reference may be made to what Derrida has to say about the reasoning associated with *khora*. Commenting on Plato’s *Timaeus*, Derrida states that “*khora* ... does not proceed from the natural or legitimate logos, but rather from a hybrid, bastard or even corrupted reasoning.”<sup>209</sup> This reasoning is neither simply logos nor simply mythos - it is the reasoning of logos contaminated by mythos. Derrida’s difficult and opaque style of writing tries to exemplify this irrevocable contamination of *clare et distincte* logical thought that he proposes. This may be witnessed in essays such as “The Double session” published in *Dissemination*<sup>210</sup>, “Tympan” published in *Margins of Philosophy*<sup>211</sup>, and books like *Chora L Works*<sup>212</sup> and *Glas*.<sup>213</sup>

To conclude this section on Derrida’s deconstruction of structuralism, reference to two more related notions should be made, namely that of supplementarity and of play. The notion of the supplement emerges out of Derrida’s critique of the metaphysical assumption that it is possible to cover the totality of experience in a structure of thought. In the course of a discussion of the implications of Claude Levi-Strauss’ work, Derrida states that it is not so much a matter of the infiniteness of a field not being able to be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse – as if at

---

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. p. 87.

<sup>209</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, translated by David Wood (Stanford: University Press, 1995), p. 90.

<sup>210</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, (London: Continuum, 1981), pp. 185 – 316.

<sup>211</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University Press, 1982), pp. ix – xxix.

<sup>212</sup> Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman, *Chora L Works*, ed. Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1997).

<sup>213</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

some time in the future, due to technical inventions, this may become possible. Rather, the nature of the field – that is language – excludes totalisation.<sup>214</sup> Totalisation is excluded in principle due to the operation of the trace, whereby language is *de jure*, first and foremost, to be cast as writing.

Under the spell of a metaphysics of presence, that which is signified by a signifier may be thought to be exhaustively catalogue-able. However, due to its being haunted by an absolute past, the signifier comprises an overabundance that can never be exhaustively linked to a discreet signification. There is always a supplement of meaning that escapes being totalised under only one signification. Inversely, a specific signified meaning always seems to lack all the nuances necessary to cover all the ramifications that spread out from a signifier. This lack always needs to be supplemented. In a translator's note to the essay entitled "Structure, sign and play," Alan Bass mentions that this double sense of supplement – to supply something missing, or to supply something additional – is at the centre of Derrida's deconstruction of traditional linguistics.<sup>215</sup>

The movement of supplementarity is also the movement of play. If a structure cannot and should not be gathered around a distinct centre of presence, then the spontaneity and movement of a game become available. There may be many different ways of supplementing a given situation, and they cannot be decided upon simply by following some pre-established rules. The supplementations only open up in the play itself. The only truth is the truth of the play - the only faithfulness the faithfulness to the game. Furthermore, the notion of play may be more congenial to the restless energy of becoming that informs history. As will have become clear by now, in sounding such a note, Derrida consciously aligns himself with the tone and style of Nietzsche<sup>216</sup>: "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation."<sup>217</sup> Thus, the play of Nietzschean interpretation is opposed to the nostalgic interpretation represented by

---

<sup>214</sup> *Writing and Difference*, p. 365.

<sup>215</sup> *Writing and Difference*, p. 443. Note 12.

<sup>216</sup> For an appreciative appraisal of the Nietzschean line within Derrida, see John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>217</sup> *Writing and Difference*, p. 369.

Rousseau and also, finally, by Levi-Strauss. The nostalgic interpretation longs for a truth given, as it were, from the outside - the other celebrates the immanent truth of the interminable play of signifiers as such.

### **3.3 Deconstructing phenomenology**

Apart from the fact that both structuralism and Husserlian phenomenology are twentieth century expressions of spatialisation after the “turn to language”, they also, according to Derrida, share a genetic bond, in that structuralism has grown and developed within a more or less avowed dependence on phenomenology.<sup>218</sup> As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the notion of structure is very much part of the phenomenological project. However, in phenomenology, it is the structure of the intentional acts of transcendental consciousness that is analysed. On the other hand, it is evident that some form of theoretical cogito is always at work in the structuralist analysis of language, history or culture.

In light of the similarities between the structuralist and phenomenological projects, it is hardly surprising that Derrida’s critique of both follows the same strategy. In both cases, it is a matter of pointing towards the movement, the restless energy that inhabits the spatialised structures and that cannot be suppressed, even though that is precisely what the metaphysics of presence intends. Having cursorily noted the similarities between Derrida’s handling of structuralism and phenomenology, it should nevertheless be noted that the analysis of the Husserlian text informs Derrida’s work at a much deeper level than that of structuralism. This is so because Husserl is actually grappling with the very issues that animate Derrida’s thought – notions of, for instance, spatiality and temporality - and Husserl develops a vocabulary to deal with these issues. While keeping the living present at the centre of his philosophy, and thereby executing a classically metaphysical move, according to Derrida, Husserl is continuously struggling with temporality and with the movement of becoming. In doing so, he sets the scene for a subversion to be performed using his own vocabulary. This is what Derrida accomplishes. Here, it must once again be emphasised that it is not so much a matter of turning the tables

---

<sup>218</sup> *Writing and Difference*, p. 32.

on Husserl, that is, of merely emphasising temporality above structure (because Husserl is, in a sense, thinking about temporality all the time), as it is of turning Husserl's thought into a thought of contamination and of haunting.

The dialogue with Husserl may be traced back at least as far as Derrida's remarkable Master's thesis, entitled: *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*, which was written in 1953-4 while Derrida was still a student at the Ecole Normale. The problem of genesis, as broached in that study, is remarkable in that it presents a tension between the notions of origin and of becoming, both of which are present in the concept of genesis itself. On the one hand, there is the implication of an absolute coming into being of something that did not exist before. On the other hand, genesis also implies being produced or engendered by something other than the self. On the one hand, an absolute origin, not reducible to anything that precedes it. On the other hand nonetheless an implication of an effective past. The tension inherent in the concept of genesis may be re-described as the question regarding the relationship of time to truth. How is one to think the autonomy of sense and truth *and* their birth in time? How is one to think both the radicalness of sense and the radicalness of becoming?<sup>219</sup> Within the scheme of transcendental intentionality, sense originates in the encounter with the transcendental object as it presents itself. On the other hand, transcendental subjectivity cannot function outside of time, and therefore has to deal with becoming. According to Derrida, this problem, emblematically presented as the problem of genesis, haunts Husserl's work at every stage until it finally takes the form of the question of transcendental historicity.<sup>220</sup>

Paola Marrati argues convincingly that the logic that Derrida develops in this early reading of Husserl is the same logic, although elaborated, that informs his later readings of Husserl. The same logic is operative later on when Derrida deals with the great exponents of the metaphysical tradition, but also in his interaction with, for instance, Heidegger and Levinas. This is the case even though Derrida later drops

---

<sup>219</sup> Paola Marrati, *Genesis and Trace – Derrida reading Husserl and Heidegger* (Stanford: University Press, 2005), p. 3.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

the explicitly philosophical terms used in his early analysis in favour of his own terms, such as writing, the trace and *différance*.<sup>221</sup>

Derrida's subversion of the Husserlian scheme may be followed beginning with phenomenology's principle of principles, *zur Sache selbst*, which insists that a philosophy worthy of the designation "science" must allow the truth of the world itself to shine forth. The shining forth of the truth of the world involves a movement of exteriorisation into objective language by way of a passing through human consciousness. But how is this exteriorisation to be conceived in a rigorous and scientific manner? The analysis of this process is, in a sense, the aspiration of the phenomenological project. A key strategy in Husserl's project of conceptualising the phenomenological process is to identify different strata or levels of meaning along the passage of truth from the things outward into objective language. The stratum which, functionally speaking, bears the biggest burden, could be termed the expressive level. This level is intermediate, coming between the pre-expressive level of logical meaning and the indicative level of signification, where material signifiers and intersubjective communication come into play. While, functionally speaking, accomplishing most of the work for Husserl, the expressive stratum of meaning is also the most problematic. Derrida's reading of Husserl shows that the absolute distinction, yet interrelation between the different levels, which Husserl attempts to establish, is untenable. On the one hand, there is a contamination between the pre-expressive and expressive levels of the intimation of meaning. On the other hand, there is also a contamination between the expressive level of meaning and the corporal, inscribed, exterior level of indication. Let us now examine Derrida's exposition of both these contaminations, which to a large extent comprise his deconstruction of phenomenology.

In the essay entitled "Form and Meaning: a note on the phenomenology of language"<sup>222</sup>, Derrida takes issue with a certain stratification that runs through the

---

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18. Martin Hägglund also convincingly argues that, pace a whole stream of Derrida interpretation, he did not undergo a religious turn in his later work. The same thought of contamination is later elaborated on using religious terms, but this does nothing to compromise the radical atheism that underlies Derrida's thought. The view of a consistency in Derrida's work from his early writings until later is also what I ascribe to in this study (cf. Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism – Derrida and the Time of Life*) (Stanford: University Press, 2008).

*Logische Untersuchungen*, and which Husserl nowhere repudiates, even in *Ideen I*. The stratification at stake here concerns the rigorous distinction between experience and expression. Derrida remarks that a huge portion of Husserl's analysis of experience "occurs as if transcendental experience were silent, inhabited by no language; or rather deserted by expressivity as such, since, starting with the *Investigations*, Husserl in effect determined the essence or *telos* of language as expression (*Ausdruck*.)"<sup>223</sup> The purpose of language, in other words, is to faithfully express the true meaning of experience, yet language and experience must be rigorously separated in order to safeguard the objectivity of experience. After exploring the fundamental structures of all experience, Husserl thus introduces language as expression and as a delimited stratum, independent from pre-expressive experience as such. But how are these strata to be conceived as separate and yet in contact, in order to facilitate the exteriorisation of meaning? In Derrida's analysis, this double feat is attempted by Husserl along the lines of a double reduction. On the one hand, the pre-expressive stratum of experience – where it all starts, as it were – is reduced to logical meaning, or "sense." On the other hand, the expressive stratum of language is reduced to a logical conceptuality stripped of any sensory or material embodiment. "Since, according to Husserl, expression supposes an intention of meaning (*Bedeutungsintention*), its essential condition is therefore the pure act of animating intention, and not the body to which, in some mysterious fashion, intention unites itself and gives life."<sup>224</sup> This second reduction is the distinction between the expressive and indicative strata of language, which will be returned to later. The relationship of the pre-expressive to the expressive stratum may be summed up as the relationship of *Sinn* to *Bedeutung*. *Sinn* (sense) indicates the totality of the noematic face of experience, while the pair *Bedeuten-Bedeutung* is reserved for the order of expressive meaning (*vouloir dire*).

Husserl envisages the transfer of meaning from the pre-expressive to the expressive stratum as, alternatively, a kind of mirror writing and a kind of imprinting.<sup>225</sup>

---

<sup>222</sup> Originally published in the *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 1967/3, no. 81, an English translation by David B. Allison appeared in 1973 in *Speech and Phenomena*. A new translation by Alan Bass appeared in 1982 in *Margins of Philosophy*. The following references are all to the 1982 edition in *Margins of Philosophy*.

<sup>223</sup> *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 158.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.* p. 161.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.* p. 161-165.

Expression merely mirrors the sense carried in the experience - it is completely neutral and adds nothing to that sense. In Derrida's words:

“[T]he transition to being stated adds nothing to sense, or in any event adds no content of sense; and yet, despite this sterility, or rather, because of it, the appearance of expression is radically new. Because it only reissues the noematic sense, in a certain way, expression is rigorously novel. To the extent that it neither adds nor in any way deforms, expression can always in principle repeat sense, by providing access to ‘conceptual form’: ‘If we have *‘thought’* or *‘stated’* ‘This is white,’ a new stratum is there with the rest, and unites with the ‘meant as such’ in its pure perceptive form.”<sup>226</sup>

The other metaphor that Husserl uses to explain the transfer of sense from the pre-expressive to the expressive stratum is that of the imprint. The expressive stratum is like some kind of *tabula rasa* that receives an imprint of noematic sense from experience. In the expressive stratum, noematic sense is received in the form of a concept. While expression adds no new sense to sense (being in that sense passive), it does add conceptual form (and is in that sense active):

“The expressive noema must offer itself, and this is the new image of its unproductivity, as a blank page or virgin tablet; or at least as a palimpsest given over to its pure receptivity. Once the inscription of the sense in it renders it legible, the logical order of conceptuality will be constituted as such. It then will offer itself *begrifflich*, in graspable, manipulable, conceivable, conceptual fashion.”<sup>227</sup>

Even though radically distinct, the two strata – that of transcendental objectivity (experience) and that of transcendental subjectivity (expression) - are attuned to each other, in that logical meaning is what is delivered and received. The noematic face of experience and the conceptual expression thereof are attuned to each other in the Husserlian preference for logical, theoretical meaning. According to Derrida, a

---

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. p. 163,164. Italics originally part of Derrida's quotation of Husserl. The quotation is from the *Logical Investigations*.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. p. 164.



circularity in the Husserlian system can be detected at this point. While the most basic premise of phenomenology is to start with the things themselves, the questioning of the things happens in such a way that a certain outcome is presupposed: the outcome of logical conceptuality. The language of logical conceptuality is the “is”-language of metaphysics. While ostensibly being critical of metaphysics, and trying to develop a critical philosophy, the circularity arranged around the “is” places Husserl, according to Derrida, very much in the forefront of a venerable metaphysical tradition.

What remains is for Derrida to point to the untenable problems accompanying Husserl’s radical separation of sense and meaning or, in other words, the pre-expressive and expressive strata of meaning. The first problem Derrida raises is that of the historical nature of concepts. In order for it to be used to express a certain sense, a concept must be available. This implies that the concept must already have existed and must therefore have its own history of use and development. A concept is not created by the imprint of experiential sense - it already exists. However, if this is the case, how can Husserl maintain the absolute priority of experience issuing, as it were, from the things themselves? Does the historical character of concepts not imply a constitutive role for expression and language in general? While Husserl seems to evade the question by emphasising the juridical anteriority of sense in relation to meaning, he never addresses the problem as such.<sup>228</sup>

A second problematic area pertains to the relationship of the logical to the pictorial in Husserl’s scheme of the transfer of sense. While it is logical sense – the noematic – that is transferred in order to be expressed, Husserl notably uses the metaphor of the *Bild* to explain this. On the one hand, there is the metaphor of *abbilden*, or mirroring, in order to emphasise that expression adds nothing to sense – it merely mirrors. On the other hand, there is the metaphor of *einbilden*, or imagination, used to indicate the formative activity whereby sense is expressed as a concept. “Here one could speak, in a sense, of a conceptual *fiction* and of a kind of *imagination* that picked up the intuition of sense in the generality of the concept.”<sup>229</sup> Husserl attributes the apparent contradiction between *abbilden* and *einbilden* to the

---

<sup>228</sup> Ibid. p. 165.  
<sup>229</sup> Ibid. p. 166.

accidental metaphoricity of language, and wants to separate this from the logical import that everything is about. The implication that Derrida, however, seems to draw, is the following: the fact that Husserl cannot but use pictorial language in his depiction of the transfer of sense indicates that sense is more than logical sense. Logic is contaminated by image and narrative and history.

A third objection that Derrida raises to the absolute separation of experience and expression concerns the limiting power of form. According to Husserl, experiential sense is expressed in the generality of a concept. This renders it manipulable and express-able. But does a general concept cover the full import of sense? What guarantees a hundred percent coverage of the sense by the concept? According to Derrida, Husserl himself acknowledges that the concept cannot *and should not* completely cover the import of sense. “This impoverishment is the condition for scientific formalization. Unequivocality is furthered in the extent to which the complete repetition of sense in meaning is given up.”<sup>230</sup> The scientific demand internal to the phenomenological system thus apparently leads to the necessity of supplementation. Meaning always overflows the concept. The concept always needs to be supplemented in order to supply for a lack in the coverage of meaning. This formulation hints back to what has been stated before under the analysis of Derrida’s deconstruction of structuralism. Meaning is a force which a metaphysics of presence tries to tame through the concept – an endeavour that never succeeds.

The conclusion that Derrida makes is that *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, experience and expression, experience and language, can never be totally separated. Each is constitutively contaminated by the other. Husserl grappled with this problem all along. He realised the need for a supplementation of the geological metaphor of the stratum by a textile (or textual, as Derrida would say) metaphor.<sup>231</sup> Like a cloth consists of a warp and a woof, so experience and language are woven together. While Husserl tried to disentangle experience and language, Derrida maintains that they are inextricably linked: experience is textual.

---

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. p. 68.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. p. 160.

With this, we have come to the second pair of strata, which Husserl tried in vain to keep apart: the distinction between an inner and an outer stratum of language. The distinction between expression (*Ausdruck*) and indication (*Anzeigen*) as radically distinct modes of language has already been discussed in the previous chapter, and mentioned in the overview at the beginning of this section. The distinction has to do with the functioning of signs in the transfer of meaning, and ultimately truth, within the phenomenological system. On the one hand, there is the general functioning of signs in language: a signifier stands in the stead of something else that is not immediately present, but which is re-presented (signified) by the signifier. This function Husserl designates with the general term 'indication'. In Husserl's own words:

“In these we discover as a common circumstance the fact that certain objects or states of affairs of whose reality (*Bestand*) someone has actual knowledge indicate (*anzeigen*) to him the reality of certain other objects or states of affairs, in the sense that his belief in the being (*Sein*) of the one is experienced (though not at all evidently) as motivating a belief or surmise in the being of the other.”<sup>232</sup>

The indicative sign functions, as it were, “outside” in the real, empirical world. As such, it forms the backbone of intersubjective communication, and also of inscription. The problem with the indicative sign is that it cannot be the bearer of certain truth. There is no certainty that the absent signified (be it a thing or a state of affairs) is really completely congruent with what the signifier indicates. There may be an error or a deception. Indication in general is therefore not suitable to bear the burden of bringing the things in themselves to light. This being so, Husserl now introduces a special, distinct stratum of linguistic functioning called expression (*Ausdruck*.) The defining characteristic of expression is that it does not suffer from absence in the way that indication does. Expression stems from immediate contact with the *lebendige Gegenwart*, the living presence, of the thing itself as it is given in transcendental consciousness. In view of the fact that expression arises from immediate experience of the thing itself, expression is not really a mode of

---

<sup>232</sup> From the *First Investigation*, as quoted by Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 28.

signification. Expression may even be explained as the absence of signification, or as non-signification.<sup>233</sup>

The living present is of special importance in Husserl's description of the way in which the truth of a thing can pass to consciousness and language. Within the intentional act of transcendental consciousness, the transcendental object is immediately present to the intuition of the transcendental subject, and the fullness of meaning is immediately given. One could also describe the fullness of meaning present in the *lebendige Gegenwart* as ideal meaning. The ideality of the fullness of meaning in the living present implies that it is infinitely repeatable. Because ideal, it can be expressed without loss. Only when ideal meaning ventures out into the real world does it become subject to the drag of signification and interpretation, with concomitant erosion of the ideal meaning content. If expression is to be seen as the absence of signification due to absolute proximity to lived experience, this, however, also implies that the transcendental subject expressing the meaning should be fully present to *itself*. Husserl describes the absolute proximity of the transcendental subject to itself as pure auto-affection. These notions of a living present and of pure auto-affection, together with the conceptions of space and time that they entail, are exactly what Derrida finds extremely problematic. Here he ventures to show that the notions of space and time that Husserl utilises, if pursued rigorously enough, eventually lead to a collapse of the strata that Husserl so meticulously tried to separate. Finally, it leads to a collapse of the absolute separation of space and time implied in the metaphysics of phenomenology.

The presence at stake here is the spatialised presence of the instant. Outer, material space is completely reduced (only to open up again afterwards in the unified, homogenised space of meaning.) Time is, however, also reduced - it is reduced to the instant. Time becomes the "now" of absolute proximity to self. "Self-presence must be produced in the undivided unity of a temporal present so as to have nothing to reveal to itself by the agency of signs."<sup>234</sup> This undivided unity of a temporal present has the character of a point, of the now as *stigmē*. This "now" also becomes the source point for pure auto-affection, that is, for absolute proximity to

---

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. p. 60.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

self.<sup>235</sup> Let us look, with Derrida, first at the notion of the now as a singular point, and thereafter at the tenability of the notion of the self as completely self-identical.

According to Derrida, it becomes clear, upon studying Husserl's *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, that Husserl realised no "now" can be isolated as a pure instant – a pure punctuality – but that there is necessarily something of an extension in the instant.<sup>236</sup> This extension is nonetheless envisaged on the basis of the self-identity of the now as point, or, as Husserl indicated, as source-point. The sense, the ideal essence, of a transcendental object has a beginning and remains stable in its movement along the flow of time - a form that persists through continuous change of matter. Husserl describes this stability in terms of a "now," even though he concedes that this now consists of a number of "retentions" and "protentions", together with the actual present. The flow of time demands that, for something to be experienced as present in transcendental consciousness, a retention of that thing from the previous instant should be held together with the present instant, as well as with an expectation of the next instant. Otherwise, an experience of presence would be impossible. Husserl argued that retentions and protentions should be seen as part of the extended now, and rigorously distinguished them from re-presentation. Re-presentation implies absence and the use of signs, and therefore loss of certainty and truth if that representation itself cannot be founded on expression of the immediately present. For the living present to be a present without any absence, the retentions and protentions that exist in the "now" must be regarded as utterly different from representations. However, Derrida notes, this is precisely not the case! Try as he may, Husserl is not able to radically distinguish between retention and repetition. Even though it happens in transcendental consciousness, the very act of comparing a retentional trace to the present instant implies the presence of the non-identical in the identical. Absence is present in the present moment. In Derrida's own words:

"As soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the not-now, perception and nonperception, in the zone of primordially common to primordial impression and primordial retention, we admit the other into the self-identity of

---

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. p. 53.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

the *Augenblick*; nonpresence and nonevidence are admitted into *the blink of the instant* ... This alterity is in fact the condition for presence, presentation, and thus for *Vorstellung* in general...<sup>237</sup>

The point is that while phenomenology tries to exclude absence and alterity in order to safeguard presence, absence and alterity are in fact necessary for the presencing of the presence. Only in relation to the irreducible non-presence of another now does the presence of the primordial impression appear. The present is always contaminated by an absolute past. Indication is always already present.

This contamination is true of the transcendental subject as well: it always already bears its non-self in itself. At this point, it should be recalled that the radical separation of expression from indication goes hand in hand with a separation of the inside from the outside. While the outside of transcendental consciousness involves the world of extension in space (the material world), the inside is the mental world of pure auto-affection. Meaning does not have to traverse space, as it happens in the instant of the immediate presence of transcendental subjectivity to the transcendental object. This meaning is completely disembodied. It is the ideal essence that only later becomes embodied in the further exteriorisation into physical sound and written inscription. Here, we once again come across the qualitative separation of speech and writing, which was discussed in the previous section.

According to Husserl, the pure auto-affection of the transcendental subject in the experience of the living presence is the experience of a mental voice. It is the mental experience of hearing oneself speak at the same time that one is speaking:

“The signifier, animated by my breath and by the meaning-intention (in Husserl’s language, the expression animated by the *Bedeutungsintention*), is in absolute proximity to me. The living act, the life giving act ... which animates the body of the signifier and transforms it into a meaningful expression, the soul of language, seems not to separate itself from itself, from

---

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. p. 65. See also the discussion in Marrati, *Genesis and Trace*, p. 69 ff.

its own self-presence. It does not risk death in the body of a signifier that is given over to the world and the visibility of space."<sup>238</sup>

Thus, we have a constellation according to which space, embodiment and writing are radically separated from the temporal instant, from *lebendichkeit* as, in a sense, pure mental meaning, and from the voice, which is the expression of this consciousness. In opposition to this constellation, Derrida simply points to the fact that the flow of time itself undermines such a radical separation. Even though I may allege an absolute proximity between my consciousness and my voice, I nevertheless, in my pure auto-affection, have to compare myself with myself from moment to moment. And this introduces a moment of pure difference into my pure self-identity.

Therefore, the phenomenological project, at least as it is dogmatically organised around a metaphysics of presence, collapses on itself if its own premises are pursued diligently enough. As Husserl conceived it, the things shine forth by having their sense intuited in transcendental consciousness, and then expressed as logical concepts without any loss of meaning. However, sense is temporal in nature, and as such is always already engaged in the movement of the trace, that is, in the order of signification.<sup>239</sup> Expression and indication, sense and its inscription are always irrevocably co-implicated, that is, contaminated. Derrida succinctly expresses this logic of contamination in terms of the notions of space and time:

“Since the trace is the intimate relation of the living present with its outside, the openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is not ‘one’s own,’ etc., the temporalization of sense is, from the outset, a ‘spacing.’ As soon as we admit spacing both as ‘interval’ or difference and as openness upon the outside, there can no longer be any absolute inside, for the ‘outside’ has insinuated itself into the movement by which the inside of the nonspatial, which is called ‘time,’ appears, is constituted, is ‘presented.’ Space is ‘in’ time; it is time’s pure leaving-itself; it is the ‘outside itself’ as the self relation of time.”<sup>240</sup>

---

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. p. 75,76.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. p. 85.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. p. 86.

The becoming space of time, which in its turn again is temporalised as space-ing, is what Derrida holds writing to be. It is also intimately linked with the neologism *différance*, to which we now turn.

### 3.4 **Différance: the becoming space of time and the becoming time of space**

When pronounced, the word “différance” is completely indistinguishable from the conventional French “différence,” and this, Derrida comments, is in itself significant, since it once again points to the logic of contamination at work. What we find here is a thought not singularly proper to either the region of sensibility or the region of intelligibility. The difference that the “a” in *différance* makes is not sensible to the ear, yet, upon inscription (sensible to the eye), additional senses emerge. Conversely, *différance* is not completely different from *différence*, but the insertion of the “a” introduces something new. The word thus demarcates a region where sensibility and intelligibility are intermingled.<sup>241</sup>

The operation of a logic of contamination is deepened by observing that “différance” cannot be *presented* as such. To define *différance* by means of the “is”-language of the metaphysics of presence would simply re-confine it within the most traditional terms of the opposition between presence and absence. With this in mind, Derrida stresses that *différance* is neither a word nor a concept. It has neither an essence, nor an existence. It also does not have a beginning, as it has always already been at work.<sup>242</sup> The best one can do then is to describe what happens, and saying this may also be the best description of *différance*: it is what happens - it is an operation within language, where the latter is taken in the broadest possible sense.

In an often quoted explanation, Derrida starts with a semantic analysis of the French infinitive “différer”, in order to bring the dynamics of *différance* into play. Deriving from the Latin verb *differre*, the French word ‘différer’ has two lexical meanings,

---

<sup>241</sup> *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 4.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5, 6.



which at first seem quite distinct.<sup>243</sup> On the one hand, there is the sense of a “putting off until later, of taking into account, of taking account of time and of the forces of an operation that implies an economical calculation, a detour, a delay, a relay, a reserve...”<sup>244</sup>. Derrida links this sense specifically to a temporisation. *Différer*, in this sense, implies the recourse – consciously or unconsciously – to a temporal mediation. Time is taken, time is used up, and the attainment of a goal or fulfilment of a desire is suspended over time.

On the other hand, the word ‘différer’ has the meaning of not being identical - something is different from something else in the sense of being other and discernible. With regard to this sense, Derrida remarks that “whether it is a question of dissimilar otherness or of allergic and polemical otherness, an interval, a distance, *spacing*, must be produced between the elements other, and be produced with a certain perseverance in repetition.”<sup>245</sup>

Now, according to Derrida, whereas the conventional French word ‘différence’ cannot convey the range of meanings implicit in the word ‘différer’, the neologism *différance* is able to do just that. *Différance* can hold together – and precisely in contamination – the sense of temporal deferral and of spatial differing. This, together with the fact that it “is” an operation rather than a substance, is its gain. How does the operational working of *différance* tie in with the temporisation and spacing implied in the thought? In Derrida’s words:

“In a conceptuality adhering to classical strictures “*différance*” would be said to designate a constitutive, productive and originary causality, the process of scission and division which would produce or constitute different things or differences.”

This would be another way of saying that *différance* hints at the becoming space of time through inscription as markings, or rather as traces, while equally constituting the becoming time of space, as these inscribed traces are in turn deconstructed.

---

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

The happening of the production of differences or articulations is neither strictly active nor strictly passive. It is not active, in that *différance* is not the subject that produces language, but it is also not passive, in that it is not produced by language either. According to Derrida, the operation of *différance* recalls something like the middle voice, which has a certain non-transitivity and resistance to fixation into categories of active and passive, agent and patient, as its characteristics.<sup>246</sup>

This section may be concluded by attempting to list, as succinctly as possible, the characteristics of the notions of Derridean space and time as they have emerged in the conversation thus far. In this regard, it should by now be clear that the narrower context of Derrida's work is transcendental philosophy, specifically in the re-energised, linguistically orientated guise it received in the work of Edmund Husserl. Derrida, as it were, inhabits the language of phenomenology and structuralism which, according to him, is inherently unstable due to a metaphysical prejudice. By showing the undecideability existing between the binary oppositions that make up this approach and that have to keep it in balance, Derrida effects a deconstruction whereby a new logic emerges out of the old vocabulary. The operation of the new logic affects the notions of space and time dramatically.

Phenomenology's pursuit of a foundation for certainty in transcendental consciousness leads it to a reduction of empirical space. Materiality and exteriority, outside of their appearance in the intentional act of transcendental consciousness, have to be placed between brackets. While space is thus reduced, it has been argued in this study that it paradoxically returns as spatialisation – the casting of a net over all of experience and history, in order to unify it as a totality.

Husserl is, however, unable to dispatch with time and temporality as easily. Derrida points out that they are what he grapples with all the time. In his conceptualisation of time (and space), Husserl builds on the work of Kant. In his treatment of time in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant effects a "double move."<sup>247</sup> On the one hand, Kant asserts that time is empirically real: no object can be given in experience that is not

---

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>247</sup> Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, p. 20. The following discussion of space and time in Kant's transcendental philosophy is indebted to Hägglund's exposition.

subject to the condition of time. Time is thus a condition for appearance in general, a pure form of sensibility without which there could be no experience to begin with. On the other hand, Kant holds that time is transcendently ideal: it may only be regarded to be a *subjective* condition for the intuition of sensible things. Time does not apply to things in themselves, but is only a condition of possibility for the appearance of things in finite experience.<sup>248</sup> This being his position, Kant now has to deal with the problem of the relationship between succession and synthesis. Time is a succession, but also a division of moments into discreet instances of past, present and future. There can, however, be no experience of time if the different moments were not related to one another. A synthesis of successive moments is thus necessary for the awareness of any temporal extension.<sup>249</sup> Kant's answer to this challenge is to contrast the variable flux of empirical consciousness with the unity of transcendental apperception, which he terms pure, original, unchanging consciousness. The "I think" is a spontaneous source of synthesis, which connects the manifold of intuition in one self-identical consciousness.<sup>250</sup> The pure apperception of the transcendental subject is bound up with time, but is not temporal itself, otherwise it would itself be in need of another synthesis, thereby instigating an infinite regress. The postulation of a non-temporal, pure apperception of the transcendental subject is a legitimate move, according to Kant, as it does not imply the acceptance of a metaphysical substance, particularly the soul.

The postulation of a pure, original, unchanging consciousness is not an option that Husserl, however, leaves open for himself. He wanted to remain, as strictly as possible, with the things themselves as they appeared within the experience of transcendental intentionality. Consequently, he foregoes the Kantian double move of saying that space and time are empirically real, but transcendently ideal. Examining how phenomena are given to consciousness in intentionality, Husserl concludes simply that temporality is characteristic of appearances in general: "On both sides – that is, both in the immanent and transcendent spheres of reality – time is the irreducible form of individual realities in their described modes."<sup>251</sup> Husserl

---

<sup>248</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Wolfgang Schwarz (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1982), p. 23.

<sup>249</sup> Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, p. 22.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>251</sup> As quoted in Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, p. 55.

thus assumes an originary temporality to phenomenality, and this is the important breakthrough of the *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, even though this temporality is still ordered around the principle of presence and the present.

Husserl is now presented with the same problem as Kant: how to account for the succession of time, while also explaining the synthesis between discreet moments, without which the experience of time would be impossible. As everything is temporal, recourse to an atemporal, pure apperception is not open to him. Husserl therefore introduces an absolute subjectivity, which he calls the absolute flow: "In contrast to the intentional acts and their objects, the flow is an 'absolute subjectivity' that is not temporally constituted but immediately given to itself as a 'living presence.'<sup>252</sup> As was already noted in the previous section of this chapter, Derrida's argument now is that Husserl tries in vain to reconcile the absolute flow of subjectivity with the need for the synthesis of retentions and protentions, in order to realise the certainty of the living present. The absolute flow of time must necessarily lead to the conclusion that every present moment is already inhabited by an alterity.

It is important to recognise here that Derrida agrees with Husserl about original temporality. This is, in fact, exactly the conclusion that Derrida wants to stress above all. The reduction of objective temporality opens onto a purely immanent phenomenological temporality.<sup>253</sup> Derrida's thought is a thought of radical, original, entirely immanent temporality. Nothing can be said to transcend temporality. Another way of saying this would be to say that Derrida's thought is a thought of infinite finitude: there is nothing outside the process of successive, finite becoming.<sup>254</sup>

The profound disagreement with Husserl and, of course, structuralism, has to do with Derrida's rejection of the attempt to organise originary temporality around a notion of presence and the present. The present cannot be the point of departure for a thinking of temporality. The present always works from within the logic of non-contradiction, whereby the identity of some point has to be defended against

---

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. p. 57.

<sup>253</sup> Marrati, *Genesis and Trace*, p. 12.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

something else - an alterity. However, the present is always already not simply the present. It is always already divided in itself, and is always already contaminated. Therefore, temporality should be thought from within the radical passivity of time. It should be thought from the perspective of the absolute past. What is produced as arché-writing, as *différance*, leaves a trace in the present, but cannot be subsumed under a proper heading.

Presence and the present should, from within this logic, be understood as an effect of writing. It is what comes from an absolute past and remains as a trace for as long as it is repeated. However, the repetition cannot be completely identical, and it should therefore be open to an unanticipated future.

As should also be clear by now, the notion of the trace implies Derrida's rejection of any separation of space and time. Spatiality, or rather spacing, is what articulates the flow of time. Martin Hägglund summarised this becoming space of time and becoming time of space as follows:

“The synthesis of the trace follows from the constitution of time we have considered. Given that the now can appear only by disappearing – that it passes away as soon as it comes to be – it must be inscribed as a trace in order to be at all. This is the *becoming space of time*. The trace is necessarily spatial, since spatiality is characterized by the ability to remain in spite of temporal succession. Spatiality is thus the condition for synthesis, since it enables the tracing of relations between past and future. Spatiality, however, can never be in itself; it can never be pure simultaneity. Simultaneity is unthinkable without a temporalization that relates one spatial juncture to another. This *becoming time of space* is necessary not only for the trace to be related to other traces, but also for it to be a trace in the first place. A trace can only be read after its inscription and is thus marked by a relation to the future that temporalizes space.”<sup>255</sup>

---

<sup>255</sup> *Radical Atheism*, p. 18.

Thus, Derrida inhabits the language of transcendental philosophy, but destabilises it in order for a logic of contamination to appear. Eventually, the confines of transcendental philosophy are exploded because “spacing” – the other shorthand for the becoming space of time and the becoming time of space – has an ultra-transcendental status.<sup>256</sup> What remains is a wholly immanent process of the emergence of different articulations - an infinite finitude.

### 3.5 The conversation with Heidegger

Derrida’s relationship with his older contemporary, Martin Heidegger, as well as the implications of this conversation for Derrida’s views on spatiality and temporality, highlights an important line of enquiry.<sup>257</sup> Although Derrida maintained that the conversation with Heidegger informed his work at all stages, the question remains as to what Derrida appropriated from, or modelled on, the Heideggerian project, and to what extent, on the other hand, he criticised and precisely sought to deconstruct Heidegger.

In the same way as Derrida did after him, Heidegger also took phenomenology as a point of departure. Heidegger, however, transposed transcendental phenomenology onto an existential plane. Whereas Husserl analysed and explicated the way in which things (beings) appear in transcendental consciousness, Heidegger maintained that what should be explored is the appearance of being as such. The most important task of philosophy is to think the difference between being and beings, or the ontic-ontological difference. However, this, according to Heidegger, is precisely what has been tragically neglected. Philosophy suffers from a forgetfulness of being. This the early Heidegger tries to remedy by rigorously analysing the presencing of being within the horizon of the human being (Dasein).

---

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

<sup>257</sup> Apart from the works by Rayment-Pickard, Marrati and Häggglund, which have already been referred to, reference may in this regard be made to John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) and Hugh J. Silverman, “Derrida, Heidegger, and the Time of the Line”, In: *Derrida and Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 154-168.

Dasein is the site of the *phainein*, the appearing of being. This appearing is, however, at the same time a disappearing, a hiding, as being cannot be definitively grasped by an instrumental rationality. The forgetfulness of being that Western thought suffers from in Heidegger's opinion stems on a practical level from a lethargy, a being taken up by everydayness, a being caught up in entertainment and the daily trudge of mass society. On a metaphysical level, the same forgetfulness of being manifests itself in a commitment to presence and the present moment. One being amongst the beings is taken to be the highest being, and everything is then organised around that being in terms of a logic of presence and absence. What is connected to the highest being is present, and the further another being moves away the less presence it could be said to possess. On the basis of this scheme, Heidegger reads the history of Western thought, from the pre-Socratics to the present, as a history organised around the principle of presence in the ontic plane, and therefore a history forgetful of being (of the ontological) as such.

In Heidegger's thought being and temporality are intimately linked - this, in a sense, is the burden of demonstration in his monumental *Being and Time*. Concomitantly, the forgetfulness of being is linked to a "vulgar concept of time." Where an attentiveness to being is relinquished in favour of a preoccupation with beings, time is likewise thought on the basis of the present, as it relates itself to Dasein. In ¶81 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger formulates this as follows:

"... in so far as Dasein calculates time in reckoning with *itself*, ... the kind of behaviour in which 'one' explicitly regulates oneself *according to time*, lies in the use of clocks. The existential-temporal meaning of this turns out to be a making-present of the travelling pointer. By *following* the positions of the pointer in a way which makes present, one *counts* them. This making-present temporalizes itself in the ecstatic unity of a retention which awaits. To *retain* the 'on that former occasion' and to retain it by *making it present*, signifies that in saying 'now' one is open for the horizon of the earlier – that is, of the 'now-no-longer.' To await the 'then' by *making it present*, means that in saying

'now' one is open for the horizon of the later – that is, of the now-not-yet.  
*Time is what shows itself in such a making present*.”<sup>258</sup>

According to Heidegger, therefore, the most important characteristic of vulgar time is its being organised around the present. The time that thus emerges is calculable and present-at-hand - it is manipulable by an instrumental reason, and this is a defining characteristic of the spatialisation wrought by metaphysics. According to Heidegger, the concept of time as a flowing stream of “nows” hails from Aristotle. Furthermore, ever since Aristotle, all discussions of the concept of time have in principle accepted the Aristotelian definitions: time is the number of change in respect of before and after - time is what is counted, starting from the present as a point of reference.<sup>259</sup>

While distancing himself from the vulgar concept of time, which seeks to understand temporality in relation to an ontic present, Heidegger equally maintains that time cannot find its meaning in eternity. This might have been an option if it were methodologically justifiable, but methodologically speaking, such a “theological” point of departure is not justifiable. An existential phenomenology can only start with man and with what appears within the human condition.<sup>260</sup> The primary question is not “what is time”, but “who is time.” What kind of being is man that he has a concept of time? In response to this question, Heidegger suggests that time is intelligible only for a being that lives with an understanding of a limit. Dasein conceives time in terms of a limit - as time passes, so do its possibilities. In point of fact, the awareness of an absolute limit is what makes all possibilities intelligible, and along with this intelligibility, a concept of time emerges. Death is the absolute limit for the being there of Dasein. The certainty of death constitutes Dasein as a finite being: “It is the certainty of death, the certainty of finitude, that opens up possibilities and thus time.”<sup>261</sup> By establishing a limit to our possibilities, death also allows us to grasp the unity (*Einheit*) of possibilities.

---

<sup>258</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 1995), p. 473.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> This is Heidegger's point of departure in his 1924 lecture, *The Concept of Time*, as quoted in Lilian Alweiss, Heidegger and 'the concept of time', *History of the Human Sciences*, 2002, 15(3), p. 118.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. p. 122.



Being is temporal and the appearing of being in the finite life of Dasein characterises it as irrevocably temporal. According to Heidegger, Dasein's temporality is a temporality oriented to the future. The fact that Dasein can only make sense of its life in light of an absolute limit that lies ahead (a *sein zum Tode*) characterises Dasein as ecstatically oriented to the future. While the vulgar concept of time organises time around the present, Heidegger proposes a concept of time based on the meaning imparted by the future. An authentic relationship to the future demands that Dasein take over its thrownness (*Geworfenheit*.) Dasein can only appropriate itself in the mode of a return. Implied in the authentic future is thus an equally authentic return, referred to by Heidegger as the existential past. From the future and from the having-been (*Gewesen*), there eventually arises the originary present. The authentic notion of the present refers to a situatedness and not to the presence of things. As has been mentioned above, life in expectance of a limit allows us to grasp the unity of our constellation of possibilities. Significantly, the present does not generate the past and the future as modifications of itself, but emerges on the basis of them. In the words of Paola Marrati:

*“Zeitlichkeit* is the ek-static unity that unfolds in the mutual implication of the ek-stases (future, having been, and present), the ek-static character of which marks temporality as ‘the pure and simple original outside-of-itself [*Ausser-sich*]: temporality (Dasein, then) is not a being that can step outside itself but is from the outset the *outside-of-itself*’.<sup>262</sup>

Temporality is the meaning of Dasein. Dasein's constitution and its ways to be are ontologically possible only on the basis of temporality.<sup>263</sup> What, then, of spatiality? According to Heidegger, Dasein's spatiality is derived from its temporality. Spatiality is not equiprimordial with temporality. The grounding of spatiality in temporality is similar to the deduction of the present from an ecstatic-existential relationship to the future. In coming up against the limit of its death, Dasein appropriates its possibilities in authentic care. Part of this appropriation of its possibilities involves a making room for its own “leeway”:

---

<sup>262</sup> Marrati, *Genesis and Trace*, p. 117.

<sup>263</sup> *Being and Time*, p. 418.

“Dasein takes space in; this is to be understood literally. It is by no means just present-at-hand in a bit of space which its body fills up. In existing, it has already made room for its own leeway. It determines its own location in such a manner that it comes back from the space it has made room for to the ‘place’ it has reserved.”<sup>264</sup>

From within Heidegger’s existential-phenomenological analysis, spatiality is grounded in temporality, although it remains nevertheless an independent phenomenon. That spatiality is an important phenomenon in Dasein’s life is borne out by the fact that Dasein’s interpretation of itself and the whole stock of significations which belong to language in general are dominated through and through by spatial representations.<sup>265</sup>

The foregoing cursory remarks on Heidegger’s conception of temporality and spatiality afford us the opportunity to explore the relationship between Derrida and Heidegger, especially with regard to the notions of space and time. In this regard, it should be remarked that there certainly is a deep sympathy between their respective projects. The rejection of metaphysical presence, together with the analysis of the history of (Western) thought as a metaphysics of presence, which is announced by Heidegger, is continually commented and elaborated on in Derrida’s work. The notion of spatialisation, used to describe the state of modern philosophy, and discussed in the previous chapter of this study, may even be said to derive more properly from the Heideggerian description of the “Age of the World-picture.”

While Derrida and Heidegger share a certain diagnosis of the condition of philosophy, they nevertheless differ in terms of where the malady stems from. Heidegger rejects the metaphysics of presence on the grounds of inauthenticity: thought is not being true to itself - it is forgetful of being. Derrida, on the other hand, rejects the presence-absence opposition as a point of departure for thought, by showing how this notion auto-deconstructs. If pursued rigorously enough, the logic of presence-absence proves to be untenable, as the present is always already contaminated by an absolute past.

---

<sup>264</sup> Ibid. p. 419.  
<sup>265</sup> Ibid. p. 421.

In addition, with regard to the main thrust of their alternatives to a metaphysics of presence, there is a deep affinity between Heidegger and Derrida. In his analysis, Husserl arrived at a completely immanent temporal flux that informs transcendental consciousness. In his transposition of phenomenology onto an ontological plane, Heidegger's thought focuses on the temporality of being as such. In a similar vein, Derrida's thought – as it has emerged in the discussion thus far – may be characterised as a thought of a constitutive temporality that is radically immanent. The appearance of finitude as temporality, such is the accordance of Derrida and Heidegger.

The deep-running, shared sentiments with regard to temporality and finitude should not, however, conceal significant differences within Heidegger's and Derrida's alternatives to the metaphysics of presence.<sup>266</sup> While Heidegger understands temporality from the perspective of the future (the *sein* of *Dasein* is a *sein zum Tode*), Derrida understands it from the perspective of the absolute past. Heidegger's ecstatic temporality involves *Dasein*'s recognition of its finitude, in view of its inevitable death. This throws it back upon its past, out of which it then gathers an authentic care for its unique, finite situatedness in the present. Derrida, on the other hand, deconstructs presence (and his thought is to that extent eccentric and ecstatic) by noting that the present is always already contaminated by the past. This does not imply that Derrida is insensitive to the absolute finitude announced by death. Death as an indication of finitude does feature prominently in Derrida's writings. The issue here is not finitude but identity. Heidegger's position is that there is an authentic temporality: awareness of an absolute limit throws *Dasein* back upon its own thrownness and allows it to gather itself in an authentic, existential awareness of its situation. The notion of authenticity is borne out in Heidegger's later writings, even if he abandons the language of phenomenology. Like a flash of lightning, being shines forth at the beginning of an epoch, only to be progressively forgotten. However, the hope remains that it will shine forth again at the end of the epoch to announce a new

---

<sup>266</sup> Cf. for instance Derrida's remark in *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 10: "I will note only that between difference as temporization-temporalization, which can no longer be conceived within the horizon of the present, and what Heidegger says in *Being and Time* about temporalization as the transcendental horizon of the question of Being, which must be liberated from its traditional, metaphysical domination by the present and the now, there is a strict communication, even though not an exhaustive and irreducibly necessary one."

epoch of being. The crucial point here is that, according to Heidegger, it is the same being that shines forth again at the end of an age. The same being that lighted up the origin will light up again. In this sense, Heidegger can speak of an originary temporality. There is a being at the origin that may be gathered again across the epochs. According to Heidegger, difference is to be sought in the ontic-ontological difference.

Derrida, on the other hand, while agreeing about the infinite finitude of temporality, cannot speak of an originary temporality. There is no authentic relationship to temporality that derives from a gathering. There is no identical being that appears again at the end of an epoch. There “is” only *différance*. What appears in the present appears as a trace: it is contaminated by an absolute past that is not gatherable into a present-past. It awaits an absolute future, which is not gatherable into a present-future. Derrida often writes about the future. In his later writings, in the context of elaborating on the social and ethical implications of *différance*, he talks, for instance, about the coming of justice and a messianism without reserve. This future, however, has the structure of an absolute past: there is no *telos* and no *eschaton*. The future that arrives will be completely unexpected, completely different, and in its turn, contaminated by its past, which will be an absolute past.

The contamination of the present by the past goes hand in hand with the contamination of time by space. Here, another difference with Heidegger emerges. While for Heidegger, the appearing of being in *Dasein* is in the first place temporal, and spatial as a derivative of its finite temporality, for Derrida, the process of temporalising is inscribed in its spacing - it is the spatial trace that traces temporalisation.

The conversation with Heidegger finally serves to highlight a characteristic of Derrida’s understanding of temporality, namely its non-linearity. This has already been mentioned at the end of the first section of this chapter. In one and the same gesture, the differing deferring of *différance* leaves man, science and the line behind. *Différance* works in different directions.<sup>267</sup> What remains is a constitutive and

---

<sup>267</sup> *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 3.

productive causality, the immanent process of scission and division which produces or constitutes different things or differences. Once again, this “is” the becoming space of time and the becoming time of space.

### **3.6 Temporal transcendence in immanence**

The final section of this chapter is devoted to a review of the ground covered in the light of the hypothesis proposed in the first chapter, namely the existence of a notion of transcendence in immanence in Derrida’s thought. With regard to the questions of meaning and the operation of signs, the introductory chapter linked the issue of relating transcendence and immanence to dualistic and monistic mechanisms of meaning intimation, the binary mechanism associated with an immanent and a transcendent pole, and the monistic mechanism associated with a thoroughgoing immanentism. Is the transcendent to be regarded as somehow separate from the immanent, thereby accepting some kind of duality, or should the transcendent be taken to be some kind of epiphenomenon of the immanent, thereby preferring some kind of monism? Furthermore, how are these questions, framed in semiological terms, to be related to broader ontological convictions?

In the course of listening to Derrida’s analysis of the spatialisation wrought by metaphysics, it became clear that he links the metaphysics of presence to a binary mechanism of meaning intimation. Some ontic existent is taken to be the point of absolute presence (or absolute identity), and everything else is then interpreted in terms of that existent. Whether it be the platonic ideas, the Logos, God the Father, *phoné*, or the phenomenological *eidos*, the pattern is always the same: something is taken to be a fixed point of presence, and everything else refers to that presence and re-presents it. Derrida then goes on to analyse a spatialised, metaphysical operation of the sign according to the binary logic of meaning intimation. According to this conception, some kind of signifier acts as a placeholder for a signified that is true, present to itself, and pure – in a word: ideal. While not in itself full presence, the sign seeks to safeguard the idea of full presence in its reference to an ideal signified:

“[T]his structure presupposes that the sign, which defers presence, is conceivable only on the *basis* of the presence it defers and *moving* toward the deferred presence that it aims to reappropriate.”<sup>268</sup>

Derrida’s deconstructive project aims at undermining this binary logic of meaning intimation. The operation of *différance*, as has been discussed, certainly makes no provision for the connection of a particular constellation with something else that it may be said to represent or reflect. Introducing *différance*, Derrida mentions that the assemblage he proposes with this term “has the complex structure of a weaving, an interlacing which permits the different threads and different lines of meaning – *or of force* – to go off again in different directions.”<sup>269</sup> Moreover, the reading of Derrida’s deconstruction of structuralism has shown that meaning overflows – even explodes – the structures imposed on it from without. Viewed in this way, meaning is in a sense a blind, “meaningless” movement; a force of nature. Meaning is what happens.

In addition Derrida understands meaning in terms of the logic of the trace. Meaning is that which appears spatially as a trace: never true to itself, always contaminated from the outside, a bastard son. The trace lingers in its contaminated state for a while before giving way to something different (though “something”, in its turn, equally contaminated). What Derrida does is nothing less than to introduce a new way of understanding the sign. This has already emerged through a consideration of the deconstruction of structuralism, and can only be summarised again here. Derrida notes that the concept of the sign is thoroughly inscribed in a metaphysics of presence, and any deconstruction of the sign would have to be undertaken by using its “is” language against itself. As has been mentioned before, Derrida takes Ferdinand de Saussure’s breakthrough to be the conceptualisation of language as an arbitrary system of differences. Each signifier signifies only through its difference from the other signifiers in the system. Although thematising difference, De Saussure, however, still thought of difference in terms of presence, somewhat similar to Husserl thinking of temporality in terms of presence. Derrida wants to radicalise the thought of difference in language to such an extent that it is no longer gatherable around a principle of presence. Thus, signification, according to the logic of the

---

<sup>268</sup> *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 9.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3. Italics added.

trace, “is” the happening of *différance*. The presencing of the trace is an effect of *différance*. Thus, the signified is always also already the movement of the signifier. Understood in this way, the deconstruction of a metaphysics of presence could be translated into the deconstruction of a binary mechanism of meaning inference into a monistic, inferential mechanism.

Upon consideration, it seems, however, that to describe the situation in this way would be an oversimplification. In the first place, it has already, in the previous chapter, been remarked that modern transcendental thought – even if Derrida understands it as an example of a binary logic - may just as well be interpreted as actually being dogmatically monist.

In what has been described as the epistemological turn, modern transcendental thought takes its point of departure singularly within transcendental consciousness. Methodologically speaking, the whole of reality can only be presented *inside* of human consciousness. Compared, as it has been, to the ontological assumptions prevalent prior to the epistemological turn, transcendental thought may be regarded as being thoroughly monist. All references to an ontological transcendent realm are placed strictly between brackets. For all practical purposes, a complete immanentism is accepted. From the perspective of this ontological immanentism, the mechanism of meaning intimation appears to be purely inferential, i.e. grounded in a monism. From whatever it takes to be the stable node of meaning for its point of departure, the cogito continues in a hypothetico-deductive manner, or to use the term coined by C.S. Peirce, it continues by way of abduction. This is an inferential process of meaning intimation.

Derrida’s deconstruction of a binary logic of meaning intimation may be interpreted within this broader context of a movement towards a thoroughly immanent ontology. What Derrida has apparently done is to deconstruct the semiological and epistemological binarity that still existed in modern thought (even while the latter may be described as ontologically monist) into a semiological and epistemological monism. There “is” nothing apart from the process of infinite finitude - meaning happens.

But does ontological immanentism really imply such a strict monism? Is all binarity to be ruled out? A careful reading of deconstruction would have this not be the case. A duality or binarity of sorts may yet be intimated in Derrida's thought, even as it remains strictly immanentist. The trace structure as a structure of contamination in fact *implies* a binarity: something is contaminated by something *else*. Furthermore, an important burden of demonstration in Derrida's conversation with Husserl is that there is no pure *lebendige Gegenwart*. There is no thing that is absolutely identical to itself - absolutely self-contained, and therefore an absolute monism. The structure of time as flow indicates that every moment is already divided in itself. Every discreet moment is irrevocably contaminated by another - by an alterity. In this sense, deconstructive thought always also implies a binarity or duality, even if it is not a matter of one pole representing another.

It appears then that whereas the epistemological binarity – the radical separation of an immanent and a transcendent pole - of modern metaphysics has been thoroughly discredited, a pure and simple monism also seems to be untenable. An analysis of change and, in particular, of the mechanism of meaning intimation, seems to indicate that some kind of transcendence inevitably appears within the immanence of monism. Whereas the binarity of radically separating transcendence and immanence has been discredited in favour of a thoroughgoing immanence, immanence itself is inhabited by transcendence. This is exactly what is borne out by Derrida's thoughts of haunting and contamination. This chapter has shown that the transcendence that inhabits immanence in Derrida's thought is the transcendence of radical temporality. Temporality "is" precisely the other that inhabits every "immanent" spatial constellation.

Having said this, the critical question that was broached in the second part of the second chapter remains the following: does all thought that explicitly works with an ontological transcendence, and therefore accepts some kind of binary mechanism of meaning inference, necessarily end up in a metaphysics of presence, together with the spatialisation and fixation that this implies? In the next chapter, another notion of transcendence in immanence will be proposed, one which, in contrast to the temporal transcendence in immanence of Derrida's thought, may be characterised as theological transcendence in immanence.



## **Chapter 4: Theological transcendence in immanence: proportion and progression**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The experience of finitude is inextricably bound with that of space, time and change. Upon consideration, these notions seem to implicate one another. To understand the meaning of space and time – the genitive being used in an objective as well as a subjective sense – one will have to note the way in which the notions of space and time are used to explain finitude and change, as well as how they are evoked by the experience of finitude and change. The first part of the hypothesis guiding this study states that the experience of change, as well as attention to the process of semiosis, suggest a situation whereby a given finite constellation always reveals itself to be transcended by what is more than itself. An immanent finitude is always also inhabited by a transcending alterity. This may be summarised by saying that our condition is characterised by a situation of transcendence in immanence. The work of Jacques Derrida, as analysed in the previous chapters, seem to corroborate the first part of the hypothesis: Derrida's thought, although radically immanentist, cannot fail to function with some kind of notion of transcendence. What transcends every finite instance in Derrida's thought, however, is the transcendence of infinite temporality. In terms of Derrida's thought, transcendence in immanence translates into the becoming space of time, and the becoming time of space. This, in his view, is the meaning of space and time, although, in a sense, it is a meaningless meaning, since no meaning can ever be definitively arrived at - meaning is continually being deferred, and in the process also undergoes continual metamorphosis.

In chapter two of this study, it was argued that Derrida's narrative, describing a metaphysics of presence and its history, is vulnerable to an accusation of structuralist generalisation. In support of this argument, an alternative genealogy of the rise of spatialisation was advanced – one that identifies the conditions for the prevalence of a metaphysics of presence with the demise of an analogical worldview towards the end of the Middle Ages. The burden of the present chapter is, subsequently, to propose an alternative understanding of transcendence in

immanence to that which emerges in the thought of Derrida, as analysed in the previous chapter.

In its exposition of an alternative conception of transcendence in immanence, this chapter draws from the broad tradition of theological and philosophical thought prior to the advent of modernity. This necessitates a methodological remark to the effect that a mutually exclusive opposition between faithfulness to received traditions, creeds, doctrinal statements and theological treatises on the one hand, and creativity or contemporary relevance on the other hand, seems to be unwarranted. On the contrary, in the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar: “history, far from dispensing us from creative effort, imposes it on us.”<sup>270</sup> Following an interpretive strategy suggested by Rowan Williams, received traditions and intellectual discourses may fruitfully be regarded as scripts for a certain kind of performance, similar to the script of a play. According to Jeffrey McCurry, Williams believes that the texts of the saints can be interpreted in the same way as the script of a play can be performed:

“Such a poetics of theological creativity as ‘inflected interpretive performance’ negotiates the delicate balance between the theologian’s need to remain faithful to received traditions of scriptural, creedal, and speculative discourse, on the one hand, and the need to articulate Christian truth in new ways that can articulate, console, liberate, and challenge the Church, academy and world today, on the other.”<sup>271</sup>

In fact, an interpretive approach that regards a reading of a past authority as an opportunity for a new, inflected performance of the thrust of what has been handed down seems to have been the general way of interacting with tradition prior to the advent of modernity. This may be associated with the analogical worldview prevalent in Western thought for much of that time. An analogical worldview takes as its point of departure the participation, at an analogical remove, of beings in being. This primary analogon opens up entire ranges of analogies within nature and history. A reading at a later stage, performed, as it were, as a non- identical

---

<sup>270</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought – An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans.: Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), p. 10.

<sup>271</sup> Jeffrey McCurry, “Towards a poetics of theological creativity: Rowan Williams reads Augustine’s *De Doctrina* after Derrida” In: *Modern Theology* 23:3 July 2007, pp. 415-417.

inflection of an earlier authority, may well be regarded as an analogical - that is non-identical - repetition of the same.<sup>272</sup>

Thus, somewhat in keeping with the alternative proposed in the second chapter, but nevertheless not merely historical, the alternative understanding of transcendence in immanence advanced in this chapter may be described as a theological understanding, as it attempts to regard transcendence as first and foremost pertaining to the divine in relation to finite creation. Such an alternative will have to account for the experience of finitude, change and difference – phenomena to which postmodern theories are all very sensitive. The implications of a theological understanding of transcendence in immanence for the notions of space, time and meaning will subsequently have to be elaborated in more detail.

Whereas the notion of transcendence in immanence in Derrida's thought was arrived at through the inductive process of analysing the notions of space and time as they emerge and function in concepts such as the trace, writing and *différance*, this chapter follows an inverse, i.e. more deductive, route. In the first section, the notion of theological transcendence in immanence will be explored. The following section takes the theological notion of transcendence in immanence as developed, and applies it to the process of semiosis. Can the notion of the sign, as it emerges from an understanding of theological transcendence in immanence, adequately account for semiosis? Does this notion of the sign come sufficiently to terms with the accusation levelled against modern notions of the sign, namely that it entrenches a metaphysics of presence?

The third section of this chapter attempts to provide an adequate understanding of the experience of change, proceeding from a theological understanding of transcendence in immanence. As will become apparent, the notion of movement, as it was understood in the intellectual tradition prior to modern physicalism, is very

---

<sup>272</sup> In this regard, Christopher Lasch makes a clarifying distinction between a remembering which seeks to interpret historically significant moments in the present, and a nostalgia that merely harks back to a past "golden age", without any hope of the significant moments in the past re-emerging, albeit differently, in the present. Clearly, the attention given to what is deemed to be an historical precedent of a theological thought of transcendence in immanence strives to belong to the former mode of remembering, rather than the latter of mere nostalgia. Cf. Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven – Progress and its Critics* (New York: WW Norton & Co, 1991), p. 82, 83.

important in this regard. In this section, as well as in the one on the semiotic process, the meaning of space and time from the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence will become apparent. Finally, this chapter closes with a meditation on the practices whereby a theological understanding of transcendence in immanence seeks to embody space and time. If the process of writing may be taken to be the embodiment of what Derrida has in mind with *différance* and spacing, the question becomes one of what an alternative mode of embodiment would look like – one that derives from a theological notion of transcendence in immanence. To this end, the functioning of liturgical practices and, within those liturgical practices, of notions such as rhythm and proportion, will be investigated.

## 4.2 Theological transcendence in immanence

Although a notion of theological transcendence in immanence may very well be deemed to be an integral part of the experience of the Judaeo-Christian tradition (which comprises the narrower context of the discussion in this chapter), the journey of the intellectual articulation of this notion has been long and arduous and, of course, still continues today. The process of gaining some kind of overview of this journey can do no better than start with acknowledging that the grand tradition of Christian intellectual labour stems from a confluence of the Hebrew-Aramaic Old Testament (particularly as interpreted in the Greek New Testament) and the Greek-Hellenistic intellectual world within which it was received at around the beginning of the Christian calendar.<sup>273</sup> The Hebrew Scriptures have an overarching character of narrative. This also holds true with regard to the form that their interpretation was given in terms of the figure of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Even though interspersed with other literature types, the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures as a corpus recount the history of God's relationship with creation and particularly with humanity.

---

<sup>273</sup> Of this confluence, Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict xvi, says that the "inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history..." Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI. "Faith, Reason and the University". Lecture given at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents).

Underlying this tradition is an existential experience of God's presence in the world and in history.

In Greek-Hellenistic thought, on the other hand (at least since Socrates), a mode of interacting with the world is found whereby reality is understood in terms of rational principles. From the immediacy of experience, various principles are abstracted and postulated as underlying experience.<sup>274</sup> Salient among the intellectual discourses on reality in Greek thought is the thought of being. Whereas the dominant mood in the Hebrew Scriptures is one of narrative and history, Greek thought thematises being. In a sense, the intellectual methodology imparted by Greek thought has remained part of Western thought ever since. In one guise or another, the phenomenological question is repeated over and over again: how does being appear?

Albeit in a pre-reflective, pre-theoretical manner, the Judaeo-Christian tradition bears witness to the notion of theological transcendence in immanence. In fact, in a sense, this tradition speaks of nothing else than the eternal God's relationship of loving intimacy with His creation. From its source in the Old and New Testaments, the Judaeo-Christian intellectual tradition maintains the creatureliness of finite reality, as well as its utter gratuity. The polemical thrust of the first chapters of the book of Genesis, for example, makes the point that God is the only Creator and that He is without peer or competitor. The sun and the moon, widely worshipped in antiquity, are creations - a greater and a lesser light made by God to give light alternately by day and by night. The accounts of creation presented at the beginning of the book of Genesis, while not being the earliest writings of the Hebrew Scriptures, certainly, by dint of their placement at the beginning of the canon, provide an important witness to the conviction that the cosmos is not itself divine, but is the result of God's creative work. And so the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* may be taken to be an important contribution by the Hebrew Scriptures, informing the theological notion of transcendence in immanence. While some have claimed that the notion of creation out of nothing is ambiguous in Genesis and in fact only hails from the encounter of Christian faith with Greek philosophy, the fact remains that writers such as Irenaeus,

---

<sup>274</sup> Simon Oliver comments that with Plato's *Timaeus*, "[t]he cosmos is, perhaps for the first time, investigated and described through the establishment of axioms from which emerge mathematical proportion and the 'harmonic music of the heavens.'" Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 8.

Tertullian and Augustine were driven precisely by the need to affirm the biblical witness to the basic goodness of creation and of God's utter freedom in creating it.<sup>275</sup>

While proclaiming the gratuitous creation of finite reality by an almighty God, the Biblical witness is nevertheless adamant and consistent in also testifying to God's nearness to, and presence in His creation. The theme of ever-increasing and ever-renewing bonds of the covenant relationship that God enters into with His creatures substantiates this claim. With regard to the covenant, Abraham Heschel points to the significance of the command to keep the Sabbath as a symbolic reminder and celebration of God's nearness. The day of rest is a day of experiencing the presence of God within time: "while Jewish tradition offers us no definition of the concept of eternity, it tells us how to experience the taste of eternity or eternal life within time."<sup>276</sup> Of course, the incarnation and the sanctificatory presence of the Holy Spirit, as proclaimed in the New Testament, sweep these themes of God's covenant and his in-dwelling up into a majestic crescendo - a crescendo of which the chords would spread to and echo through the medium of the Greek thought of the time.

Greek thought, for its part, despite its intellectual acumen, arrived at the end of the classical age still by and large as a thought of totality. In chapter 2 of this study, a liturgical, dynamic reading of Plato was proposed in opposition to a reading that would see him as one of the earliest exponents of a fixating metaphysics of presence. The ontology that emerged at that stage out of such a doxological reading of Plato had as its main feature, a transcendent but overflowing good that gives immanent reality to be. Through participation in the good, immanent reality is on a doxological journey to the good. While such a reading of Plato serves the purpose of casting doubt on the Heideggerian-Derridean history of metaphysics, it should, however, now be qualified by noting that within a broader context, Plato's conception of the transcendent was not yet radical enough.

---

<sup>275</sup> David Wilkinson, "Reading Genesis 1-3 in the light of modern science," In: Stephen C. Barton & David Wilkonson (eds.), *Reading Genesis After Darwin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). p. 139.

<sup>276</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951) p. 74.

David Bentley-Hart characterises pre-Socratic thought as the thought of immersion in *physis*. According to this notion, being is viewed as a closed and finite order of placement and displacement, construction and destruction, life and death, governed by the determinations of blind fate. This, according to Bentley-Hart, is the ontology that most purely flows from a certain pagan vision of being as sacrifice: order is won by means of erecting a sacrificial barricade against chaos. This thought of *physis* is, moreover, a thought of totality. It “has no horizon but beings, and so can do no more than abstract from nature and violence and transience to a sublime, dark reservoir of ontic possibility, and to an inescapable structure of arising and perishing.”<sup>277</sup>

Against the background of a thought of *physis*, as subjugation to the world's mere event, the thought of Plato and Aristotle seeking, as it does, to postulate principles of being, represents a significant moment of enlightenment. Yet, once again following Bentley-Hart, it could be argued that neither Plato nor Aristotle was able to radically overcome the sacrificial economy of finitude.<sup>278</sup> Plato struggled with the tension between change and changeless essences: how does the changeable material world participate in the unchangeable realm of ideas? His answer was to reify transcendental being into a datum as if it were given in world immanent experience, and he treated absolute being as a genus of which the varieties of immanent being are species. With regard to this development, Eric Voegelin argues that the postulation of a transcendental realm was not a wanton assumption on Plato's part, but followed from a genuine experience of desire in the soul, together with its cathartic effects. In other words, it flowed from something akin to a religious experience.<sup>279</sup> Aristotle, for his part, would have been aware of the experiences that formed the wellspring of Plato's postulations, and would have shared in them, as witnessed, for instance, in a fragment of his work entitled *On Prayer*. While Aristotle, according to Voegelin, rightly criticised the hypostatisation of transcendental being into a separate realm, he did not repudiate the experiences of transcendence which gave rise to the notion of a realm of ideas. In the words of Voegelin, Aristotelian thought, in consequence,

---

<sup>277</sup> David Bentley-Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 226. Cf. Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion*, p. 8.

<sup>278</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 227.

<sup>279</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Order and History (vol. 3): Plato and Aristotle* (Univ of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 329.

“is a curious transformation of the experience of transcendence that can perhaps be described as an intellectual thinning-out. The fullness of experience that Plato expressed in the richness of his myth is in Aristotle reduced to the conception of God as the prime mover...”<sup>280</sup>

Thus, the “thinning-out” in Aristotle involved a shift of focus to the immanent dialectic of finite form and unrealised potency, and to a thematisation of causality. Ultimately, however, Voegelin concurs with Bentley-Hart that neither Plato nor Aristotle was able to radically penetrate the problem posed by the experience of transcendence within immanence.<sup>281</sup>

The thought of totality and, therefore, of necessity, remained with Greek thought in its later neo-platonic manifestations. While neither Plato nor Aristotle was willing to use the term “infinite” to describe absolute being, Plotinus did speak of the One as infinite.<sup>282</sup> Within Plotinus’ thought, the world of diversity and sensibility emanates from the infinite One and is also called to return to the One. Yet, as Bentley-Hart observes, the infinity of the One still belongs to a metaphysics of the whole, a discourse of necessity - it is the metaphysical reverse of the realm of difference...”<sup>283</sup> As such, the emanative thought of the one and the many in Plotinus at once absolutely distinguishes and absolutely identifies being and beings and, in consequence, remains a thought of totality.

It was, however, precisely in the encounter between the Jewish-Christian faith in a creator God, who yet covenantally lives amongst his creatures, with the Greek-Hellenistic thought of being, that the thought of totality was shattered and a notion of transcendence emerged, which was able to do justice to “being’s splendid otherness, within the immediacy of its mysterious presence.”<sup>284</sup> With the spread of the Christian

---

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. p. 330.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> *Enneads* 5.5.6-11; 6.7.18,23, as quoted in Bentley-Hart, p. 191.

<sup>283</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 191.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid. Of course, to speak of “the Judaeo-Christian tradition” is a massive generalisation. Within Christian thought at that time, the different positions would have covered the whole scale, ranging between the two extremes of eternal separation from God, and the absolute, person-negating presence of God in the soul (see Edward Moore, “Likeness to God as Far as Possible’: Deification Doctrine in Iamblichus and Three Eastern Christian Fathers,” In *Theandros*, Volume 3, number 1, Fall 2005). Speaking of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is very much a way of rediscovering an own



faith throughout the Greek and Latin-speaking world, the notion of theological transcendence in immanence was forged in the fires of apologetic answering *ad extra*, and of doctrinal controversy *ad intra*. The Trinitarian and Christological controversies lead the Church Fathers to apply the clear distinctions of Greek thought regarding being to dogmas concerning the nature of the trinity and of Christ. Thus, in fourth century Cappadocia, the Church Fathers defending the orthodoxy of the Council of Nicaea maintained, against the theological hierarchies advanced by the schools of Alexandria, “that the Christian God is at once infinitely more transcendent of and, in consequence, infinitely nearer to (within the very being of) finite reality than was the inaccessible God of antique metaphysics, the supreme being set apart on being’s summit, the fixed hook from which the cosmos dangled.”<sup>285</sup>

The notion of theological transcendence in immanence allows, at once, for a more radical thought of divine transcendence and a more radical thought of created immanence than was available to metaphysical thought prior to its emergence. With regard to the radical novelty of the kind of immanence that emerged from the notion of theological transcendence in immanence, Alfred North Whitehead observes the following: “In deciding for the direct immanence of the Spirit in the material world, the great fourth century theologians of Alexandria and Antioch have the distinction of being the only thinkers who in a fundamental metaphysical doctrine improved upon Plato.”<sup>286</sup> Thus, another kind of immanence and another kind of transcendence is implied in the Christian dogma of God’s free creation: neither that of the Platonic exemplar at the top of a hierarchy of resemblance, nor that of the neo-Platonic sublime One, nor – in modern terms, for instance – the transcendence of the Hegelian concept locked in a dialectical dance with particularity.<sup>287</sup>

To merely affirm that the theological notion of transcendence in immanence is not this or that is not enough, however. The positive content of this notion was already brought to attention in the second chapter of this study during the course of an

---

position within contemporary thought in the spirit of remembrance, as described in note 1 at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>285</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 182.

<sup>286</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge: University Press, 1947), p. 214.

<sup>287</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 273.

investigation of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. In order for a richer narrative of the notion of theological transcendence in immanence to emerge, this chapter will now, in addition, make extensive use of a reading by David Bentley-Hart (following Hans Urs von Balthasar) of the theology of the fourth century Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nyssa. Where appropriate, observations already made in chapter two will be repeated here.

How, then, can it be that the transcendence of Being over beings – of God over creatures – is such that the otherness of the transcendent is at once also the intimate reality of every finite thing in its particularity? The doctrinal statements adopted by the ecumenical council of Nicaea concerning God as Trinity provided fourth century theologians with a reference point from which to explore the notion of theological transcendence with intellectual rigour. Bentley-Hart points out that for the theologians of the fourth century, a salient feature of divine transcendence lay in the notion of divine *apatheia*.<sup>288</sup> God's *apatheia*, or impassability, means that He is in Himself the fullness of love and peace and life. God does not need anything or anyone to supplement the fullness that is in Him. In creating the world, God did therefore not act upon some inner lack that somehow had to be addressed through an exteriorisation into finitude and particularity. The creation of the world is truly a creation out of nothing, and not out of necessity ("nothing" being understood here precisely as gratuity and non-necessity, and not as something over against being that, in its nothingness, allows being to define itself).

To say that God is the fullness of love and peace and life in Himself, and that there is no dialectical necessity that binds Him to creation and into a totality, means that theology will have to find a way of explaining diversity and particularity. This is precisely provided by the dogma of the Trinity, as this dogma asserts that diversity and particularity inheres in God, and therefore do not have to be derived from somewhere else. God is Trinity, and this means that He is never to be considered otherwise than as the co-inherence of three persons in one. God is always already the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit that yet are one being. God does not

---

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. p. 157,158, 166.

need the finitude of creation to allow diversity to emanate, for example, from an inscrutable One.

That God is Trinity implies, furthermore, that there is always already a fullness of relationship in Him. There is an otherness, a difference in God, which is nevertheless not the difference of alienation, but rather the distance of love and regard. The Father loves the Son and expresses himself completely in the Son. Yet, He is not the Son. The Son loves the Father and returns to the Father in the fellowship of the Spirit, yet he is not the Spirit. The distance of love and regard, the fullness of self donation and returning, the difference of relationship that is simultaneously also the fullness of community, such is the *perichoresis*, the co-inherence of the persons of the trinity, as envisaged by post-Nicene theology. As will be emphasised later, in using the term 'relationship' of God, we are always speaking at an analogical remove. Thus, while it is true that there is relationship in God, it is also always infinitely more perfect than can be expressed in creaturely language. According to Bentley-Hart:

“[T]he relationality of human persons, however essential it may be, remains a multiple reality ... it is infinitely remote from that perfect indwelling, reciprocal 'containment,' transparency, recurrence, and absolute 'giving way' that is the meaning of the word *perichoresis* or *circumincessio*.”<sup>289</sup>

As has already been mentioned, the dogma of the trinity also enabled a positive notion of infinity to be assimilated into the notion of divine transcendence. David Bentley-Hart reads Gregory of Nyssa to the effect that God's infinity means that he is the perfect completeness of what he is. Attributes such as life, wisdom, goodness and beauty are only limited when their contraries are encountered. However, God encounters no boundaries - He is without opposition. God is “beyond nonbeing or negation, transcendent of all composition or antinomy.”<sup>290</sup> In terms of the notion of

---

<sup>289</sup> Ibid. P. 172.

Andrew Louth makes the point that post-Nicene theology reserved the term *perichoresis* for the fullness of relationship within the trinity, while speaking of *diastema* as the relationship within finite reality that analogically participates in the intra-divine relationships. Andrew Louth, “Space, Time and the Liturgy,” In: Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds.) *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy* (London: Ashgate, 2009), p. 219, n.11.

<sup>290</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 193.

difference, God's infinity means that he already contains all difference within himself in an endless parataxis - that is, as endless seriality. Difference does not emanate dialectically from a simple One, but always already exists in a peaceful order of co-existence. God's simplicity, therefore, should not be understood first and foremost as undifferentiatedness, but primarily as fullness or *pleroma*.

Hardy and Ford suggest that a significant difference exists between Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa with regard to the conception of the infinite, which is God – a difference which, they hint, may even be indicative of fourth century differences in approach between the Greek East and the Latin West.<sup>291</sup> According to this reading, Augustine's understanding of God emphasises the self-sameness of God as trinity: God condescends to give Himself to man in Christ and the Holy Spirit, yet remains unchangeable over all in the very disclosure of Himself to man. Gregory's understanding of God, on the other hand, would then be one of an ever-deeper infinite – an infinite which, by its nature, is dynamic and expanding. However, on this point at least, the reading of Hardy and Ford seems to overstate the difference between Augustine and Gregory on the basis of a misreading of Gregory's conception of God's infinity. An ever-deepening, ever-expanding infinite would be a contradiction in terms. What Gregory does is to adduce the notion of an ever-deepening, ever-expanding movement to the finite human soul as it traverses God's infinite beauty. The human soul is thus somewhat like a container that keeps on expanding as it tries – *per impossible* – to take in God's infinite beauty. As was suggested above, God's infinity is better understood as that which does not ever encounter its opposite, and which is therefore never bounded. This notion is not incompatible with God's *apatheia* as discussed above, or even with the notion of unchangeability.

According to Bentley-Hart's reading of Gregory, furthermore, God's eternity not only means that He is without beginning or end, but also that He is without extension or succession:

---

<sup>291</sup> Hardy, D.W. & Ford, D.F. *Jubilate: Theology in Praise* (London: Darton, 1984), pp. 179-181.

“[T]he divine nature knows no past or future, no sequence, but is like an endless ocean of eternity; it is not time, though time flows from it... Extension, whether of time or space, belongs exclusively to the created order and distinguishes it from the unimaginable infinity of God who contains beginning and end at once in his timeless embrace.”<sup>292</sup>

To say that God is in Himself perfect donation and return is to say that He is a fullness of dynamism. Yet, this dynamism is not the movement from potentiality to actuality, as is found in created being. God is infinite act - there is no potentiality in Him. Once again, in the words of Bentley-Hart:

God’s infinitely accomplished life of love is that Trinitarian movement of his being that is infinitely determinate – as determinacy toward the other – and so an indestructible *actus purus* endlessly more dynamic than any mere motion of change could ever be.”<sup>293</sup>

Two conclusions seem to emerge out of the foregoing meditation upon theological transcendence. In the first place, the tradition of Judaeo-Christian thought, when using the word ‘being’, maintained from early on that this word should most properly only be used when speaking of God.<sup>294</sup> In comparison to the thought of late antiquity, the theological notion of transcendence is therefore a thought of being’s splendid otherness: God is being - only in absolute dependence on and in reference to God can “being” be used when speaking of finite creation. Secondly, a theological thought of transcendence is, moreover, a thought of God as *infinite* being. Elaboration of this notion forces one into the realm of negative language: there is no potency in God - there is no beginning or end, there is no succession or extension, there is, indeed, no negation. A foray into positive affirmation would have one say that God is the eternal now, but this formulation would then have to be carefully explained in view of the criticism against a metaphysics of presence, which forms an important background to this study. God’s eternal “nowness” should only be

---

<sup>292</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 193. Time and space would thus belong to the distance and relationship of diastema, which is proper to finite, created being (see n. 17 above).

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.* p. 167.

<sup>294</sup> “In the strictest sense, theology can use a word like *ousia* of God alone,” *Ibid.* p. 252. Cf. Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, p. 20.

understood together with His transcendence, to such an extent that He is not an ontic being amongst beings that subsequently forms the centrepiece of a metaphysical montage. Furthermore, God's transcendent infinity is not a formless infinity to the effect that it would be indistinguishable from a void or a *nihil*. On the contrary, God's transcendence is infinitely *formosus* – “the supereminent fullness of all form”<sup>295</sup> - it is infinite beauty - beauty that does not encounter any boundaries. Thus only can it be said that God is infinite now.

Having explored the notion of theological transcendence as it emerged from the confluence of Judaeo-Christian and Greek thought, we are now in a position to contemplate the notion of immanence and, subsequently, of transcendence in immanence. The development of a notion of theological transcendence as being's splendid otherness - an otherness not in need of definition or supplementation by finitude - also enabled a thought of radical immanence to emerge. The important point here is once again that there is no dialectical necessity between transcendence and immanence. Within Christian theology, finite creation is radically contingent - it does not have to be there. The fact that it exists at all and that it keeps on existing from moment to moment is solely by the grace of God's delight. It is precisely in order to further emphasise this point that Bentley-Hart seeks to recover the notion of delight for theology: the being of creation is in essence God's pleasure. Created being exists because it pleases God that it is there. “The Bible ... depicts creation at once as a kind of deliberative invention ('let us make...') and, consequently as a kind of artistry for the sake of artistry.”<sup>296</sup> God's relationship to creation is one of love, but precisely also that love which is a delighting, a taking pleasure in. And this love, which is delight, evokes a reciprocal love of delight in and desire for God in creation. Whereas God's love and desire is infinite (although also infinitely dynamic in the *perichoresis* of the Trinity), finite creation's desire for God manifests itself in a journey of change into an ever more encompassing participation in God's glory.

Therefore, in terms of this understanding, transcendence pertains to God, and immanence to creation - while God is infinite being, creation is the realm of finitude

---

<sup>295</sup> Ibid. p. 177.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid. 251.

and becoming. In Heideggerian terms<sup>297</sup>, while God is being, creation is the expression of God's being in beings (the difference between being and beings certainly not being thought of in Heideggerian terms as some kind of necessity). As will become apparent below, such an understanding of creation allows for a positive embrace of difference, change and finitude. However, the notion of transcendence in immanence first has to be investigated.

While being radically contingent, creation as God's creation still, in some respects, shares in the being of God. Patristic theology sought to understand this mystery in terms of the Trinity. If the Trinity is understood as the expression by the Father of the fullness of Himself in the person of the Son – this expression being in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and the Son giving himself back to the Father fully – once again in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, then creation must be understood as a contingent, non-necessary expression within this infinite movement of the Trinity. Because the Son is the full expression of the Father, he is also called the Logos. And precisely because creation is also an expression of God's love, it happens through the Logos, the second person of the Trinity. According to Bentley-Hart:

“In creation God, who is never without his Word, nevertheless utters himself ‘outward’ to that which has being only because God's address can never be without reply (Isa. 55:11)”.<sup>298</sup>

Creation, then, is not alien to that infinite address within the Trinity that is God Himself - it is an utterance outwards, a making into finitude (and therefore a *kenosis*) of that same address. Understood in this sense, the being of creation can be said to participate in God. Created being in some mysterious way, really share in God's being. In this regard, God's transcendence may be said to inhabit finite creation.

Having said this, a theological notion of transcendence in immanence must be carefully guarded against misunderstanding in two respects. On the one hand, transcendence in immanence cannot be wed to a notion of being as univocal, that is,

---

<sup>297</sup> Expressed in Heideggerian terms, but of course not according to Heidegger's thought. According to Heidegger, God is the highest ontic being, and not being itself. Just like Kant Heidegger restricted God to the terrain of theology, a defined field within the ontic.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.* 252.

as having the same character and nature uniformly. Should this happen, the radical transcendence of God would be compromised, and theology would be in danger of thinking an ontic God – merely the highest being amongst beings. On the other hand, transcendence in immanence can also not be a thought of the radical equivocality of being. If this were the case, God would be wholly transcendent and, in a sense, wholly absent, which would in effect be the same as having a totally immanent reality. It is therefore precisely in response to the experience of transcendence in immanence, and as a refining of the intellectual labour of patristic theology, that the notion of the analogy of being came to be used in the high scholastic theology of Thomas Aquinas, even if the term itself may not have been used explicitly. In analogical thought, the participation of beings in being – the kinship, as it were, of beings to being is affirmed, while at the same time maintaining the even greater dissimilarity between beings and being as the never quantifiable interval between the finite and the infinite.

According to Bentley-Hart, God is in Himself already somehow analogous: the coincidence in God of mediacy and immediacy, image and difference (in the perichoretic relationship between the persons of the Trinity) is the “proportion” in which every finite interval somehow, infinitely remotely, participates.<sup>299</sup> Thus, the entirety of the world, in all its irreducible diversity, should be viewed as an analogical expression (at a distance, in a different register) of the dynamism and differentiation which characterise God.<sup>300</sup>

What has been affirmed here in more theological terms was, in chapter two of this study, described more philosophically. Salient points made there can now merely be restated. In the first place, the analogy of being (or an analogical understanding of the relationship between being and beings) can be described in terms of the distinction between existence and essence. In God, there is no distinction between existence and essence. God is what He is essentially. This means that, apart from being existence itself, God is also all predications of being in His own being. He is goodness itself, truth itself, beauty itself. The fact that in God, existence and

---

<sup>299</sup> Ibid. p. 186.  
<sup>300</sup> Ibid. p. 192.



essence coincide, means that God is infinitely determinate. He contains all difference in Himself in a parataxis of endless peace.

Whereas the being of God is a real identity of essence and existence, finite creation and all finite creatures are characterised by a real distinction between essence and existence. To speak of the essence of a creature would be one way of saying that in its unique *haecceitas*, it participates in transcendent being, and is thus an “instance” (to risk speaking in a reified manner) of transcendence in immanence. That a creature at any given moment never fully inhabits its own essence is an indication of its creaturely finitude: it is not itself transcendent, but in its participation in the divine transcendent, it is itself precisely immanent. In the words of Bentley-Hart:

“... the matter of greatest importance here is the distinction thus preserved between the God who possesses – who *is* – the fullness of the divine and the creature who participates in the divine: for the latter there must always be – even within its relation to its own essence – a real distinction between subject and object, motion and motion’s aim, ecstasy and form, participation and ‘substance.’ This is the nature of contingency...”<sup>301</sup>

In a following section of this chapter, the nature of contingency within the context of theological transcendence in immanence will be investigated further, together with the implications that this has for the notions of space and time. At present, and in closing this section, attention must be drawn to another characteristic of theological analogy, which was highlighted in chapter two.

Aquinas, in applying Aristotle’s distinctions regarding analogy, found the analogy of attribution useful for explaining the participation of immanent being in divine transcendence. From a certain perspective, that analogy with which all finite being participates in divine being is the analogy of attribution. This is so because the term “being” can most properly be used only of God. To the extent that it has being, finite being participates in God. In chapter two of this study, it was noted in this regard that the analogy of attribution, when used theologically, cannot refer to a *tertium*

---

<sup>301</sup> Ibid. p. 203.

*comparationis*, as if God, as well as creaturely being, both share in a more universal category called being. On the other hand, the transcendent otherness of God, whereby he is also infinitely more than finite creation, must also be protected. To this effect, another notion of analogy – analogy of proportion – has to be inserted *within* the analogy of attribution, thereby modifying it radically. The analogy of proportion understands the relationship of being to beings as a proportion of mutual otherness. There is proportion, but it is never quantifiable - every similarity is at the same time inhabited by an even greater dissimilarity. Taken together, these two notions of analogy once again point not to mere univocity, nor to mere equivocity, but precisely to transcendence in immanence. The remainder of this chapter further examines the notion of theological transcendence in immanence - firstly by seeking to apply it to the related issues of semiosis and contingent change, and secondly, by examining the implications it has for understanding how space and time can be embodied in certain practices.

### **4.3 A semiology deriving from theological transcendence in immanence**

An important thrust of Jacques Derrida's earlier work seems to have been to show how a certain notion of the sign has been drafted into the service of a metaphysics of presence. The operation of a metaphysics of presence is such that under its sway, every framework – be it cultural, philosophical or religious - is organised around a principle of presence. Everything is hierarchically arranged according to its proximity to, or role in, upholding the principle of presence. It also follows that certain other entities are rejected, subjugated, ostracised and negated because they are deemed to be far away from, or inimical to, the identified principle of presence. According to Derrida, the way in which signs were conceptualised from the beginning in Western thought testifies to such a metaphysics of presence. A sign is needed when the "thing" itself is not present. A sign must uphold presence in the absence of what should, by rights, have been present. According to Derrida, the opposition between presence and absence works itself out in the division of the sign into two hierarchically arranged "faces." On the one hand, there is the signified face of the sign. This is the ideal meaning content that is to be presented by the sign. On the other hand, there is the signifier, which is the material vehicle that merely supports

the ideal meaning content. Within the material signifier, another hierarchical opposition emerges: that between a phonic signifier that is in close proximity to ideal experience, and a written signifier that is not close to immediate experience and can therefore only have a secondary and derived function. What in fact happens, according to Derrida, is that the necessity to make binary hierarchical oppositions never ends, because full presence can never be attained or protected. There is always a lack of fullness that needs to be supplemented. Within this situation, Derrida advances a thought of contamination - a thought of presence irrevocably inhabited by absence. Derrida argues that form and content cannot be separated watertightly, that there is no complete separation between signifier and signified, and also that there is no watertight separation to be made between phonic and written signifiers. The materiality of a signifier expresses meaning in its, as it were, horizontal movement towards another signifier. There is no separate, "vertical" reference to an immaterial, ideal signified. Signification should be thought from within the logic of the trace. The trace is never pure presence, as it is a "mere" trace that "is" "here" at the moment. On the other hand, the trace is not absence either: there "is" precisely a trace. From within the logic of the trace, the sign can no longer be in service of a metaphysics of presence.

In chapter two of this study, it was argued that a metaphysics of presence can and should indeed be roundly criticised. Whereas a different genealogy of the advent of spatialised fixation was proposed, the absolute undesirability of a metaphysics of presence, as manifested in much of modernist thought, was endorsed. The question that this section now seeks to answer is whether or not a notion of theological transcendence in immanence is also able to provide an alternative notion of signification, one that would testify to an alternative to a metaphysics of spatialised presence.

Speaking of signification and the semiotic process comes naturally to a theological notion of transcendence in immanence. As has been mentioned in the first part of this chapter, to speak of God as Trinity is to invoke thoughts of communication. Thus, in his eternal generation, the Son is the image of God the Father. He is the expression of the fullness of the Father, while yet being the Son and not the Father. In the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the Son gives himself back to the Father, but

through the Spirit, this giving back is a non-identical return. Using the language of seriality and temporality (analogically), it would be as if the non-identical return of the Son to the Father in the Spirit were a further inflection of God's infinite fullness. In fact, the self-expression of the Father is also in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the fullness of God's self-communication in the eternal life of the trinity is, in the words of Bentley-Hart, "never merely the reflex of the Same but the fullness of reply, in all the richness and dilatory excess of the language of love[;] the Spirit eternally remodulates the divine distance..."<sup>302</sup>.

What meditating upon God's life as Trinity allows us to glimpse, therefore, is a notion of non-identical repetition that is not negative – an instance of lack in need of supplementation – but where each repetition (or response) is rather another modulation within God's infinite fullness. Within the Trinity there is difference and distance; there is communication, but this communication does not arise out of some kind of lack or absence - it is the infinite dynamism of giving and giving again with another inflection, and of receiving the same in a different manner. Once again, Bentley-Hart says the following: "... one may speak of God as a God who is, in himself, always somehow analogous; the coincidence in God of mediacy and immediacy, image and difference, is the 'proportion' that makes every finite interval a possible disclosure – a tabernacle – of God's truth."<sup>303</sup>

From the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence, signification within finitude cannot be thought independent of the infinite signification in God. In fact, creation may in some sense be said to be part of that signification. As has already been mentioned, creation must be understood as the same Word that the Father utters in the Son, but now as a word *ad extra*. It is a word that is not inside the economy of the Trinity, as it is a creation, an artefact, and yet – precisely because it is uttered by God – not alien to God. The notion of theological transcendence in immanence enables finite creation to be taken as a sign because it participates at an analogical remove in the communication of love, which is God. Every finite

---

<sup>302</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 184.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.* p. 186.

constellation is therefore in principle a constellation of meaning.<sup>304</sup> However, in speaking of meaning here, one must be careful not to lapse into the mode of speaking of a metaphysics of presence. To say that a finite constellation “is” a constellation of meaning should not be to say that finite meaning can be fixed or definitively described.

Only an ontology working with the absolute separation of transcendence and immanence can assume that meaning can be fixed and stabilised. While arguing for God’s transcendent otherness, the notion of theological transcendence in immanence is, however, precisely not a thought of the separation of transcendence and immanence. The transcendent is *in* the immanent - the immanent partakes of the transcendent. This would imply, then, that every constellation of meaning, while genuinely expressing something, is also, at the same time, genuinely open to further inflection. Meaning is not fixed, but is open for growth, and in that sense, final closure is always deferred. Because the transcendent, which pervades the immanent, is an infinite transcendent, every finite constellation, while genuinely participating in the communication that is the transcendent in the immanent, can never fix that communication, but needs to be open to further inflection, modulation and non-identical repetition.

As has been stated before, a finite creature always finds itself with a real distinction between its existence and its essence. It exists - it has finite boundaries, but these boundaries are always only relatively stable. Because a finite being participates in the infinite transcendent, its being is always ecstatic - its essence is always ahead of itself. It is on its way to its essence, as if somehow it would ever be possible to attain the fullness of God. The same ecstatic conception of meaning should also be applied to the philosophical category of substance:

“All creation declares God’s glory, and so should be understood not simply according to a logic of substances, but first as a free and flowing succession of *semeia*, within which ‘substances’ are constituted as the relative stability of

---

<sup>304</sup> This is not to say that there are not many instances of meaninglessness in creation. Theology, however, maintains that the presence of meaninglessness and of evil does not belong to creation constitutionally, but is a result of the contingent presence of evil as a corruption of the created goodness and beauty of creation.

the 'notes' or 'moments' that the whole discourse (the Logos) calls forth; being as a kind of cogent rhetoric."<sup>305</sup>

What holds for finite substances as relatively stable constellations or moments within an ongoing discourse is equally true of the relations or intervals between these moments. The relations between finite entities are all relations, at an analogical remove, of the relations of infinite peace, joy and love that exist in God. When a relation is reconfigured differently, this does not have to be interpreted as ontological violence. Rather, the giving way of a constellation of meaning into a new ordering may always be understood from a broader horizon of interpretation, or a higher vantage point, or even a narrower context, as a harmonious interval. In other words, the proportion between the constellations may always be sought out. And the proportion always exists, first and foremost because God is a God of harmony, but then also precisely because He is a God of *infinite* harmony. As an analogical expression of the infinite being of God, no interval can be deemed violent.<sup>306</sup> In attempting to explain the harmony of analogous proportion, Bentley-Hart uses the image of Baroque art. As the detail in an architectural edifice is incessantly re-articulated in smaller, yet proportionate details, as a theme in a Bach fugue is re-articulated in a different register again and again, so difference in creation may be taken to be the non-identical repetition that strives in its moving forward to express – once again *per impossible* – the infinite glory of God.

The analogical sign can never be a fixated sign. Transcendence in immanence means that every finite constellation is transcended - it is open and on the move, it is ecstatic. In the same way that the relation between transcendence and immanence can never be quantified, the meaning of the analogical sign can never be fixed. In the same way that transcendence and immanence cannot, in the creaturely realm, be separated radically – precisely because it is transcendence *in* immanence, a watertight distinction cannot be made in the analogical sign between a material signifier and an immaterial, ideal meaning content. Translating what has been said

---

<sup>305</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 208.

<sup>306</sup> Unless, of course, it is the contingent brokenness of evil that spreads its meaninglessness throughout all relations and intervals. This is contingent; it does not have to be so, and – so Christian theology maintains – in principle, it has been undone in the incarnation of the Son of God in the life and passion of Jesus Christ.

here in a theological mode as it were back into the more traditional semiological fields of linguistics and hermeneutics may imply that every act of reading or interpretation, at its deepest level, should be viewed as a liturgical act. To point to the immersion of every semiotic act in the immanent ebb and flood of language, as is fashionable in much of postmodern theory, may not be the only avenue of opposition to the modernist separation of an all-powerful, knowing subject and a field of knowledge spread out before it. There is no compelling reason why the fixation wrought by modernist spatialisation may not just as well be overcome by situating the reader and the text, the sign and its meaning, within a liturgical process - that is, a process of *anaphoresis*, a process of approaching the transcendent in worship, a process that never ends.<sup>307</sup>

Using the traditional language of Christian theology, the human soul may be said to be a particularly significant manifestation of the meaning expressed by finite creation. Whereas creation in its being is an answer to God's expression of love and delight and therefore is meaning, it is with the creation of humanity that the articulation of this meaning attains a particular depth and splendour. The following quotation from David S. Toolan (in his turn using the language of evolutionary physics and biology) illustrates this point succinctly:

“The dizzy subatomic particle-waves spinning wildly out of the big bang didn't know what to make of themselves at first ..., but the initial conditions were such that as they joined forces, split and joined again and again and again, corralling energy from atoms, galactic clusters, molecules, chains of inorganic and organic compounds, simple life forms – and on and on to *homo sapiens* - they were implicitly carving out an inside, an interior to ferry and hold the energy of their Initial Conditioner – the message of the Original Dispatcher who set them loose in the first place and never ceases to sustain the diversifying process forward. From the very beginning the trouble was that quarks, atomic nuclei, molecules, plants, and bacteria, as finely woven as they are, could contain only so much of the divine energy field. It came across like

---

<sup>307</sup> Peter Candler has demonstrated this point with regard to the narrower field of Biblical hermeneutics, but there is no intrinsic inhibition to its being broadened into a wider semiological perspective. See Peter M. Candler jr. *Theology, rhetoric, manuduction – or reading Scripture together on the path to God*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

static; no clear message... Only with the emergence of the species homo sapiens did you have the complex hardwiring – nervous system and brain – that could possibly tune in to the Cosmic Mind and thus become mindful of the meaning of things.”<sup>308</sup>

In the human soul, created being has an “inside,” a “relatively stable substance” where the echoing of the God-sound in creation finds a particularly meaningful resonance. Bentley-Hart, interpreting Gregory of Nyssa, says that the particular meaningfulness of the soul lies in its traversal of all the *semeia* of being.<sup>309</sup> The soul, in other words, passes along all the diverse constellations of meaning that is creation, and articulates them in its consciousness. This is what it means that the soul in particular is the *imago Dei*, the image of God. However, because finite being participates in the being of God (analogically, that is, also within an ever greater difference), the articulation of the meaning of being will never cease. Thus, Gregory proposes the image of the human soul as being somewhat like an ever-expanding container. As it journeys across the infinite arrangement of meaning constellations that is the expression of God’s glory, the soul keeps on expanding – journeying ever deeper into God, though never itself ceasing to be finite and creaturely.<sup>310</sup>

The semiology proposed here springs from and is imbedded in the tradition of Christian thought. As such, it can never stand on its own. In one way or another, the reality of meaninglessness, violence, miscommunication and evil has to be dealt with. To develop the Christian doctrine of evil and redemption falls outside the scope of this study. For the purposes of this section on semiology, it is sufficient to remember that the gospel of Jesus Christ may be understood as a re-issuing of God’s word of creation. If creation, being completely contingent and unnecessary, has also contingently become corrupt and prone to evil, then the life and work of Jesus Christ may be taken to be a word of repair and healing - a word of return to God. The doctrine of the two natures of Christ states that Christ is the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Logos and Son, and at the same time, the finite human being Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, in Christ, transcendence in immanence finds

---

<sup>308</sup> David S. Toolan, S.J. “Praying in a Post-Einsteinian Universe” In: *Cross Currents*, Fall 1996.

<sup>309</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 209.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, p. 42, 43.



its true and highest manifestation. In the words of Bentley-Hart: “Only in Christ...has this ordering of the finite toward the infinite perfectly occurred; only here is the true image of God and the true form of the creature entirely given; but the Holy Spirit is able always to bring all natures into conformity with that love, to reconcile them to the infinite according to the salvation Christ has wrought, and to fashion in them anew the beauty for which they were created.”<sup>311</sup>

Therefore, everything that has been said of the analogical signification effected by finite creation must be said *a fortiori* and *de jure* primarily of Christ. Christ is the analogical sign through whom finite creation finds its signification again. The journey of the human soul, as a traversal of all the *semeia* of creation, is thus also a journey in the Holy Spirit to be formed and re-formed according to the form of Christ.

The proposal of a non-fixated semiology stemming from the notion of theological transcendence in immanence may achieve greater clarity if, in conclusion of this section, it is again explicitly placed alongside the deconstructive semiology proposed by Derrida. In opposition to a conception of the sign organised around a logic of presence, Derrida proposes a semiology of contamination: in its presencing, every sign is contaminated by an irrevocable absence. The sign is a bastard son, not faithfully representing his father. There is always a lack – the fullness of presence is not fully represented. This is a constitutive deficiency due to absolute temporality. Signification, therefore, is not something other than the becoming space of time and the becoming time of space. There is no separate realm of ideal meaning that must be represented. The notion of signification that thus appears is of some constellation of meaning that emerges from a sublime absence, wavers for a brief moment within the realm of being, without being able to be definitively fixed, as it is determined by its absent past, and then transforms into another, completely unforeseen constellation of meaning. As has been observed, there are obvious correspondences between such a conception of signification in Derrida, and the ontological framework proposed by Heidegger, the modification by Derrida deriving from his contamination of the present from an absolute past, whereas Heidegger sees the present as being determined from the absolute limit of the future.

---

<sup>311</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 209.

In contrast to the contamination of the present by an absolute past or future, theological transcendence in immanence proposes the “contamination” of the present by a deeper, transcendent *presence* - the presence of the infinite. As has been mentioned before, within the Christian metaphysical tradition, as articulated by Gregory of Nyssa, God’s infinity means that He is the perfect completeness of what He is. God is without opposition, and He is therefore beyond non-being or negation, transcendent of all composition or antinomy. The logical implication, which Gregory also draws, is that God is beyond all temporal and spatial distinctions. God is without extension or succession: “here”, “there”, “past”, “present” (understood as a discrete moment) and “future” do not pertain to him.<sup>312</sup>

In opposition to an “ontic” semiology that wants to fixate meaning within the realm of the ontic present, theological transcendence in immanence proposes an ontic present that is inhabited and pervaded by an always greater transcendent presence. This is the transcendence of infinite being towards which all finite meaning constellations are always open. The signification proposed by theological transcendence in immanence is therefore always provisional - always open to difference and deferral, and always ecstatic. The eccentricity of the sign does not, within this conception, however, pertain to the flow of an absolutely immanent temporality (which is the transcendence of temporality), but to the participation of immanent finitude in the always greater otherness of divine transcendence. Heidegger was aware of this option (as, doubtlessly, was Derrida ), but he rejected it on methodological grounds.<sup>313</sup> As will be argued in the final chapter of this study, there are, however, no compelling methodological reasons for rejecting a semiology that understands every present finite constellation of meaning as open in its participation with the infinite. Whereas signification within the Derridean understanding implies a kind of meaningless meaning – every meaning is inhabited by the *nihil* – signification within a scheme of theological transcendence in immanence actually appreciates every definite meaning, even within its

---

<sup>312</sup> Ibid. p. 193.

<sup>313</sup> “If time finds its meaning in eternity, then it must be understood starting from eternity. The point of departure and path of this inquiry are thereby indicated in advance: from eternity to time. This way of posing the question is fine, provided we have the aforementioned point of departure at our disposal, that is, that we are acquainted with eternity and adequately understand it.” (Martin Heidegger. *The Concept of Time*, trans. W. McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). 1E.

provisionality. Whereas a specific meaning constellation may not be the final word on anything, it nevertheless constitutes a moment in the traversal by finite being of infinite being's splendour. As such, it is infinitely worthwhile and meaningful. Furthermore, whereas a semiology deriving from the notion of temporal transcendence has no use for the category of the beautiful, a semiology of theological transcendence in immanence may appreciate proportion within relative stable constellations of meaning, and also appreciate transformations as harmonious intervals, that is, as meaningful.

#### **4.4 Space, time and change**

In chapter three of this study, it was noted that Derrida positions himself within a certain problematic raised in Husserlian phenomenology. I am referring to the problematic of the relationship between genesis and truth. On the one hand, the eidetic reduction brackets out all reference to external reality and focuses on the essence of the transcendental object as it appears in consciousness. This is an ideal essence, i.e. infinitely repeatable in transcendental consciousness. On the other hand, there is the transcendental flow of temporality within which every eidetic essence appears. But how can a stable essence be fixed within the interminable flow of temporality? The thrust of Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl is to argue that there is simply no stable, ideal essence to be safeguarded in order to allow for a perfect repetition at some later stage. Derrida subsequently takes his deconstructed understanding of the dynamic of what happens in consciousness, strips it of its phenomenological guise, and presents an ontological claim: what we have is the infinite finitude of temporality. All that there "is" is the radically immanent process of spacing - the becoming space of time (as a certain constellation achieves relative stability), and – what has always already started - the becoming time of space (the relatively stable constellation bears the seeds of its own demise in itself and is always already anticipating its other). The "other" of the infinite finitude of temporality is, precisely, a temporal other. It is the absolute past inhabiting every present - the messianic as the absolute future to be awaited. As was pointed out at the end of the previous chapter, in a manner of speaking, it is transcendence in

immanence that is presented here – the transcendence of a radically immanent temporality.

Clearly, the strong point of temporal transcendence in immanence is the appreciation it has for change and for the different, the non-identical. It is an ontology that tries to limit the violence supposedly wrought by identity through the counter-violence of the deconstruction of every proposed stability. But what is the nature of this change? Can anything be said of this change, apart from the naked event of its happening? The point that Derrida seems to make with regard to change is that it is without a goal or destination. Change happens, and the only meaning there is to it lies internally, in the event of the change which is happening. Change does not necessarily lead to anything better or, for that matter, worse. In the course of his critique of the phonic sign, which is in the service of a metaphysics of presence, Derrida mentions that the signification that emerges out of the deconstruction of Presence is in a mode of non-linearity. According to him, the linear is complicit in a metaphysics of Presence, precisely because a metaphysics of presence sees one thing as leading to another; one thing as building on another, all the while more and more approximating presence. In a telling few pages of *Grammatology*, Derrida pleads for a de-sedimentation of four thousand years of linear writing, in order to remember a writing:

“that spells its symbols pluri-dimensionally; there the meaning is not subjected to successivity, to the order of a logical time, or to the irreversible temporality of sound... [T]he word history has no doubt always been associated with a linear scheme of the unfolding of presence, where the line relates the final presence to the originary presence according to the straight line or the circle. For the same reason, the pluri-dimensional symbolic structure is not given within the category of the simultaneous. Simultaneity coordinates two absolute presents, two points or instants of presence, and it remains a linearist concept.<sup>314</sup>

---

<sup>314</sup> *Of Grammatology*, p. 85.

Thus, the absolutely immanent temporal flux is associated with non-linear change, that is, change that happens in any direction or dimension. Earlier in this study, the Deleuzian metaphor of rhizomatic change was used to attempt to understand the change that Derrida has in mind. A rhizome can develop in any direction or in many directions at once. Having said that, what should be kept in mind when using this metaphor is that the rhizome itself does not remain as a stable base from where the roots are sent out in every direction. The rhizome itself does not remain identical to itself over time.

In the previous two sections of this chapter, it has already been argued that a theological notion of transcendence in immanence is not uncongenial to change and difference. Talk of a dialectical opposition between the same and the different, the one and the many has no place within Christian thought. To speak of God as Trinity is to speak of a difference that does not flow from any prior unity. God is three persons and yet one being, and in the divine *perichoresis*, the co-inherence of the Father in the Son, and the Son in the Father through the Spirit, there is difference and yet the unity of one divine being. Furthermore, Christian theology confesses the being of God to be infinite being. This implies that the dynamic self-expression of the Father in the Son and the giving Himself back of the Son in the Spirit is an infinite dynamic of non-identical presence - *Deus semper maior*. Within the being of God, there is always greater depth of mystery, always more unencountered glories (to speak from the vantage point of finite creation). Thus, if finite, created being participates analogically (that is, always at an unquantifiable interval of ever greater difference) in the being of God, it should be very much open to difference. Created being can never lock identity down, thereby foreclosing the journey of a being into further reflections of God's infinite glory. As has already been mentioned, Gregory of Nyssa, for example, conceived of finite change as created being's traversal of the infinite being of God. For classical thought, upon which Gregory builds, the concept of change was closely associated with the concept of motion. And, far from being an unimportant indicator, as it is within a modernist, Newtonian worldview, the concept of motion in antiquity was multi-layered and full of meaning. We now move to a brief exploration of this notion, the aim being to determine the implications for the meaning of space and time within an ontology of theological transcendence in immanence.

From the vantage point of theological transcendence in immanence, finite motion is not discrete, self-explanatory or trivial, compared to, for example, the “laws” governing force and acceleration. In addition, in contrast to the change presented by Derridean temporal transcendence in immanence, motion, from this perspective, is multi-layered and full of meaning. In the first sections of this chapter, it was mentioned that a notion of theological transcendence in immanence refers “being” first and foremost to God. God most properly and essentially exists, while creation in its finitude and radical contingency exists only to the extent that it analogically partakes of the being of God. A similar line is to be taken with regard to the concept of motion. Properly speaking, all motion is analogically related to, and should be referred to, transcendent being.

However, at this point, a question arises. Does the avenue of referring all motion to God not bring us into conflict with God’s complete self-sufficiency – His *apatheia* – as was touched upon earlier in this chapter? Furthermore, Aristotelian metaphysics, to the extent that it is congenial to Christian thought, presents God as the first Unmoved Mover. The Aristotelian principle of causality states that everything that is moved is moved by another, and this causal chain constitutes a hierarchy of motions that culminates in the first Unmoved Mover. In his magisterial synthesis of neo-platonic theology and Aristotelian philosophy, Thomas Aquinas presents a view that attempts to respect divine *apatheia*, while still ultimately referring all motion to God. Aquinas does this by carefully distinguishing the motion within finite creation from the infinite dynamism of the Trinity that is not the same as finite motion. Within God there is no change from potency to act, as He is one and all act. If motion is defined as that which hovers between potency and act and is in a sense the transition from potency to act, then, of course, there is no motion in God. On the other hand, there is the infinite self donation of God in the shared knowledge and love of the persons of the trinity which, in a sense, constitutes a motion. Simon Oliver notes that Aquinas mediates between these understandings by sometimes referring to the dynamism in God in terms of Aristotelian *energeia*, which is a constant operation that does not involve the transfer from potentiality to actuality.<sup>315</sup> The point is, then, that

---

<sup>315</sup> Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 116.

a theological notion of transcendence in immanence can refer all motion ultimately to God, while still maintaining the utter contingency and non-necessity of finite motion to the life of God.

In his discussion of the appropriation of the classical Greek notion of *diastema* by the Church Fathers, Andrew Louth makes a similar point.<sup>316</sup> The term ‘diastema’, probably originally Aristotelian, has the implication of “interval or “extension.” This is characteristic of everything that changes and is subject to becoming. On the one hand, *diastema* distinguishes one thing from another – it is the discreteness of one thing from another. On the other hand, it also refers to any distance or extension and the capacity to move across such a distance. This is not merely to be understood in physical terms: *diastema* may also indicate the discursive “distance” covered in the movement from the premises to the conclusion of an argument. *Diastema* is characteristic of everything that belongs to the realm of change and becoming. Thus, it makes possible the “space” required for relationship (in every sense, not just geometrical), including the “space” that exists between human beings.

If *diastema* is the notion of finitude thought in terms of space, it is also the same notion thought in terms of time. In the words of Andrew Louth, the notion of *diastema* includes:

“... the time through which the sequences of the seasons pass, the succession of years, the movement from day to night and night from day, but it includes other experiences of time: the time through which human beings pass from birth, through infancy, and childhood, to maturity, and then on to death; the time through which our ideas, thoughts, feelings, relationships pass.”

Thus, *diastema* refers to finitude and the discreteness of relatively stable substances, as well as to notions of time and space as traversal, which emerge within such a realm of becoming. The Church Fathers, being exponents of early

---

<sup>316</sup> Andrew Louth, “Space, Time and the Liturgy,” In: Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds.) *Encounter between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy* (London: Ashgate, 2009), p. 217.

Christian theology, understood the notion of *diastema* within the context of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. For them, *diastema* characterises the realm of creation, in distinction from God, who is being itself. Within God there is no *diastema*, and yet there is the fullness of relation. This is the relation expressed by the notion of *perichoresis*. Von Balthasar emphasises the novelty, or at least the *Wendung* that Christian theology brought with regard to the reception of Greek thought concerning time and finitude:

“Gregory of Nyssa, therefore, brings an absolutely new element to the problem by interpreting time as the very sign of the creature and thus of the fundamental passivity of created being. In this way the three elements of the Greek philosophy of time find themselves profoundly modified. The Stoic *diastema* becomes an ontological concept that designates a being that is not identical to itself, a being that is in some way torn apart, divided from itself. Plotinus’ ontological time aptly maintains its character of restlessness and of tense vitality but is more pronounced in its orientation toward the indigence, the poverty, the insufficiency of the creature. Circular time is finally stripped of its infinite, eternal radiance. To the contrary, the circle becomes the symbol of finitude. The circuit is followed only one time. Once it has arrived at its end term, the created being reaches at the same time the goal of its existence. It dies, it does away with itself.”<sup>317</sup>

What emerges from this discussion is that from the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence, motion is at once that which distinguishes the transcendent divine from created immanence, *and* that which allows for immanence to be intimately bound up with transcendence. On the one hand, there is the relation of distinctness between the realm of being and that of becoming. In God, there is no distinction between potency and act, and in that sense, there is no becoming. God is infinite being in His simplicity, unchangeableness and eternity. On the other hand, it is precisely because of the relation of divine transcendence in creaturely immanence that there can be finite motion at all.

---

<sup>317</sup> Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, p. 33, n.46.



In the previous section, change was explained in terms of Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of the traversal of the infinite by the finite. The same point may now be made with reference to Thomas Aquinas' use of the concepts of emanation and causality. Emanation, according to Aquinas, refers to the active self-expression of a nature in relation to others in the production of another self.<sup>318</sup> Perfect emanation happens only in God, whose intellect and act of understanding is identical with his being. God's understanding and intellect are identical with His essence.<sup>319</sup> In Trinitarian terms, perfect divine emanation may be described as the Father who expresses His self-knowledge in Himself, and as the Son, who is expressed or conceived as the self-knowledge of the Father. God's knowledge coincides with His being, and this is infinite and perfect. In a sense, therefore, all things are held as what they are first and foremost in God's self-knowledge. All things, even that which would at some stage become finite creation, are contained first and foremost in the mind of God as part of the divine self-knowledge. Then, according to His grace and free will, God grants being to these ideas of finitude, thereby creating a creation that is not God, and that is yet, as we have seen, not alien to the being of God.

Within the creation that emanates from God there exists a hierarchy, which is not to say that some parts of creation have in themselves less being, or are in some way evil due to their position in the hierarchy of being. The notion of a hierarchy of being is simply a way to deal with the experience of difference and change within the realm of becoming - a way, as will become apparent, that allows for a richer and deeper intimation of meaning in the experience of change. Accordingly, Aquinas suggests a hierarchy of emanation within creation based on the discreteness of emanation or, in other words, the ability to make a communication of oneself without losing the self.<sup>320</sup> Highest with regard to the perfectness of their self-communication are the spiritual substances or angels. They are purely intellectual beings who know themselves through themselves, and concomitantly do not require any sense perception. Human beings are likewise able to reflect on themselves and to thereby produce an emanation of themselves in other selves. The human intellect is capable of self-knowledge and understanding. Yet, unlike the angels, humans must first venture

---

<sup>318</sup> Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion*, p. 111.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.* p. 112.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.* p. 111.

outside of themselves in order to receive sense perception, before they can arrive at self-knowledge.

Animals have sense perceptions as well, which come to reside in their memories, but they are unable to be self-reflective and to form a self-image. Below animals are plants, which have even less capacity for self-communication, even though, as living beings, they are able to move within themselves towards some form. The lowest form of emanation is ascribed to inanimate bodies. The only way in which their nature can be procreated is through the external action of one upon another - for example, a fire acts upon a combustible object and produces another fire.<sup>321</sup>

Crucially, the emanative act of creation, whereby creation participates analogically in the creative act of God, would be incomplete without considering the non-identical return in God that all created being likewise participates in. In the Holy Spirit, the Father's self-knowledge in the Son also becomes willed or desired knowledge in the Son's giving back of Himself to the Father. In the words of Simon Oliver:

“[C]oupled to the emanation of the Word must be a love whereby the lover dwells in the beloved, both in God's knowing and in that which is known. The love by which God is in the divine will as a lover in the beloved proceeds both from the Word of God and the God whose Word he is. It is as if the Father is the lover and the Son the beloved, but immediately and in eternity this is returned so the Son is the lover and the Father the beloved. This introduces a kind of circular dynamism to the inner divine life which Aquinas refers to as a kind of intellectual 'motion'.”<sup>322</sup>

Therefore, it seems that Aquinas, when speaking of the Holy Spirit, speaks of the divine will, and love and desire, and of the “motion” of a non-identical return within God's infinite life. In this motion, created being participates, and to the extent that finite beings are able to will and love and desire, they find their places in the hierarchy of being. Intellectual natures in particular must possess a will alongside an

---

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. p. 114. Oliver, in the quoted passage, refers to Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV.19.8 & 12.

intellect, because an intellectual nature cannot but desire to know. God's word can never go unanswered, and finite beings, to the extent that they have an inside, a hollowness where God's word can reverberate, are arranged in a hierarchy of being. This once again does not imply that certain beings are further away from God than others - God is equally intimate to all created being, but the manner in which created beings participate in the being of God differ, and allows for the intimation of an innumerable array of proportions and harmonious intervals within creation.

To say that finite creation participates at an analogical remove in the divine act of *creatio* and non-identical return is to hint at a kind of circular movement in the change happening in creation. All created beings are only relatively stable substances that are characterised by an ecstatic striving after the fullness of their being. Discounting for the moment the brokenness and operation of evil in creation, the striving and movement of creatures would then, within the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence, not be neutral or aimless in any direction. On the contrary, in receiving its being as a gift, a creature strives and moves toward the transcendence calling in its own immanence, giving itself back in a non-identical return to the fullness from where it comes, thereby becoming more and more itself in a movement that does not have a fixed terminus. If space and time, in terms of this view, are closely related to *diastema*, and therefore to movement, traversal and change, care should nevertheless be taken not to move too quickly into a quantitative frame of mind. Simon Oliver emphasises this point by noting the following with regard to Aquinas' thought:

“Motion will always, for Aquinas be explained by the intimacy of God, for motion is, as for Plato, the embodiment of that which is known perfectly in eternity. Whereas we tend to imagine motion in terms of ‘towards’ or ‘away’ from something, for Aquinas it seems that motion is more fundamentally understood to take place ‘within’ or ‘enveloped by’ *esse ipsum*.”<sup>323</sup>

The point, however, remains that motion, space and time, precisely because they are referred to transcendent divine being, are oriented towards transcendence,

---

<sup>323</sup> Ibid. p. 104.

which allows for a deeper intimation of meaning, compared to the notion of spacing and temporalization proposed by Derrida. The conclusion that motion is never a nondescript wandering may also be made by studying the so-called motor causality principle proposed by Aristotle and taken over by Aquinas.<sup>324</sup> According to this principle, everything which is moved is moved by another. Thus, whatever is moved requires a mover that is not the same “thing” as that which is moved. To move something, and to be moved by something, are two utterly distinct processes. A mover which is in actuality moves something else that is in potentiality. The same thing cannot be in actuality and potentiality at the same time with regard to the same aspect. Furthermore, actuality must precede potentiality in ontological terms. There must be something in actuality that is able to evoke the movement from potentiality to actuality in something else. In a sense, the principle of *omne quod movetur ab alio movetur* is another way of recognising transcendence in immanence - a recognition that, from the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence, would be another way of talking about creation’s participation – at an analogical remove – in God’s intimacy at every point to His creation. Everywhere, creation manifests analogical participations in the inherence of divine transcendence in creaturely immanence, in this case specifically the transcendent actuality that actualises something that is in potentiality.

The point here with regard to motion and change is, firstly, that motion is not neutral or aimless, and secondly, that a beautiful variety within movement may be intimated. The fact that, according to Aquinas, motion is not neutral, is succinctly demonstrated in his taking over from Aristotle the distinction between natural and violent motions. A natural motion can be described as a movement for which a particular being has a natural receptivity. The motion of a heavy object falling downward is natural, as heavy objects, by their very nature, move downwards. In contrast, a violent motion is one for which a particular being has no innate intention - it may even resist the motion, as witnessed, for example, by a heavy object being lifted upwards.<sup>325</sup> In the case of a violent motion, it is particularly clear that an object is moved by something other than itself. This principle of motion is, however, also applicable in the natural motion of inanimate objects, as well as in the motion of animate beings. While

---

<sup>324</sup> Ibid. p. 90 ff.  
<sup>325</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

animals appear to be self moved, Aristotle-Aquinas maintains the strict distinction between mover and moved by distinguishing different parts in the body of an animal: the legs are the mover, and the remainder of the body is what is being moved.

Higher up in the hierarchy of causality, upon considering the human soul, one may think that one has come across a mover that is not moved by something external. The soul is the mover of the body, but the soul itself – is that not moved by itself? Aquinas replies that the soul has a most fundamental composition by which it is moved, namely the composition of essence and existence.<sup>326</sup> The soul cannot account for its own coming into existence. It does not subsist by itself, but exists by the grace of God, who gives it into being, and who calls the soul back to himself again. Thus, according to Aquinas, the phenomenon of causality can be studied in order to understand something of the perfection of circular motion compared to that, say, of linear motion, as well as to intimate something of the rich diversity of change in creation.

The classical distinction between actuality and potentiality allows for a vivid illustration of the difference between theological transcendence in immanence and temporal transcendence in immanence when placed alongside each other. Whereas Heidegger and Derrida prioritise potentiality over actuality, within a notion of theological transcendence in immanence the actual takes precedence over that which is in potentiality. According to Derrida, an actual constellation is inhabited by the potential to be different – it is never identical to itself. Theological transcendence in immanence, starting with the fullness of the actuality of divine transcendence, is sensitive to the potentiality that is yet to be actualised in every actual finite constellation, to the extent that that constellation is ecstatically on its way to fuller (self) presence. The difference between theological and temporal transcendence in immanence with regard to actuality and potentiality will be discussed again in the final chapter of this study.

This section may be concluded by summarising the characteristics of space and time from the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence. The first point to

---

<sup>326</sup> Ibid. p. 91.

be noted in this regard would be that space and time, like being and change, find their meaning in being referred to divine transcendence. Space and time are realities associated with finitude. The notion of *diastema*, as appropriated within a conception of theological transcendence in immanence, expresses the discreteness of finite substances, as well as the relationship between them and the traversal of the “distance” of that relationship. And so, the meaning constellation of “diastema” comprises at once the notion of discrete substances and the notions of space and time necessary to conceptualise finitude and substantiveness. Significantly, Von Balthasar renders Gregory of Nyssa’s *diastema, inter alia*, with the word ‘spacing’ (*espacement*.) In expounding the concept of diastema in Gregory’s religious philosophy, Von Balthasar also highlights this double connotation, firstly denoting finitude and extension between limits, and secondly as the “receptacle” of all created being, and therefore as space and time as such.<sup>327</sup>

However, *diastema* is inhabited by mystery. There is always more to it than can be grasped. The finitude of *diastema*, with the accompanying understanding of space and time, is inhabited by a transcendence. *Diastema* participates at an analogical remove in the infinite being of divine transcendence. As has already been noted, God’s infinite being is not to be thought in spatial or temporal terms. In Him there is no extension or succession. To speak of God’s simplicity, eternity and *apatheia* would be to imply something like an infinite presence. Yet, space and time are created by God as the reality of finitude - the unquantifiable manifestation of the analogical remove at which created being participates in the being of God. Thus, beings emerge from God into finitude, where they exist as relatively stable substances, and where they change and grow and give themselves back to God in a non-identical return.

Within the tradition of Christian thought, the reality of transcendence in immanence with regard to the meaning of time has been expressed by the taking over from Plato of the notion that time is to be regarded as a moving image of eternity. Time is an expression of the movement whereby created finitude participates in the infinite being of God. It is in its relationality, on the other hand, that space participates in the

---

<sup>327</sup> Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, p. 28-30.

infinite being of God. Whereas Derridean spacing is characterized by a *rappor sans rapport* (à la Levinas), theological transcendence in immanence allows for spatiality to be thought of in terms of innumerable arrangements of peaceful relations within and between constellations. When space and time are taken together (as they should be) as the spacing or temporalisation of every configuration, theological transcendence in immanence would speak of the movement of non-identical repetition or return, which characterises created finitude. Thus, while not being the same, according to the mode of a fixated presence, created beings are also not completely different, in the sense of existing in complete equivocity. Rather, the difference that creatures exhibit from moment to moment and in relation to other creatures manifests an unquantifiable proportionality, which, as such, participates analogically in the proportion between divine transcendence and created immanence.

Thus, finally, what emerges from the discussion in this section is an intimation of the progression of time and the proportionality of space, a progression and a proportionality, moreover, that are mutually interpreting. Within creation there is progression within proportion and proportion within progression. That a being can grow or change and not be the same as it was, while also not being completely different from what it was, testifies to the former. The existence of rhythm, in all its beautiful variety, testifies to the latter. Saying that there is progression within proportion and proportion within progression may be one way of expressing the participation by the realm of becoming in the realm of being or, in other words, it may be an expression of the presence of transcendence in immanence. Furthermore, it should by now be clear that in terms of this view, there is no compelling reason to treat space and time first and foremost as physical realities, thereby relegating other modes of progression and proportionality to the ranks of the “merely” metaphorical. Within any given creaturely constellation – be it animate or inanimate, vegetal, animal or intellectual – the proportion of transcendence in immanence is analogically manifested: the potentiality of a substance for change towards its essence. Equally, in the relation between constellations, the proportion of transcendence in immanence is analogically manifested as the relation between similarity and otherness, intimacy and desire. In any event, distance is not negation.

Within a notion of change, conceptualised as the movement of a non-identical repetition or change, the meaning of space and time emerge as the proportionality of progression and the progressive unfolding of proportionality. In the following section, the ways in which these notions of space and time are embodied will be discussed.

#### 4.5 The practice of progression and proportion

In a sense, Derrida's work is nothing but a continual emphasis on embodiment. Attention is constantly drawn to the ubiquity of contamination. Every constellation comprises an intermingling of the ideal and the material, the signified and the signifier. The Derridean emphasis on embodiment, however, is of a curiously receding nature. An (embodied) meaning constellation is only recognised in its *already being* deconstructed. The presence of absence within every presence results in a constellation only being recognised in the moment of its disintegration and giving way to something radically unforeseen. The image that comes to mind is that of an Antarctic glacier affected by global warming: the front of the glacier is continually eroded backwards up the slope by the warmer waves and atmospheric temperature, even as the ice itself keeps moving forward. Enormous blocks of ice break off and drift away into the ocean, but the glacier itself is not in homeostasis: the emphasis is not so much on new ice forming and moving forward as on the inexorable disintegration and erosion backwards at the front of the glacier. Likewise, the emphasis in deconstruction is on the disintegration happening in every integration, as opposed to a balance, or even better - a community, between integration and disintegration. This state of affairs has been described as a state of asymmetric non-reciprocity.<sup>328</sup> Thus, within Derrida's thought, justice demands an unreserved openness towards the other. The coming of the other is the death of the self.<sup>329</sup> The merest hint of reciprocity between the self and the other would inaugurate an economy that, in the final analysis, serves the interests of the self,

---

<sup>328</sup> For an illuminating juxtaposition of the notions of asymmetric non-reciprocity, as advanced in various modernisms and postmodernisms, and asymmetric reciprocity, as it is manifested in a certain inflected interpretive performance of the Christian tradition, see John Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One: Reciprocity Refused", *Modern Theology*, 17:3, July 2001; John Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two: Reciprocity Granted", *Modern Theology*, 17:4, October 2001.

<sup>329</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law", In: *Acts of Religion*, edited by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 250.



thereby compromising the absolute alterity of the other and defeating the arrival of justice. As Derrida says, "There is no more gift as soon as the other receives."<sup>330</sup>

At this point, it may be useful to try and identify a more general logic of the asymmetric non-reciprocity found within Derrida's thought. This may be done by focusing on the functioning of the negative in his thought. In this regard, deconstruction is a thought of the positive contaminated by the negative. The logic of the trace is a logic of the positive bearing the negative within itself due to its radical temporality. Nevertheless, the positive and the negative do not have anything to do with each other. No relationship may be sought or postulated between them. On the contrary, the absence of any relationship whatsoever is the absolute precondition for justice. What one finds, therefore, is a curious sort of prejudice in favour of the negative. The negative always has the prerogative to negate the positive. The negative inhabits the embodied positive, and Derrida would probably be adamant that a separation of the two is illegitimate, as he would like to put the emphasis precisely on their mutual contamination. The mutual contamination of the positive and the negative is, however, solely a function of time. In all other respects they remain absolutely separated. The relationship of the negative to the positive is the non-relationship of non-reciprocity. However, as has been observed, the bias is towards the negative: presence is determined by absence; embodiment is determined precisely in its dissolution. Furthermore, what arrives is totally unforeseen - it bears no relationship with what has passed away. The non-reciprocity between the negative and the positive is therefore an asymmetrical non-reciprocity.

In phenomenological terms, the observation regarding the function of the negative in Derrida's thought becomes an observation about intentionality. According to Derrida's deconstruction of Husserlian phenomenology, that which appears in the intentional space of transcendental consciousness "is" always not that anymore - it is inhabited by an absolute past, awaiting an absolute future. In this instance as well, within the grammar of phenomenology, the asymmetrical non-reciprocity of a prejudice in favour of the negative is evident. This state of affairs may be associated

---

<sup>330</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Given Time*, vol 1, *Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 13.

with the most basic epistemological stance of modernity, a stance problematised yet paradoxically radicalised in much of postmodern thought. What has, in chapter two of this study, been described as the epistemological turn, a turn which saw the demarcation of the transcendent move from an ontological (theological) transcendent towards an epistemological transcendent (that which transcends consciousness), predisposes thought towards the negative. Subsequent to the transcendental turn, no relationship exists between the self and the other, between consciousness and what transcends it. Intentionality then comes to designate the horizon within which phenomena appear. The horizon, even though intentional in the sense of directed, is an openness, a passivity.<sup>331</sup> The prejudice is towards that which arrives from the outside, that which is the negative of consciousness' positive.

From the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence, another kind of intentionality may, however, be proposed – an intentionality in juxtaposition to that which emerges from within Husserlian phenomenology. This is the intentionality of intending some kind of communication - of wanting to *say something*. From the perspective of this alternative intentionality, the emphasis is on wanting to say something (*vouloir dire!*), rather than on the more passive, even negative attitude of waiting for what appears within the intentional horizon. Such an approach places the emphasis on the positive, rather than on the negative - on the something rather than on the nothing. However, this “reversal” can only happen where a relationship between the positive and the negative is recognised. Where no relationship between the self and the other exists – under the sway of transcendental consciousness – a prejudice towards the negative probably remains the most viable logical option. However, what theological transcendence in immanence proposes is precisely once again a prior ontological consensus, wherein the epistemological is embedded. This would allow for a reciprocity, a community, between the self and the other, the positive and the negative.

The intentionality of wanting to say something has a further implication for the reciprocity between the positive and the negative: while being reciprocal, it remains an asymmetrical reciprocity. Meaning does not simply arise within the reciprocal

---

<sup>331</sup> Milbank, *The Soul of Reciprocity (part 1)*, p. 337.

relationship, but is imparted in the relationship. It has the character of a gift, and reciprocity would then come to imply a giving of a gift in return by the one who originally received the gift, albeit in the mode of a non-identical return.

The prior sections of this chapter have, from the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence, explained what an emphasis on the positive, the something, would mean that yet maintains a reciprocity between the positive and the negative. As in the case of being and movement, intentionality is ultimately referred to God. Intentionality most properly belongs to the infinite life of the triune God. Intentionality – the wanting to say something – is the movement of love between the Persons of the Trinity. Finite creation, in its turn, can then be regarded as an utterly non-necessary movement of God's intentionality to bring about something that is not God. Yet this something is not outside of God's intentionality. It finds its being in analogously participating in God's being. And so, finally, we are in a position to regard creatureliness as the positive embodiment of God's intention to communicate something.

How would the negative function within such a conception of positive embodiment? As has been mentioned before, a notion of theological transcendence in immanence cannot but recognise the existence of brokenness and evil within finite creation. And in a certain manner, the existence of brokenness and evil in creation constitutes a negation of God's good intention in creating finite reality. This negation is an impossible attempt to exist independently outside of God's positive intentionality. In the words of Von Balthasar, who quotes Gregory of Nyssa:

“Everything that exists outside of God is like nothing before his eyes. ‘Not absolutely nothing, but like nothing,’ like a spider’s web. ‘He who looks at it sees nothing.’ All of this is suspended in God, and in order to be able to subsist, it participates in the inexhaustible source of being. But if it turns away from this source with a desire to belong to itself, it no longer merits the name of being. This profoundly ontological privation of being is sin, which is veritably an annihilation.”<sup>332</sup>

---

<sup>332</sup> Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, p. 27.

The *kerugma* of the Christian tradition is that God negates the negation (or nihilation) of sin by restating his original intention with creation. In Christ God's word becomes flesh. This, for Christian theology, is the defining moment of embodiment - God's definitive statement of intent from which all further intentionality springs forth. The incarnation of the Word of God in Christ is not to be opposed to the embodiment of God's intent in the creation of finite reality. From the perspective of brokenness, the incarnation, life and death of Christ may be taken to be a restatement of God's original intent, which effects a negation of the negation that is sin. From the perspective of temporal finitude and becoming, the incarnation may be viewed as an intensification and crowning of the original intent, whereby the original intent can appear in a more manifest and glorious manner. These perspectives do not exclude each other, but there exists, in the words of Von Balthasar on the religious philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa, a "mystery of reciprocal priority" between them.<sup>333</sup>

Thus, the notions of creation and incarnation place the emphasis on a positive intentionality - on something specific, a specific form. The theological notion of transcendence in immanence goes hand in hand with the embodiment of a specific – not a generic - intentionality. It is a specific form that is the form of beauty.<sup>334</sup> With this, the character and functioning of tradition in Christianity become evident. Tradition is the continuation and unfolding of that specific form, which is God's intention in Christ. And yet, one must hasten to add, the specific form of Christ is also the form of *infinite* beauty. It is the very form that resists every attempt at a grasping totalisation. Because this tradition is the embodiment of immanence pervaded by transcendence, it is also the embodiment of the *semper maior*, a communication always being enriched in its unfolding as it traverses God's infinite plenitude.

It is here that another, perhaps more proper function of the negative becomes pertinent within a theology of transcendence in immanence. This is the negative of the *semper maior*. In truth, the notion of theological transcendence in immanence is also a thought of the mutual intermingling of the positive and the negative. Whatever

---

<sup>333</sup> Ibid. p.81.

<sup>334</sup> David Bentley-Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 177.

may be asserted of God must then also be denied, because God is always more than that. The difference with the functioning of the negative in deconstruction emerges therein that a relationship between what is affirmed and what is negated may be postulated. The emphasis is on the positive tradition, on the form of what is being said. A specific spatio-temporal constellation of the tradition is then subsequently not wholly negated - it is superseded by an "even more." Precisely because it has been embodied in finite creation, the intentionality of God can never be totalised in some kind of grasp. Each relatively stable instance will have to be superseded by a next instance that, while not wholly negating its predecessor, nevertheless takes it up into an even richer depth of meaning and beauty. The positive embodiment of Christ, in its unfolding as tradition, is inhabited by the negative of the *semper maior*, which urges a sensitivity towards difference and variety, but precisely also for proportion in progression and progression in proportion.

The embodied intentionality of transcendence in immanence that is Christ is communicated across space and time. Christian tradition may be regarded as the embodied carrying onwards of a specific form, a form that nevertheless resists every attempt at totalisation. It is in this sense that the Christian church is called the mystical body of Christ. It is called mystical because in its being, it expresses something of the immanent pervaded by the transcendent. The church is not purely physical, nor is it purely spiritual, but it is precisely the *embodiment* of the spiritual and, conversely, it is the physical in its being open to the infinitely transcendent. The four "marks" of the church, formalised at the First Council of Constantinople in the year 381, namely that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, may be regarded as a summary expression of this tradition of transcendence in immanence. The church is holy in that it is the specific form of Christ that is handed on. It is catholic in the sense that no spatial barrier exists for the communication of the form of Christ. It is apostolic in the sense that no temporal barrier exists for the communication of the form of Christ. And, finally, it is one in the sense that the form of Christ that is handed on resonates with all of created being, since it is a restatement of God's original intentionality. Because the form of Christ is also the form of infinite difference and variety, the marks of the church may be interpreted in a non-totalising manner. Accordingly, the catholicity of the church would not inhibit the incarnation (so to speak) of the form of Christ at analogical removes from one

another at different places and in different cultures. Likewise, the apostolicity of the church would not inhibit the incarnation of the form of Christ in later historical moments at analogical removes from the form of the early Church. In the same vein, David Bentley-Hart comments that the passage through time (and it may be added through space) of the form of Christ may be seen as the transmission of difference as gift, and not, as in much of postmodern thought, as violence and the reduction of the Other to the Same.<sup>335</sup>

In order to, finally, arrive at a meditation on the practices whereby the meaning of space and time<sup>336</sup> is embodied within the Christian tradition, a brief note on the “mystery of reciprocal priority” between the life and liturgy of the Church is in order. As has been noted<sup>337</sup>, the reference to the mystery of reciprocal priority hails from Hans Urs von Balthasar’s interpretation of the metaphysics of Gregory of Nyssa. Within Gregory’s thought Von Balthasar identifies a situation of real becoming and a situation of ideal becoming with regard to creaturely finitude. Real becoming refers to the evolutionary impulse within creation whereby the intentionality of God in willing a creation progressively unfolds.<sup>338</sup> “The ‘life force’, pure potentiality at the starting point, made its first appearance in the ordered disposition of matter, and then it demonstrated its ‘plastic vitality’ in the blossoming of successive degrees of life.”<sup>339</sup> Von Balthasar’s interpretation of Gregory may in its turn be paraphrased using the image of David Toolan, which has already featured earlier in this chapter.<sup>340</sup> This is the image of creation progressively evolving and unfolding to develop an adequate “interior” (as much as that may be said of finite creation) where the word of God may find a resonance. Ultimately, Christ himself, and subsequently the tradition of his mystical body, becomes the highest expression of God’s intent in creating finite reality. In the words of Von Balthasar:

---

<sup>335</sup> Ibid. p. 142.

<sup>336</sup> The genitive is once again being used in an objective as well as a subjective sense.

<sup>337</sup> See note 63 of this chapter.

<sup>338</sup> Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, p. 57.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid. p. 58.

<sup>340</sup> See section 4.3, note 38.

“And finally, in a last supernatural ‘evolution’, the earth bore that unique fruit which was the human body of Christ and which would turn out to be the beginning of the eternal deification of the earth.”<sup>341</sup>

Von Balthasar, however, also identifies a line of thought in Gregory, which he terms ‘ideal becoming’. According to this conception, creation in its entirety, but pre-eminently man, is to be viewed as the image of God. Image is here to be understood as the content of God’s intention, which is not reducible to the progressive unfolding of his intention:

“It is a question, on the one hand, of the preceding creation in its entirety and, on the other, of that properly divine character that is ‘the image’, which is not capable of being reduced to a natural formation ... No transition could have produced this image by evolution. Man is the *analogatum princeps* (chief of analogies) of life...”<sup>342</sup>

From the perspective of ideal becoming, there is a man, which is the corporate unity of all individual men, which somehow summarises the intent of the whole of creation in being an image (finite and creaturely) of the infinite God. The corporate “ideal” man (who is not ideal in a Platonic, transcendent sense), however, “because he cannot exist without change because the transition from nothingness to existence is already a certain movement, and which has a kinship to this mutability, was going to freely move towards evil.”<sup>343</sup> And so God, in His love, gave a new man, Christ, in whom the whole of humanity is corporately taken up.

Upon quoting Gregory’s use of the Pauline imagery of the first Adam and the second Adam, Von Balthasar comments as follows on the way that Gregory viewed the two modes of becoming as co-implicating each other:

“... the transition from the ‘ideal’ to the ‘real’ is made without spacing (*adiastatoos*), on the plane of the spirit, but the transition is translated onto the

---

<sup>341</sup> *Presence and Thought*, p. 62.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.* p. 66.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71.

'real' plane by the 'necessary' pathway that leads it slowly toward its end term. Thus the 'necessary road' (*anangkaios hodos*) is reconciled with the cyclical nature of the spirit and the 'impossible solution' ... opens up."<sup>344</sup>

The result, for the purposes of this discussion, is that there is an intimate connection between creation and Christ. It is Christ who is the form of God's positive intention – the same intention expressed as finite creation. The co-implication of Christ and creation may also be formulated with reference to the brokenness and evil pervasive in creation: there is an intimate connection between creation and salvation, in that both involve the positing of God's intention in the form of Christ. Between these orders, a mystery of co-implication is to be intimated. They are mutually elucidating.

The church is the form of Christ in his mystical body, and therefore manifests the same co-implicating reciprocity. On the one hand, the church is nothing but its members living their natural everyday lives according to the form of Christ. This would be a conscious and fallible embodiment of God's intentionality in creating finite reality. On the other hand, the Church is also a liturgical embodiment of the form of Christ. Christ is the focused, crowning expression of God's original intent with creation, and also the restatement of that intent. Because it is an embodiment of the tradition of the form of Christ, the same reciprocity exists between the life and liturgy of the church. The liturgy is a focused expression of the life of the church according to the form of Christ. The image of a magnifying glass used to focus the rays of the sun may be used to explain the co-implication of life and liturgy. A magnifying glass is used to focus the rays of the sun onto a flat surface, resulting in a small, brilliant and warm circle of light. The focused circle of light is not something other than the rays of the sun shining everywhere around it. Yet, the characteristics of the light - its brilliance and its warmth – may be experienced more clearly when focussed through the magnifying glass. Similarly, the life and the liturgy of the Church, in being an embodiment of the form of Christ, do not qualitatively differ from each other. The liturgy may be seen as a focus, a crowning, and in some sense as a continual restatement of the life of the church. On the other hand, if the church was not simply its members living their natural, creaturely lives after the form of Christ,

---

<sup>344</sup> Ibid. p. 83.



then there would not be anything to focus in the liturgy, just as the magnifying glass needs the rays of the sun in order to focus it into a small, brilliant circle.<sup>345</sup>

Thus, finally, in the distinction between the life and the liturgy of the church, we have arrived at a point where we are able to speak of the practices whereby the meaning of space and time are embodied in a theological notion of transcendence in immanence. Within both the life and the liturgy of the church, as well as in their interrelationship, the proportion in progression and the progression in proportion that is the participation at an analogical remove in divine transcendence in immanence, becomes apparent. Of course, to somehow catalogue all such practices would be impossible, and therefore an exemplary sampling would have to suffice. With regard to the practice of the meaning of space and time in the everyday life of the church, the following quotation from Andrew Louth provides a beautiful overview of what the script for a manifold of inflected interpretive performances of tradition in the varied contexts of today's world may look like:

“[S]pace and time are so to speak the coordinates of all created existence, not just physical existence, and the understanding of movement is consequently many layered. Physical movement is movement through physical space and duration, but there is cosmic movement concerned with the movement of the heavens, the sequence of the seasons, the passage from evening to morning. This cosmic movement is more than physical movement, for it has significance, meaning, bound up with the quality of time characteristic of seasons – spring, summer, autumn, winter (vividly expressed in medieval calendars, not least those found (significantly) in books of hours) – and of the passage from evening, through night, to morning and the day. The creation in six days suggests a sequence of ages, prefigured in the successive days of creation, including the ‘ages of the world’, variously conceived. There are also the stages of human life, often modelled on the ages of the world: from birth, through the ages of man (variously divided, sometimes four – childhood, youth, maturity, old age ...) to death.

---

<sup>345</sup> The point is precisely that the whole of life is liturgy and that conversely, liturgy is nothing but a focused intensification of life. It would therefore also be appropriate to speak of the reciprocity under discussion as, say, that between the “liturgy of life” and the “liturgy of the sanctuary.”

Furthermore, there is the movement of the soul from its baptismal awakening by repentance, through growth in the image of God by ascetic struggle, and a deepening transfiguration through grace in which the life of God is manifest in the soul, to deification. All these experiences of movement suggest mutual analogies; it is not, as the modern mind is tempted to think, that physical space and duration are the 'real' meaning of space and time, the others being merely metaphorical. Rather all these experiences of movement in space and time are experiences of the modalities of creaturely being, characterized by *διαστημα* [*diastema*]."<sup>346</sup>

With regard to the ascetical struggle referred to in the above quotation, reference may be made to the emphasis on the inculcation of virtues and the forming of wholesome habits that are part of a Christian life. The function of discipline and the inculcation of virtues are practices which embody the meaning of space and time, as they testify to the orientation of creaturely life towards its end in God.<sup>347</sup> Asceticism may furthermore be regarded as an embodiment of the intimate relationship between the positive and the negative in Christian tradition. The soul struggles with undue attachments and addictions to finite attractions, and the becoming aware and letting go thereof are important milestones on the soul's journey into God. Likewise, the realisation that there is always more fullness of love and depth of relationship ahead strengthens the soul's desire to keep on journeying.

It is, however, precisely due to its nature as a focusing intensification of life, that the practices embodying the meaning of space and time are most evident in the liturgy of the church.<sup>348</sup> With regard to the liturgy of the church too, the multitude of practices defies exhaustive description, and some salient examples will have to suffice. Catherine Pickstock's analysis of the meanings of space and time that emerge in the pre-Tridentine Roman rite is extremely helpful in this regard.<sup>349</sup> Pickstock refers, for example, to the constant re-beginning of the liturgy evident in the Roman Rite (the

---

<sup>346</sup> Andrew Louth, "Space, Time and the Liturgy," In: Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds.) *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy* (London: Ashgate, 2009), p. 220, 221.

<sup>347</sup> Cf. Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion*, p. 121 -123.

<sup>348</sup> The "liturgy of the sanctuary" as opposed to the "liturgy of life."

<sup>349</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing – On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). pp. 173 – 192.

so-called liturgical stammer) as a realisation that true eschatological liturgy is in time endlessly postponed. With regard to the embodiment of spatial meaning in the liturgy, Pickstock refers to the place, or better, the standpoint, from which the words of the liturgy are uttered. When the celebrant, for instance, says the words: "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" at the beginning of the liturgy, these words constitute an ambiguous beginning in several ways. It is, paradoxically, at once a sending out of God and a going into God. "It instantiates both a commission bearing divine authority, and an unmoving invocation of divine protection and subsumption within the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."<sup>350</sup> Furthermore, to assume a position in the Name of the triune God is also not really to assume a position, but rather to partake of a journey, "for the Father is the journey of the generation of the Son from which the Spirit proceeds. This name is therefore not a static name affixed outside being, but is an essential name commensurate with the existential space of the Trinitarian journey."<sup>351</sup> Again, when the celebrant utters the words "I will go to the altar of God...", the altar is always more than the physical altar situated in the apse of the church. "Unlike ordinary geographical destinations, the altar of God is an infinitely receding place, always vertically beyond, in the sense of *altaria*, a raised place where offerings are upwardly burnt..."<sup>352</sup>

On the other hand, in the midst of the constant diastematic journeying and re-beginning that the liturgy is, it is also, and just as much, a celebration of presence. This is of course supremely evident in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the celebration of the presence of Christ in the (immanent) realities of bread and wine, while being at once also infinitely transcendent thereof. With regard to the temporal meaning of the Eucharist, Graham Ward states that "the Eucharist participates in a temporal plenitude that gathers up and rehearses the past, while drawing upon the futural expectations and significance of the act in the present.... Hence the presence cannot be fixed into the present which lies on the other side of representations."<sup>353</sup>

---

<sup>350</sup> Ibid. p. 181.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid. p. 182.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid. p. 183.

<sup>353</sup> Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 171.

The point is that the liturgy of the Church is an analogical embodiment of transcendence in immanence, which is expressed in diastematic journeying through time and space, a journeying that is at once also inhabited by a mysterious, ungraspable presence. In this regard, much may also be said of Christian liturgical architecture.<sup>354</sup> Again, one or two remarks will have to suffice. The “natural scientific” side of a classical education consisted of a fourfold (*quadrivium*) of disciplines. Geometry was the study of spatial order through the measure and relationship of forms. Astronomy was the study of temporal order through the observation of the cyclical movement of heavenly bodies. Harmony, specifically as music, was the study of the relationship and interchange between the temporal movements and events of the heavens and the spatial order and development on earth. The last discipline making up the fourfold was arithmetic. The implicit goal of the great *quadrivium* in antiquity was to educate the mind to become a “channel” through which the earth, understood as the realm of manifested form, could receive the abstract life of the heavens.<sup>355</sup> Within the Christian tradition of transcendence in immanence, these classical sensibilities were taken up and transformed. Thus, according to Robert Lawlor, the twelfth century architecture of the Cistercian Order made use of designs which conform to the proportional system of musical harmony, thereby creating structures of extraordinary beauty.<sup>356</sup> References to geometric proportions abound in studies of Church architecture. Thus, the cathedrals of Chartres and Notre Dame de Paris, for example, incorporate the so-called Golden Ratio in their design. Suggestions have also been made that the progressions stemming from the square root of three (the so-called *vesica piscis*) are evident in these buildings and in the architecture from that time.<sup>357</sup> What is expressed architecturally is the notion of proportion in progression and progression in proportion. A specific proportion is a relatively stable constellation, perhaps through its harmony itself testifying to a certain transcendence in immanence. And yet the proportion cannot be fixated - it invites further unfolding. In the words of Robert Lawlor:

---

<sup>354</sup> For an accessible introduction, see Margaret Visser, *The Geometry of Love – Space, Time, Mystery and meaning in an ordinary church* (London: Penguin, 2002).

<sup>355</sup> Robert Lawlor, *Sacred Geometry – Philosophy and Practice* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982), p. 6.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.* p. 33, 45.

“A form is a geometric system and like any system, biological, chemical or other, it must be seen in the unfolding continuum of its components in their cause-effect relationships. The movement from implicit to explicit is similar to that from cause to effect. It is only in the arbitrary mental world that cause can be separated from effect, while in the natural world they are inseparable: a cause is not a cause unless it has an effect. If we carry this logic further we see that the square surface also only exists in a continuous relationship to a cubic volume, of which it forms one of the six faces. In contemplative geometry the attempt is always to follow the complete movement from the purely abstract, two-dimensional world of line, then plane, as it becomes explicit in the actual world of three dimensional volume”.<sup>358</sup>

Christian liturgical architecture, at least at certain times in its tradition, has been a transforming appropriation of this insight, thereby attempting to embody the meaning of space and time from within a notion of theological transcendence in immanence.

Finally, it may be remarked that the interrelationship of the life and liturgy of the church presents an instance of the embodiment of the form of Christ. For the alternations between focusing and celebrating in liturgy, and living the life of everyday (which, it should be remembered, are not qualitatively distinct practices) constitute a beautiful rhythm, whereby, once again, the church participates analogically in the tradition of theological transcendence in immanence. The practice of Sabbath, as appropriated within Christendom – one day of the week being liturgically set apart from the other days – is probably the most salient example of such a rhythm. However, the Liturgy of the Hours, stemming from the tradition of Benedictine monasticism, also shows what such a rhythmic co-implication of liturgy and life may look like within the ambit of a twenty-four hour day. And, of course, the cycle of the liturgical year, starting as it does with advent and Christmastide, moving to a climax in the season of Lent and Easter, and then incorporating a season of “ordinary time”, bears witness to the same rhythmic sensibility in the Christian tradition. Thus, liturgical rhythm, as a temporal order, also bears witness to the presence of proportion in progression and progression in proportion, which is a

---

<sup>358</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

creaturely attempt to embody the positive form of Christ, even while being on the way to the “always more.”

This chapter began with an investigation into what a notion of theological transcendence in immanence, as an inflected interpretive performance of Christian tradition, may mean when explicitly placed alongside the notion of temporal transcendence in immanence that emerged from a study of Jacques Derrida’s work. Subsequently, the notion of theological transcendence in immanence was examined with regard to its ability to present an alternative semiology from the problematical view of the sign associated with spatialised modernity. The third section tested the notion of theological transcendence in immanence with regard to its ability to accommodate difference and change, both of which are realities to which postmodern sensibilities are very sensitive. Finally, the practices whereby theological transcendence in immanence embody the meaning of space and time were investigated and placed alongside Derridean “writing” as the practice of the embodiment of deconstruction.

In the next and final chapter of this study, the state of the conversation with Derrida will be evaluated.

## Chapter 5: Whereto the conversation? Once more transcendence in immanence

### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is expressly a conversation with Jacques Derrida on the meaning of space and time. In this regard, a conversation about a specific topic is understood to imply alternate statements about the topic in question, followed by remarks and rejoinders whereby the different points of view gain a certain degree of clarity and possibly convergence. Concomitantly, the methodology of this study is not a strictly phenomenological one. Had it been, it would have asked what the meaning of space and time would be that becomes manifest in Derrida's extensive oeuvre. As it is, however, the question about the meaning of space and time rather becomes a stage of sorts, against which Derrida's thoughts, as well as an own point of view, appear.

A point of entry into the conversation with Derrida was afforded by the hypothesis of a shared notion of transcendence in immanence. Derrida, it was suggested, works with a notion of transcendence in immanence informed by radical temporality. Another way of describing this notion would be to say that it is a notion of infinite finitude. At a given finite moment, a finite constellation is inhabited – or contaminated – by a radical other - the other of the *avenir*, or “to come.” Nothing can be said of this alterity, apart from the fact that it is coming. It cannot be anticipated - it cannot be planned for. As such, the future of the “to come” curiously has the structure of the absolute past – there is nothing to be done about it. The alterity that is coming transcends the finitude of the finite constellation. On the other hand, the immanent constellation is not fully present to itself - it is inhabited by an other. Thus, we have transcendence in immanence. Yet, having said this, the transcendence of temporality remains, so to speak, on a horizontal plane - the effect of a temporality without reserve.

Derrida profiled his notion of temporal transcendence in immanence by projecting it against the background of a history construed as the history of the metaphysics of

Presence.<sup>359</sup> Against the totalising, homogenising, hierarchic violence of logocentrism, the transcendence in immanence advocated by deconstruction allowed for an exquisite sensitivity to difference and variety, and the associated notions of freedom and justice. One way of summarising this sensitivity, which at the same time conveys something of the positive impulse of temporal transcendence in immanence, would be to invoke the Derridean neologism *différance*. *Différance* may be described as the becoming time of space as well as – distinguishable, but not separable<sup>360</sup> – the becoming space of time. Every spatial constellation is radically inhabited by the flux of time. It is always not itself anymore, as it will give way to something different. At the same time, something different, some kind of unforeseen spatiality, will always arrive as ideality is contaminated by corporeality.

In a subsequent chapter, an alternative interpretation of the shared experience of transcendence in immanence was proposed and juxtaposed against the temporal transcendence in immanence intimated in Derrida's thought. The notion of theological transcendence in immanence seeks to enact an inflected interpretive performance of salient themes from the tradition of Christian theological thought prior to the advent of modernity. In this regard it was suggested that a radical distinction between God and his creation should be coupled with the simultaneous affirmation of God's intimate and pervasive proximity to every part of creation, as well as to creation as a whole. The somewhat eclectic exploration of voices from the tradition, notably those of Gregory of Nyssa and Thomas Aquinas, was attempted with the foregoing contribution by Derrida in mind. This implied that the challenge facing the theological notion of transcendence in immanence was to be at least as sensitive to the experience of difference and variety as Derrida is, along with most of postmodern thought. Theological transcendence in immanence maintains that words such as being and intentionality can most properly only be predicated of God. Created finitude, since it is the expression *ad extra* of God's intentionality, or the effect of which God is the cause, however, participates in an analogical way in the being of God. Thus, created finitude is not an immanence closed in upon itself. Rather, it is

---

<sup>359</sup>In the second chapter of this study, it was argued that Derrida's account, which continued a course plotted by Heidegger, is open to the accusation of structuralist generalisation.

<sup>360</sup>Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 40: "[S]pacing is neither space nor time; the *incision* is neither the incised integrity of a beginning, or of a simple cutting into, nor simply secondary. Neither/nor, that is, *simultaneously* either or..."



ecstatic, radically open to the all-pervasive divine transcendence. The analogical participation of the finite in the infinite, it was argued, does allow for infinite variety and for the respect of difference. Furthermore, in contrast to a notion of transcendence in immanence that remains with the rather entropic becoming space of time and becoming time of space, theological transcendence in immanence wants to regard every spatiotemporal interval as – at least potentially – peaceful and harmonious. Using the grammar of analogical being, theological transcendence in immanence wants to intimate meaning as proportion in progression and progression in proportion as finite being traverses - *per impossible* - the surface of infinite being.

Two notions of transcendence in immanence juxtaposed and brought into conversation with each other. The question that the final chapter of this study asks is the following: whereto the conversation? Besides the mere juxtapositioning of the different notions of transcendence in immanence, what avenues remain open for the conversation - especially if rationality as an epistemic value is to remain valued. The issue of the possibility of rational conversation, as well as the limits of rational conversation, will be an important theme running through this chapter. If there was one insight that twentieth century intellectual reflection gained, it was an insight into the limits of rationality. Rationality is a matter of language games and local reasons. Late modern or postmodern sentiments regard claims for a universal rationality and attempts at outlining such a rationality with suspicion, to say the least, and generally simply dismiss such claims as risible.

Would it therefore not be prudent to leave the two notions of transcendence in immanence outlined thus far just as they are – juxtaposed against each other? In this way they would, in a sense, remain transcendent to each other. Would it not be prudent to leave the two great traditions of language, philosophy and theology – for that is, in a sense, what the distinction between temporal and theological transcendence and immanence comes down to – alongside each other and extraneous to each other?<sup>361</sup> Such an approach would be to echo the sensibilities of the third century theologian Tertullian: what has Athens to do with Jerusalem? -

---

<sup>361</sup> Cf. Catherine Keller's remarks on the transdisciplinary transcendence (and immanence) of philosophy and theology; Catherine Keller, "Rumors of Transcendence – The Movement, State and Sex of 'Beyond'" In: John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.), *Transcendence and Beyond – A Postmodern Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 129, 130.

*credo quia absurdum est!* In contemporary thought, such a sentiment would seem to be represented by Jean-Luc Marion. He uses philosophical language, specifically transcendental thought, along the lines of Descartes, Husserl and Heidegger, to argue for the impossibility of God for man.<sup>362</sup> Marion uses philosophical concepts to argue for the inaccessibility of theology to philosophy. According to Marion:

“[w]e will have to conclude, regarding God, that all we ever find is a triple impossibility – impossibility with regard to intuition; impossibility with regard to concept; and impossibility, therefore, with regard to experiencing the slightest phenomenon.”<sup>363</sup>

Such an approach would seem to suggest that theology can use philosophical language – in Marion’s case, the notion of impossibility - to clarify its own position, but there is no room for philosophy intrinsic to theology. What theology can do is to use philosophical concepts to argue for the ultra-transcendence of God.

The attitude of “separative transcendence”<sup>364</sup> between philosophy and theology is of course not restricted to a theology that wants to safeguard the absolute transcendence of God. In a sense, the whole movement of secularisation that started with the advent of modernity is a movement to legitimise, in philosophical terms, the pushing away of God into a sphere absolutely transcendent to what is deemed “the natural”, and to eventually dismiss theology, along with metaphysics, as philosophically passé. Such an approach would be very congenial to a discourse of temporal transcendence in immanence that wants theological transcendence in immanence to remain transcendent from it, and therefore dismissible.

Formulated in semiological terms, the question we have been asking is the following: would the conclusion drawn at the end of the conversation with Derrida not be that one simply has to choose between an approach that favours a transcendent pole in the deduction of meaning via the working of signs, and an approach that favours an

---

<sup>362</sup>Jean-Luc Marion, “The impossible for Man – God” In: John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.), *Transcendence and Beyond – A Postmodern Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 17 ff.

<sup>363</sup>Ibid. p. 24.

<sup>364</sup>Keller, *Rumors of transcendence*, p. 131.

immanent, inductive process in the intimation of meaning? Should the conversation partners part ways with a respectful bow, having heard each other's point of view, as well as the internal rationality of each view?

The conclusion of this study is that such a state of affairs need not - in fact, *should not* - be the outcome of the conversation with Derrida on the meaning of space and time. To leave the two notions of transcendence in immanence, as they have been explored, lying separatively transcendent to each other would be precisely to ignore the experience of transcendence in immanence (an immanence pervaded by an other - open to a "more") that each of the discourses seeks to thematise. To opt for a post-dialectical, merely rhetorical act of persuasion would be to disregard the rhetorical moment in every act of dialectical reasoning, as well as the discursive reasoning involved in all rhetoric.

Jacques Derrida himself has reacted with exasperation towards those who have pictured him as a frivolous non-cognitivist with no concern for truth or contexts, and has staunchly defended his firm belief in the validity of rational thought as such. In his *Limited Inc*, he writes: "Once again (and this probably makes a thousand times I have had to repeat this, but when will it finally be heard, and why this resistance?) as I understand it the text ... does not suspend reference to history, to the world, to reality."<sup>365</sup> The deconstructive process, while in a sense placing itself in opposition to the "history of the metaphysics of presence," nevertheless also situates itself inside that history and shakes the foundations from the inside. In doing so, says Derrida, "I try to respect as rigorously as possible the internal, regulated play of philosophemes or epistemes by making them slide – without mistreating them – to the point of their nonpertinence, their exhaustion, their closure."<sup>366</sup> In undermining the totalising violence committed by the metaphysics of presence, deconstruction thus makes use of the rationality on which much of this metaphysics is built – in a sense, against itself. What emerges is therefore not irrationality but another rationality, another way of being in the world. Any discourse against the metaphysics of the 'centre', and this includes deconstruction itself, cannot escape

---

<sup>365</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988) p. 137.

<sup>366</sup> Derrida, *Positions*, p. 5.

collusion with the structure it seeks to undermine.”<sup>367</sup> In the repetition and return of play, how could the phantom of the centre not call to us,” asks Derrida.<sup>368</sup> The point is that the deconstructive process, in deconstructing that which, in a sense, is its other – spatialisation and totalisation – inserts itself *within* (that is, immanent to) that which it seeks to deconstruct, and shows the supplementarity, the openness, from within.

If this is true of Derridean temporal transcendence in immanence, the same may be said of theological transcendence in immanence as it was conceived in this study. Western theological thought has a tradition of engagement with philosophical thought that seeks to enact a gesture of appropriation - a gesture whereby philosophical thought is inhabited, and yet also transcended: thus, a gesture of transcendence in immanence with regard to philosophy. This point may be demonstrated with reference to the theological methodology of Thomas Aquinas, a figure who has been mentioned extensively throughout this study.

Since very early on Christian theology has sought to utilise the grammar and concepts of philosophy to clarify the tenets of faith. The tradition of the *Sapientia Christiana*, according to Rudi te Velde, a tradition that started with Augustine, incorporates philosophical speculation and rational thought into theology.<sup>369</sup> Within this tradition, essentially characterised by a Christianising Platonism, philosophical reason gave up its formal autonomy and functioned in its search for wisdom and truth within the realm disclosed by what was accepted to be God’s revelation in Christ. Philosophical thought served the development of the interior intelligibility of Christian wisdom, informed by the spiritual and religious sources of the Bible and the Church Fathers. Te Velde outlines this tradition of theological appropriation of philosophy in order to contrast it to some extent with the approach of Thomas Aquinas, an approach towards the relationship between theology and philosophy that may perhaps be typified as transcendence in immanence.

---

<sup>367</sup> Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God*, p. 14.

<sup>368</sup> *Writing and Difference*, p. 297.

<sup>369</sup> Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God – The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae* (London: Ashgate, 2006), p. 5.

As has been noted before, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the reintroduction of portions of the Aristotelian corpus that had hitherto been lost to Western thought. Under its influence, “reason” became emancipated from its previously restricted role as dialectical instrument regarding matters of faith. Increasingly, “natural reason” came to be regarded as the foundation of the various philosophical disciplines – practical as well as theoretical – which cover all of natural and human reality. The reintroduction of Aristotelian science and its seemingly naturalist interpretation of reality offered a serious challenge to theology and the way in which it dealt with philosophy. According to Rudi te Velde, what we see in the work of Thomas Aquinas is a redefinition of Christian theology that formally separates it from philosophy and situates it as an independent science with its own principles based on divine revelation.<sup>370</sup> Aquinas does not leave philosophy and theology to lie separately transcendent to each other, however:

“The theological project of the *Summa* marks itself off against the whole of philosophical disciplines, not by excluding and rejecting them as being foreign to its own revelation-based approach to the truth, but by incorporating philosophical (metaphysical) reason and at the same time limiting its scope from within.”<sup>371</sup>

If the whole of finite reality is accepted to be the result of the creative activity of God, then this reality will in one way or another bear witness to that God of which it is the artefact. This means that theology can, to some extent, leave philosophy to study nature, making use of the precepts of natural reason. This is rationality’s immanence. Yet, at least for Thomas Aquinas, this does not amount to some kind of natural theology whereby natural reason can arrive at God and His attributes. The immanence of natural reason, while enjoying a relative autonomy, is always also transcended in the acceptance of the prior truths of revelation handed down by tradition. Within Aquinas’ conception of the relationship between philosophy and theology, the role of philosophical reason would be to elucidate the internal intelligibility of theology, not the truth or falsity of the proposition “God exists.”<sup>372</sup>

---

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

What Aquinas has done is to separate philosophy and theology in order to relate them again in a relationship of transcendence in immanence. Theology, as it were, inhabits philosophy and goes along with its immanent analysis of being. The rationality of the analysis contributes to the intelligibility of theology. Theology itself, however, derives from the truths of revelation. These are accepted beforehand and provide the destination towards which the arguments for intelligibility of the philosophical reasoning are oriented. Later in this chapter, the methodological model of transcendence in immanence as a way of understanding the relationship between Aristotle and Aquinas will be revisited.

Thus far, it has been argued that the conversation with Derrida on the meaning of space and time, based on a shared experience of transcendence in immanence, should not be abandoned with the two interpretations of transcendence in immanence lying separatively transcendent to each other. Such an approach would seem to be contrary to the impulse inherent in deconstruction, and also contrary to a well attested impulse within the tradition of Christian theology (even if counter examples from the tradition could also be offered.) Both partners in the present conversation would seem to favour an approach seeking some kind of transcendence in immanence when it comes to juxtaposed or differing points of view. In what follows, the possible playing out of such an approach, firstly upon the initiative of temporal transcendence in immanence, and thereafter upon the initiative of theological transcendence in immanence, will be investigated.

## **5.2 Theologies of temporal transcendence in immanence**

For the most part, Derrida only addresses theology in passing. The remarks that he makes in this regard, especially earlier on in his career, suggest that he deems theology to be a paradigmatic instance of a metaphysics of presence and that it should, therefore, be subject to the same operation of deconstruction. In Derrida's own words:

“Since it cannot be elevated into a master-word or concept, *since it blocks every relationship to theology, différance* finds itself enmeshed in the work that pulls it through a chain of other ‘concepts,’ other ‘words,’ other textual configurations.”<sup>373</sup>

Hugh Rayment-Pickard has suggested that the situation with regard to Derrida’s relationship to theology is, however, not that simple. According to him, it may be helpful to distinguish two applications of the term “theology” and to treat Derrida’s relationship to each on its own.<sup>374</sup> On the one hand, the word “theology” may be used to label discourses about God. Rayment-Pickard refers to this as the restricted sense of “theology” and states that this is only one of Derrida’s many philosophical interests. On the other hand, the term “theology” may be used “to name the conditions of possibility of ‘all metaphysical determinations of truth’, whether God is explicitly invoked or not.”<sup>375</sup> While the restricted sense of “theology” is mostly only dealt with in passing, the second sense – Rayment-Pickard calls this “general theology” – could be regarded as the core topic and organising theme with regard to Derrida’s entire project. Rayment-Pickard goes on to explain what he has termed “general theology” in Derrida:

“General theology embraces the belief, the explicit or implicit assertion, or the structural affirmation, that there is a central, or underlying, or over-arching, or essential, or inherent meaning to things. So a belief in God would be one example of general theology, and Derrida does write specifically about theism, faith and religion. But what we are calling ‘general theology’ here goes far beyond theism and formal religion: it extends to the conditions of possibility of the entire range of possible affirmations of the absolute.”<sup>376</sup>

What is suggested here is that the word “theology” – in the general sense – should be viewed as an abbreviation of the expression “metaphysics of presence”. Understood in this sense, Derrida’s whole project has to do with theology, more specifically the deconstruction of theology. Perhaps Rayment-Pickard’s intention

---

<sup>373</sup> *Positions*, p. 38 (italics added).

<sup>374</sup> Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God*, p. 5.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.* (The quotation is from *Of Grammatology*, p. 10.)

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

with the expression “general theology” may be clarified by noting that Derrida uses the expression “onto-theology” to indicate the same semantic field:

“The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude, such are the gestures required by an onto-theology determining the archaeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence, as parousia, as life without difference: another name for death, historical metonymy where God’s name holds death in check.”<sup>377</sup>

While it can be agreed that theology, in the sense of general theology or onto-theology, plays an important role in Derrida’s thought, it should also be noted that this conception of theology is identified in order to be deconstructed. In this sense, theology has a diminished, even negative role to play as the necessary coagulation of meaning around an organising principle that is inherently non-identical to itself and that will inevitably give way to something different. Is this kind of scapegoat role then the final word on theology in Derrida’s thought? In his book Rayment-Pickard suggests that more may be said about Derrida’s theology. He argues that even though unacknowledged by himself, Derrida’s work may be said to be theological. Theology is not only that which deconstruction sets itself up against - deconstruction itself may be understood to be theological. Within this context Rayment-Pickard uses the word “theology” to refer to the positive point that Derrida is making through his work – even if that positive point is about the impossibility of making any final positive point. According to this interpretation there is an implicit, and sometimes explicit, theology of the phenomenological tradition along the lines of Husserl. Derrida, in important ways influenced by Heidegger, deconstructs Husserlian phenomenology. However, the deconstruction of phenomenology is still a kind of phenomenology, as it tries to show the undecideability between what is present and what is absent. According to Rayment-Pickard, this undecideability or impossibility is precisely what Derrida’s theology is all about. In the latter part of this chapter, this point will be returned to within the context of theological transcendence in immanence’s gesture of immanently inhabiting temporal transcendence in

---

<sup>377</sup> *Of Grammatology*, p. 71.



immanence while yet transcending it theologically. Firstly, however, an examination of the theological reception of Derrida's thought is in order.

Working within the legacy of Derrida, two divergent schools of thought may be identified with regard to the implications for theology of deconstruction. These "schools" may be described in terms of their relationship to the theme of the death of God, present in so many words at least since Nietzsche. On the one hand, there is the school of deconstruction that wants to leave God dead and buried. The death of God is celebrated as the long awaited end of an epoch of metaphysics. On the other hand, there is a school that sees in the death of God precisely the opening for God to emerge. According to this train of thought, the death of God draws away the metaphysical blinds from our eyes and kindles an authentic desire for God.<sup>378</sup> Perhaps this divergence and undecideability is precisely what Derrida would have wanted regarding the interpretation of his legacy. Martin Hägglund, already referred to earlier in this study, may be regarded as an exponent of the former school of Derrida interpretation. Hägglund's stated intention is quite clear:

"Refuting the notion that there was an ethical or religious 'turn' in Derrida's thinking, I demonstrate that a radical atheism informs his writing from beginning to end."<sup>379</sup>

Hägglund's argument, well rehearsed in earlier chapters of this study, centres on the radical and thoroughgoing ontological immanence of Derrida's thought. Ontologically speaking, there is nothing more than the flux of infinite finitude. The experience of transcendence – real as it is - is a product of the temporal flux of infinite finitude. Earlier on in this study such a notion, informed by a radically immanent ontology, was termed a "horizontal" transcendence in immanence.

The first school of Derrida interpretation would thus, it seems, be comfortable with leaving theology transcendent to deconstruction and therefore leaving it behind together with the metaphysics of presence. It is the second school of Derrida

---

<sup>378</sup> *Transcendence and Beyond*, p. 224.

<sup>379</sup> Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism – Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 1.

interpretation that is, seemingly, more congenial to theology, even to the point of interpreting deconstruction as a desire for God. Such an approach would see deconstruction inhabiting theology immanently in order to point to a “more” beyond traditional theological notions of transcendence.

Mark C. Taylor may be regarded as one of the earlier exponents of a reception of deconstruction that appreciates it as containing rich resources for religious and theological reflection. Taylor takes as his point of departure the theme of the death of God, and suggests that deconstruction is to be regarded as “the hermeneutic of the death of God.”<sup>380</sup> In interpreting the meaning of the death of the transcendent, theistic God,<sup>381</sup> Taylor develops the notion of marginality and liminality.<sup>382</sup> What emerges in the wake of the deconstruction of theology is not atheism, although it is not theism either. Taylor is interested in that borderline, liminal space between theism and atheism. The notion that he wants to explore is a/theism, with specific emphasis on the “/” in such an a/theological approach.

Clearly in line with Derrida’s thought, Taylor remarks that “a/theology” cannot be spoken, only written. At this point the whole argument for viewing language, thought, signification and life itself first and foremost as writing – arche-writing – becomes pertinent. As has been discussed in the third chapter of this study, writing is understood to be more than the mechanical act of inscribing markings in some kind of medium. In itself writing manifests a new way of dealing with meaning. The binary distinctions that are characteristic of a metaphysics of presence are subverted in favour of a process of contamination. Signifier and signified cannot be separated completely, neither can corporeality and ideality, or identity and difference, and God and the world cannot be separated in any way.

According to Taylor, as soon as a word is written, it creates a boundary to delimit some kind of territory of meaning. However, the boundary of the word is porous - it is in fact a liminal space that invites transgression. The word is a crossing to something else. This marginality, liminality and porous borderline is what is

---

<sup>380</sup>Mark C. Taylor, *Erring – A Postmodern A/theology*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.

6.

<sup>381</sup>Ibid. p. 104: “A/theology is in a large measure a critique of the notion of the transcendent God...”

<sup>382</sup>Ibid. p. 5.

presented in the “/” of a/theology. It is in the undecideability, in the liminal territory of the “/” that Taylor intimates transcendence, even though he himself would not have named it as such. Taylor himself prefers to speak of the “seminal openings” afforded by the bewildering undecideability that emerges in deconstruction’s wake.<sup>383</sup> Seminal textual openings, resisting every attempt at appropriation by a metaphysics of presence, are the traces of transcendence intimated by Taylor in the process of writing. In his words:

“When understood in this way, writing can be read as the divine milieu. Along this middle way, writing of God repeatedly appears as the unending dissemination of the word.”<sup>384</sup>

Taylor extends his deconstructive hermeneutic of the death of God to encompass a “radical Christology.” Radical Christology involves a thought of incarnation understood in terms of Derrida’s notion of writing. The divine *is* the incarnate word:

“[T]his embodiment of the divine is the death of God. With the appearance of the divine that is not only itself but at the same time other, the God who is alone God disappears... Incarnation *irrevocably* erases the disembodied logos and inscribes a word that becomes the script enacted in the infinite play of interpretation.”<sup>385</sup>

Radical Christology, radical incarnation means that there is no other God apart from the opening afforded by the supplementarity of meaning. “God is what word means, and word is what ‘God’ means. To interpret God as word is to understand the divine as scripture or writing.”<sup>386</sup> Taylor then goes on to describe the implications of such an a/theology for anthropology, hermeneutics and ethics. Under the rubric of “mazing grace”, he argues, in line with Derrida, for a radically ateleological, aneschatological ethics of play.<sup>387</sup> This is a life of graceful wandering. The notion of

---

<sup>383</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid. p. 103.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid. p. 104.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid. p. 155.

wandering affords a concluding remark about the meaning of space and time that appear within Taylor's a/theology. According to Taylor:

“The time and space of graceful erring are opened by the death of God, the loss of self, and the end of history. In uncertain, insecure, and vertiginous postmodern worlds, wanderers repeatedly ask: ‘Whither are we moving? ... Are we plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up and down? Are we not erring as through an infinite nothing?’ While the death of God is realized in the play of the divine milieu and the disappearance of the self is inscribed in markings and traces, history ‘ends’ when erring ‘begins,’ and erring ‘begins’ when history ‘ends.’”<sup>388</sup>

With regard to space and time, Taylor quite explicitly takes over Derrida's notion of spacing, but interprets this, precisely, as the play of the divine. In the becoming space of time and the becoming time of space, the divine is to be recognised.<sup>389</sup>

Whereas Taylor's notion of a/theology develops the notion of writing in order to propose a theology of transcendence in immanence that remains on the horizontal, immanent plane, John D. Caputo focuses specifically on the notion of temporality in Derrida, in order to situate transcendence on an horizontal plane.<sup>390</sup> In an essay entitled “Temporal Transcendence – the very idea of *àvenir* in Derrida”, Caputo argues that in the past, whenever the question of time was raised, time was regarded as something to be transcended in order to arrive at the eternal. However, ever since the question of time was opened up in a radical way by the likes of Husserl, Heidegger and Levinas, philosophers have become more interested not in the transcending of time, but in time as transcendence.<sup>391</sup> Caputo concurs with what has been argued in the third chapter of this study, namely that such an approach to time as transcendence is also particularly true of Jacques Derrida and the enterprise

---

<sup>388</sup> Ibid. p. 150, 151.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid. p. 107.

<sup>390</sup> For an extensive interpretation of Derrida in the direction of religious thought and theology, see John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>391</sup> John D. Caputo, “Temporal Transcendence – The Very Idea of *àvenir* in Derrida” In: Caputo and Scanlon (eds.), *Transcendence and Beyond – A Postmodern Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 188.

of deconstruction. In this regard, Caputo wishes to understand temporal transcendence in Derrida along the lines of the key concept of *à venir*.

“In Derrida, a certain quasi-transcendence, if there is such a thing in Derrida – if this were ever a word we could have enticed him into using in his own name ... - is a function of the *à venir*. In Derrida, a certain quasi-transcendence, or analogue or successor-form or side-effect of transcendence, some transcendence without transcendence, unfolding under the different circumstances and transferred dynamics of deconstruction, would refer then to an infinite self-transformation of our temporal lives, which we might also describe as the passion of existence.”<sup>392</sup>

The structure of temporality in Derrida has already been investigated extensively. The question now is how Caputo uses this temporality in his theological reception of Derrida. There is, Caputo suggests, in Derrida a certain passion associated with the expectation of a “to come” that will break into the world otherwise prone to homogenisation and the re-appropriation of difference. This passion for the impossible is at the same time a passion for existence. The passion evoked in awaiting the arrival of the impossible is “the spark that drives existence past itself and ignites a certain self-transforming.”<sup>393</sup> This self-transforming is precisely what time is, what time does – if one is attuned to it. Caputo continues by suggesting that this passion for existence may even be consciously expressed in desire, hope and prayer.<sup>394</sup> According to him, this is the religious side of Derrida. In summary, it may be said that the location of transcendence horizontally on the plane of immanence follows naturally from an understanding of the radical temporality of Derrida’s thought. The divine is precisely the possibility of self-transformation opened up in the expectation of the impossible, unforeseen “to come.”

The present section of this chapter has considered two attempts at relocating transcendence on the plane of immanence, namely those of Mark C. Taylor and John D. Caputo. Both of these authors seek to effect a theological reception of

---

<sup>392</sup> Ibid. p. 191.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid. p. 190.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid. p. 198.

Derrida by conceiving a theology and a religiosity informed by temporal transcendence in immanence. From the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence, as advanced in this study, it would, however, be possible to offer serious criticism of the proposal for a theology informed by temporal (horizontal) transcendence in immanence. In the remainder of this section, four interrelated critical responses are discussed.

In the first place, it can be asked whether temporal transcendence in immanence, despite its methodological objective, really inhabits the theological tradition of Christianity, in order to be able to transcend it towards some “new” theology. In order to effect a gesture of transcendence in immanence, this approach, deriving from Derridean deconstruction, should first be immanent to - that is, at home in, the tradition of theology. But is this so? The first critical remark levelled at a theology informed by temporal transcendence in immanence is that it represents a radical break with the greatest and oldest streams within the tradition of Christian theological reflection.<sup>395</sup>

Gianni Vattimo argues that the present secular situation of the West is the realization of the inner genius of Christianity, rather than a radical break with it. According to Vattimo, at the centre of Christian theology lies the conviction that Jesus Christ has freed us from the Truth:

“Having freed us from ‘objective’ Truth (that is to say, as Heidegger would say, from metaphysics) Jesus Christ has freed all religious experiences also – thereby reducing himself (reducing Christianity itself) and all these other religions to their basic essence. The Christian tradition knows well the idea that Charity matters above all else”.<sup>396</sup>

---

<sup>395</sup>In the second chapter of this study, it was argued that the advent of modernity presented a radical break with the foregoing intellectual climate and tradition. Postmodernity may be taken to be an intensification of salient themes in modernity, as well as an increased self-critical awareness of rationality’s own relativity.

<sup>396</sup>Gianni Vattimo, “Nihilism as Postmodern Christianity”. In: John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.), *Transcendence and Beyond – A Postmodern Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 47.

Thus, according to this interpretation, the incarnation, as divine kenosis, in which God abandons his eternity and dwells among us in flesh and time, is worked out in a Christian tradition that abandons itself and works towards a world with no final truths - a world of charity. The present situation of nihilism, in which terms such as religiosity, modernity, Christianity and even nihilism itself cannot be said to refer to an "object", is precisely the outworking of the inner genius of Christianity and an indication of the direction in which further development should take place. Of course it may be remarked here that a conviction about the inner genius of Christianity and about what the content of charity would entail refutes the other claim made, namely that these terms do not refer to anything objectifiable. However, the broader critical remark has to do with the claim that a temporal or horizontal transcendence in immanence departs in a radical way from the broad tradition of Christian theological reflection. As has been argued in the fourth chapter of this study, the narrative traditions of the Old and New Testaments testify to the encounter with a transcendent, personal God, who is yet intimately related to his creation - a God who, in fact, is closer to each creature than that creature is to itself. The point is that a post-theistic, impersonal theology lies separatively transcendent to the main thrust of Christian theological reflection. It is a valid and coherent point, but could it really be said to be theology, if the history and tradition of the word is taken into account?

The second critical remark to be made with regard to theologies of temporal transcendence in immanence has to do with the overcoming (or transcending) of metaphysics. As has been mentioned, there is a school of Derrida interpretation that sees in the death of God only the death of the metaphysical God. Far from leaving theology dead and buried, the death of God only draws away the metaphysical blinds from our eyes and (re)awakens a desire for God. However, with regard to this position, the following critical question must again be asked: can this be so? Is it in any rigorous way possible to leave all metaphysical speculation behind?

In his essay entitled *Nihilism as Postmodern Christianity*, which was referred to above, Vattimo makes the following point regarding modernity and post-modernity: if modernity is to be understood as that epoch which awakened to the historicity of truth, and if the Enlightenment is sensitive to the historical unfolding of truth, then post-modernity is the awareness of the plurality of unfolding truths:

“[T]he experience it has of the dissolution of metanarratives opens postmodernism to the understanding of myths, understood not as metaphysical truths, but as myths that cannot be truly denied by any absolute, or metanarrative, or reason.”<sup>397</sup>

Thus, Vattimo would have us speak of a weak historicism, which knows that every “speaker” has no other resources outside his/her own history. When speaking of our life and experiences we have no other recourse than to depend on the (his)stories – the myths – that feed our memories. In other words, we know we are historically determined, but there is nothing to be done about it. Yet, Vattimo still protests that these myths and histories we live by are qualitatively different from metaphysics. This notion, however, needs to be challenged. If we cannot speak of our experience without recourse to myths and stories, then we have convictions about being that transcend the merely physical - in other words, they are meta-physical. As has already been emphasised in the introductory chapter of this study, when intimating the meaning of something, there is always a horizon, a corpus of evidence that is accepted as self-evident, even if only for the moment. However, this situation could and should be extended to thought in general: there is never simply uninterpreted experience, and the interpretation of experience involves the acceptance of some state of affairs as “how it *is*” - in other words, as *being so*. Therefore, it is not possible to escape from metaphysics.

Hugh Rayment-Pickard, in his interpretation of Derrida, makes a related point: despite positioning theology, and specifically general theology or onto-theology, as the paradigmatic example of a metaphysics of presence that is to be inhabited in order to be deconstructed, Derrida’s thought nevertheless may itself also be viewed as theological. Even as Derrida argues for the “impossibility” of theology, he implicitly recommends the idea of the impossibility of God as an alternative theology.<sup>398</sup> In the following quotation Rayment-Pickard elaborates on his suggestion:

---

<sup>397</sup>Ibid. p. 46.

<sup>398</sup>Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God*, p. 9.



“What we see in Derrida’s writing is not a philosophy *sui generis*, but another philosophy in the broadly ‘phenomenological’ tradition which also embraces Husserl and Heidegger. ... Thus Derrida tries to make a phenomenon of the impossibility of a phenomenology. This whole enterprise takes place on the presupposition that we will be *wiser* for reading the philosophers concerned. No one can doubt that Derrida’s philosophy is a tremendously complicated and paradoxical turn in the development of phenomenology. Yet who could suppose that Derrida is not trying to *show* us the truth, however problematized, and that his writing does not belong to this history of *showing*?”<sup>399</sup>

However, if it is not possible to leave metaphysics behind, then it should be acknowledged that a notion of temporal transcendence in immanence is at least as metaphysical as theological transcendence in immanence. The metaphysics that it derives from is simply a different metaphysics – the metaphysics of a purported radical ontological immanence.

The third critical remark about temporal transcendence in immanence and its theological reception has to do with the freedom promised by such a militantly ateleological approach. In the discussion on Mark Taylor’s theological interpretation of deconstruction, it has already been noted that his a/theology is explicitly ateleological and aneschatological. The ceaseless change that is the reality of immanent finitude is not change in any specific direction - it is an aimless wandering or “erring.” As part of this finitude, human beings should consciously embrace and celebrate the endless possibilities of becoming – this, precisely, is freedom, this is the divine moment.

It should be noted that the freedom of endless becoming has a well attested philosophical lineage. It may be regarded as an outworking of the radical break announced by modernity with the teleological worldview preceding it. The philosophical-theological synthesis effected in the high Middle Ages of tenets from classical thought with Christian faith held that the human will was, as it were, drawn

---

<sup>399</sup>Ibid. p. 119.

by desire towards the highest good (being God Himself.) According to this worldview, the desire for the highest Good (and Truth and Beauty) is mediated through a desire for created goodness, truth and beauty, thereby presenting a kind of journey for the soul with, as its destination, the beatific vision of God. The journey into the good is at the same time a journey into the true self. Thus, as a created being grows to become more and more true to its created, natural purpose, so it also draws nearer - from its perspective - to the highest good, which is God himself (who, as Being itself, is closer to the creature than it is to itself.) In terms of this worldview, to become free means to become more and more oneself – a journey that is at the same time a journey into God.

With the advent of modernity the recognition of divine transcendence in immanence was replaced with a radical separation of transcendence and immanence in preparation of an outright rejection of ontological transcendence. This in turn gave rise to the modern situation of an opposition between nature and freedom, an opposition that, in postmodern thought, resulted in a celebration of radical freedom. Postmodernism in many ways radicalised the modern preference for the historical as a progressive becoming free from nature. Heidegger's statement in *Being and Time* that the potential should be regarded as higher than the actual is representative of postmodernism's emphasis on the pliability and endless potentiality of being.<sup>400</sup>

An emphasis on endless potentiality goes hand in hand with temporal transcendence in immanence. The question being asked here, however, is the following: what kind of freedom can such a notion deliver? The reply should be that it is not freedom at all, but rather the bleakest unfreedom. In a world devoid of all teleological orientation, finite creatures are left with endless potentiality. While some have argued that the endless becoming itself should simply be celebrated and enjoyed for what it is, the effect of potentiality without direction is rather a curling in upon itself of finite being. The experience of being ecstatic – that is, of always not being identical to oneself – and yet of not having any destination to grow to, results in finite being attaching to one aspect or another of finite reality and circling around it in order to gain some kind of leverage. Far from being radical freedom, endless potentiality

---

<sup>400</sup> *Being and Time*, p. 63.

devoid of an orientation towards a final good results in finitude grasping at some aspect of its finite condition and attaching itself to it. Finite ends are thus regarded and treated as ends in themselves, and buckle under the pressure. The need for security, for example, curls in upon itself and becomes an attachment to power or a fixated paralysis through fear. The need to sustain life becomes an inordinate attachment to pleasure for its own sake, or consumption for its own sake. In short, the removal of ends, instead of releasing endless potentiality, endangers the potentiality of immanent beings. This state of affairs has been appropriated with grim cynicism by the market forces of late modern consumer society. On the one hand, consumers are continually being reminded of their endless potentiality: “be all that you want to be.” On the other hand, consumer products, ever-changing and ever-increasing in scope, are provided to satisfy the need for existential attachment of finite beings that have nowhere to grow to. The result of the noble sounding ideal of celebrating endless potentiality and endless becoming is a very mundane condoning of the *status quo* of late capitalist consumerism.

All of this is not to say that a notion of theological transcendence in immanence, from whence the present criticism is directed, is not sensitive to becoming and potentiality. Although, ontologically speaking, theological transcendence in immanence holds that the potentiality of spatiotemporal finitude is directed towards an infinite actuality, namely being itself, it also maintains that the only experience finite beings have is the experience of spatiotemporal finitude, and therefore of potentiality. As has been mentioned, created finitude is thus very much an experience of growing and of becoming. Nevertheless, it is only because the end (the highest Good) is actually present, albeit it, from an epistemological perspective, only provisionally, that the ecstatic journey of finite beings can start at all. Even though potentiality is given in experience, theological transcendence in immanence maintains that finite potentiality is directed towards an absolute actuality, which orients its journey.<sup>401</sup> Because the actuality that draws finite potentiality towards it is the actuality of infinite being, this means that finite beings will never be able to encompass infinity. There will always be scope for more variety, more diversity, and more difference. Only, this is the difference of peace and harmony, the difference of proportion and progression.

---

<sup>401</sup> Cf. Danie Goosen, “Radical Immanence. An Anomaly in the History of Ideas”. To be published in 2012.

The fourth and final critical remark levelled at the theological reception of temporal transcendence in immanence involves the actual relationship of transcendence and immanence in the sphere of finite reality. More to the point, the issue here is whether any indication of a relationship between transcendence and immanence is given at all, or whether it is denied. Deconstruction may be seen as speaking of a contamination of the immanent by the transcendent, albeit in a temporal manner: the present is not identical to itself - it is inhabited by an other that has the structure of an absolute past. But what is the character of the "contamination" that deconstruction speaks of? It seems that the contamination of the immanent by the transcendent is necessarily after the fashion of a relationless relation. Even though temporal transcendence in immanence is a thought of transcendence in immanence, it seems that transcendence and immanence do not have anything to do with each other, and this is necessarily so if the integrity of the coming of the other is to be safeguarded. In other words, even though deconstruction as temporal transcendence in immanence wishes to overcome the radical separation of transcendence and immanence effected by modern thought, whereby the latter strived to ensconce a static, spatialised form of presence, temporal transcendence in immanence only manages to propose a relationless intermingling of transcendence and immanence.

In a certain way, deconstruction remains very much within the lineage of Kantian thought, with its strict delimitation of the noumenal from the phenomenal. This is so despite deconstruction showing the futility of a critique that seeks to establish the boundaries of reason in such a way that it would cover the phenomena rendered by experience without remainder. While the distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal, as proposed in Kant's *First Critique*, remains pertinent to the discussion, it has been pointed out that Kant's separation of the sublime from the beautiful in the *Third Critique* presents a very clear indication of the way in which postmodern thought continues a certain Kantian legacy.<sup>402</sup> For Kant, judgements of beauty disclose a certain subjective purposiveness in nature. The subjectivity of the

---

<sup>402</sup>Cf. the discussion of the Kantian sublime by John R. Betz, "Beyond the Sublime: the Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (part one)," *Modern Theology*, 21:3 July 2005, pp. 376 ff. Betz mentions that his analysis of the Kantian sublime is indebted to the insights of Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt in the latter's essay "The Theological Sublime" in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 201-219. See also John Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity Part One: Reciprocity Refused," *Modern Theology*, 17:3 July 2001,

judgements lies in the feelings of a pleasurable accord between nature and mind with which they are associated. However, the objects in nature are not in themselves beautiful. Rather, they charm the imagination because they entertain its free play. In the end, therefore, Kantian judgements of beauty do not really reach an “other” apart from subjective thought, but remain occasions of auto-affection. Alongside this conception of beauty stands the Kantian notion of the sublime. Whereas the beautiful is conceived as that which delights the faculties and which evinces a harmonious interplay of the understanding and the imagination, the sublime is described as the occasion where the rawness of nature raises its head in defiance of every attempt at the intimation of harmony and order. The sublime is associated with abyssal experiences - in other words, experiences of such magnitude or sheer overwhelming force that they are unfathomable by the categories of human reason. While it is doubtful that the Kantian sublime was ever intended to indicate some kind of move beyond the confines of transcendental philosophy that would break open a passage into ontology, it is precisely the absolute otherness of the sublime that is emphasised in postmodern receptions of Kant’s aesthetics.<sup>403</sup> In the words of John R. Betz:

“One of the most salient features of postmodern readings of the sublime is that the sublime figures as a kind of ‘promised land’, a place of prophetic refuge, because it registers an aesthetic break with every economy of representation.”<sup>404</sup>

Thus, in postmodern thought the sublime is associated with the arrival of the absolute other. This is also true of the way in which the transcendent is conceived within temporal transcendence in immanence. Even though there is no constellation that can remain immanently closed in upon itself, as it is always inhabited by a transcendent other, the other remains an absolute *other*. There is no relationship between the immanent and the transcendent, and as has been stated before, this is deemed necessary in order to safeguard the otherness of the other, lest it be appropriated within the immanent economy of the “same.”

---

<sup>403</sup> John R. Betz, *Beyond the Sublime*, pp. 381, 382.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.* p. 381.

The ethical concern for the integrity of the other as other has been the main focus of the work of Emmanuel Levinas. For him every other is completely other, and the recognition of this fact places an enormous ethical burden on the conceiving subject. While criticising Levinas' conception of the infinite, Derrida nevertheless, in important ways takes over the Levinasian maxim of *l'autre est tout autre*. The point is that as part of the postmodern reception of the Kantian sublime, and taking over from Levinas an emphasis on the absolute otherness of the other, the relationship between transcendence and immanence within a notion of temporal transcendence in immanence may be described as one of asymmetrical non-reciprocity. The relationship is firstly asymmetrical, since the emphasis is placed on the arrival of the other. The immanent constellation is passive - it is subject to the inexorable flow of temporality and therefore to the arrival of the transcendent. However, and more important for this discussion, the relationship is the non-relationship of non-reciprocity. The arrival of the transcendent other evokes no answer from the immanent constellation that is affected by it. It is simply affected by it and therefore gives way to a new constellation that in its turn is affected by being originally contaminated with a transcendent other. There can be no mention of any kind of community between the transcendent and the immanent. And while this, in some quarters, may be regarded as the apex of ethical behaviour, the resultant worldview is one of atomised individuals who are continually being split more and more in the infinite flux of temporality. What remains is, in effect, nothing, except for temporality itself. Nothing prevents the ethical treatment of the other as other from sinking into mere indifference: directionless change is simply regarded as what happens. With regard to the meaning of space and time within such a worldview, the conclusion already reached in earlier chapters may be restated: space and time are indifferent categories - spacing is what happens; entropy increases.

In contrast to the asymmetrical non-reciprocity resulting from temporal transcendence in immanence, the approach of theological transcendence in immanence could be said to be one of asymmetrical reciprocity. Whereas the relationship between God and finite creation is deemed to be asymmetrical – creation is radically contingent and dependent; God is self-subsistent Being – there is nevertheless reciprocity. Finite creation is the effect of God's creative intention and, in being the effect of which God is the cause, creation participates after a

fashion in the being of God. The transcendence that immanent creation is pervaded by is not thought in terms of strangeness, but in terms of community. Even though divine transcendence is always more, infinitely more, than may be grasped in finite thought, the participation of finite immanence in divine transcendence implies that the power at work in creation is one of a drawing towards God, and not merely of a frightened running away upon the arrival of an absolute other. Creation, and especially consciousness, is filled with a desire to grow towards its created goal, and as a result of grace, even past its created goal towards deification. This is its reciprocal giving of itself to God in response to God's gift of creation.

Conceiving of the relation between transcendence and immanence in terms of reciprocity and community has important implications for ethics and social theory, as well as for aesthetics. On the one hand, the interval that separates the self from the other may be regarded as a harmonious interval. The otherness of the other may be celebrated precisely on the basis of shared creatureliness. With regard to aesthetics, a transcendence in immanence viewed on the basis of a reciprocity between transcendence and immanence may afford the opportunity of once again appreciating beauty. All experiences of beauty would not have to be suspected of being subjective projections upon the canvass of an unfathomable abyss. Prior to conscious thought, there is already a relationship between transcendence in immanence that allows for proportionality in temporal progression, as well as progression in spatial proportion. In other words, prior to subjective thought, there is already a relationship between transcendence and immanence that is beautiful.

In this section, the possibility of temporal transcendence in immanence appropriating theology and thereby inhabiting it according to the methodology of transcendence *in* immanence has been explored. As it stands, the prospects for such an approach do not look favourable. Four interrelated critical responses have been broached, to wit the strangeness of temporal transcendence in immanence to the main tradition of Christian theology, the impossibility of a final overcoming of metaphysics, the implications of the conception of freedom as unbridled potentiality associated with temporal transcendence in immanence, and, finally, the implications of the non-relationship of asymmetrical non-reciprocity between transcendence and immanence, as found in temporal transcendence in immanence.

In the final section of this chapter, the converse possibility will now be considered, namely that of somehow appropriating the insights of temporal transcendence in immanence into a broader view of theological transcendence in immanence, thereby inhabiting it according to the methodology of transcendence in immanence.

### 5.3 Theological transcendence in immanence

Whereto the conversation with Jacques Derrida? Thus far, it has been argued that the notion of transcendence in immanence, according to its very methodology, so to speak, is unwilling to accept the differing interpretations of temporal transcendence in immanence and theological transcendence in immanence as remaining completely transcendent to each other - that is, as simply being juxtaposed to each other *as different*. Rather, transcendence in immanence would seek to relate the two interpretations of transcendence in immanence in a relation of transcendence in immanence. The possibility of temporal transcendence in immanence appropriating theology (as it were), and explaining the divine in terms of temporal transcendence in immanence, was subsequently explored and rejected. However, that leaves the possibility of theological transcendence in immanence inhabiting temporal transcendence in immanence, while also transcending it in a properly theological gesture.

The final part of this study suggests that the possibility of theological transcendence in immanence appropriating temporal transcendence in immanence and inhabiting it after the fashion of transcendence in immanence is indeed viable and a suitable provisional conclusion to the conversation with Jacques Derrida.<sup>405</sup> This will be argued primarily on the grounds of the content of the notion of theological transcendence in immanence itself, and secondly with reference to an historical precedent to such a gesture in the work of Thomas Aquinas. In what follows, the methodology of transcendence in immanence, as materially contained in the work of

---

<sup>405</sup>The conclusion is provisional, because in a sense, the conversation between the two positions is truly interminable. It may always be possible to view the synthesis reached by the present study as a totality that auto-deconstructs, as it is already inhabited by its other.



Thomas Aquinas, will be investigated. The study ends with an exploration of the possibility of achieving a similar gesture with regard to the Derridean manifestation of the phenomenological tradition.

During the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, Christianity in the West was faced with a challenge in the form of the discovery of a large part of the Aristotelian corpus that had, since antiquity, fallen into obscurity. Up until then, Christian intellectual labour was mainly approached in terms of the venerable tradition of *Sapientia Christiana*, according to which the role of reason was simply to expound the truths of revelation using philosophical concepts.<sup>406</sup> Aristotelian philosophy, however, presented theology with an intellectual approach that was much more “immanent”, in that it sought to understand nature on the basis of experience and reasoned principles, and not primarily in terms of revelation. In the face of this altered situation, Christian theology could, and in quite a few of its exponents *did*, react by emphasising the sole legitimacy of revealed truth, thereby denying immanent experience and reason any legitimacy whatsoever. This could be interpreted as a response whereby transcendence overrules immanence. On the other hand, theology could react with what would amount to capitulation before an emancipated reason, and could seek to reinvent itself as “natural theology” - in other words, as a theology that only accepts propositions pertaining to the divine that are in line with “natural” reason. Had this been the case, a completely autonomous immanent sphere would seemingly have emerged.<sup>407</sup> The fascinating and remarkable feat of Thomas Aquinas was that he rejected both of the previous options in favour of a third approach. Aquinas saw that the emancipation of natural reason could yet prove to be a powerful ally within a broadened project of Christian intellectual labour. In the words of Rudi te Velde:

“The theological project of the *Summa [Theologiae]* marks itself off against the whole of philosophical disciplines not by excluding and rejecting them as

---

<sup>406</sup>Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God – The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae* (London: Ashgate, 2006), p. 5. The following part of the discussion is indebted to Te Velde’s exposition of the way in which Thomas Aquinas incorporated Aristotle.

<sup>407</sup>The possibility for a completely secular immanent sphere also rears its head in the first scenario, namely that of theology denying reason and created nature any legitimacy whatsoever. If created nature is denied any role at all, it becomes a simple matter of inverting this position in order to deny any transcendence whatsoever.

being foreign to its own revelation-based approach to the truth, but by incorporating philosophical (metaphysical) reason and at the same time limiting its scope from within.”<sup>408</sup>

What Aquinas did was to try and relate the revealed truths of the Christian faith with the more self-contained, immanent approach of Aristotelian philosophy, in such a way that theology inhabits and makes use of metaphysical reasoning while still incorporating it into a bigger picture of creation’s relation to the transcendent Divine. According to such a scheme of transcendence in immanence reason has its own limited autonomy. Reason cannot be used to prove the existence of God or man’s relation to God without the knowledge that faith is. And yet the precepts of reason do have a relative autonomy, being part as they are of a creation that has been granted an existence outside of God. While reason cannot prove the existence of God, or force any conclusions about God solely on the basis of its logical analysis of experience, reason can be used to argue for the intelligibility of the Christian belief in God and the other doctrines of faith that accompany it.

Thus, Aquinas simply accepts revelation. He does not try to prove (at least not in any modern, scientific sense) the existence of God who reveals himself, or the state of the world as being fallen and redeemed in Christ. What Aquinas does is to explore how such a state of affairs can be intelligible or possible, based on the precepts of reason informed by experience of the natural world. To this end, Aquinas explores and elaborates on the *sacra doctrina* of the Christian religion. This “divine science” of the *Summa Theologiae* could be understood as the practical outworking of the notion of transcendence in immanence, since, on the one hand, it seeks to define itself properly as a science in terms of the Aristotelian understanding of a science<sup>409</sup>, and on the other hand, it only seeks to manifest the intelligibility of revealed truth, which it accepts beforehand. Once again, in the words of Rudi te Velde:

“Being a *scientia*, sacred doctrine is not restricted to factual revelation. Rather, it considers the whole of reality under the aspect of the intelligibility

---

<sup>408</sup> *Aquinas on God*, p. 5.

<sup>409</sup> “A science is, essentially, *cognition ex principiis* – cognition of propositions (conclusions), the truth of which depends logically on prior propositions, which are known through themselves (principles).”  
Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 23.

things have when seen in the light of God's revelation. On the one hand, one must acknowledge an essential distinction between philosophical knowledge and the knowledge of sacred doctrine. On the other hand, the diverse disciplines of rational knowledge are subsumed by, and integrated in, the higher and more comprehensive intelligibility of the *scientia* of sacred doctrine. Sacred doctrine is not a science about a different reality; it is about the same reality, but seen under a different formality. The different intelligible aspects of reality that are disclosed and studied by the philosophical disciplines of human reason are included in this science in a more unified and comprehensive manner, notwithstanding the fact that its formal point of view is only accessible for humans through faith."<sup>410</sup>

Thomas' approach, as it appears in the above quotation, is truly remarkable. This approach accepts that human reason only has access to nature by means of experience, whereby an immanent domain is in fact marked off. Equally, it accepts that the propositions of reason, in seeking to explain experience, should be true to its own nature, in being finite and immanent. At the same time, it accepts – on the basis of faith in revelation – that the whole of this finite, immanent reality should be viewed as a creation that is the result of the work of a creator, and that is radically dependent for its existence on the sustained care of God.<sup>411</sup> While this does not alter the functioning of the individual operations of reason, it does affect reasoning as *a whole*. Now the entire existence of reason, as it experiences nature, may be taken to be connected to the transcendent reality – God – that relates to and cares for creation. From within reason itself there is no compelling reason to reject the possibility of such a configuration. It is just as rational to imagine a transcendence that inhabits and affects immanent reality as a whole as it is, based on experience, to imagine a reality comprised only of finite immanence.

Commenting on the epistemological situation of, on the one hand, a prior acceptance of revelation, and on the other hand, an *a priori* exclusion of the possibility of conflict

---

<sup>410</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>411</sup>Eric Alliez describes the epistemological situation of a prior acceptance of revelation as follows: "... a *ratio fide illustrata* whose *resolutio* depends upon a single truth excluding a priori all hiatus between the truth of philosophy and the truth of revelation..." Eric Alliez, *Capital Times – Tales from the Conquest of Time*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 189.

between experience and the truth of revelation, John Milbank mentions that Aquinas was able to draw from the tradition of Christian Platonism, which he inherited via Augustine and Anselm.<sup>412</sup> Plato already grappled with the so-called Meno problematic, or the necessity of, in a sense, already having to know something in order to be able to know it. According to Milbank:

“... for Aquinas, since *a priori* reasonings to God are refused, and straightforward *a posteriori* inductions are equally impossible, discursive reasoning about God must presuppose a disclosure of God to our *intellectus*, which enjoys a very remote participation in the divine immediacy of vision.”<sup>413</sup>

Thus, the disclosure of God to our human intellect is to be understood as a dim and unquantifiable participation in God’s own science. For Thomas, *sacra scriptura* is, in important ways, what is to be understood when speaking of divine revelation, but then as read, manifested and performed, because the Bible was not yet taken to be a discrete, foundational and merely written text.<sup>414</sup> To understand how the acceptance of divine revelation can – perhaps even more importantly - be a real participation in God’s own science, it may be helpful to bear in mind how Thomas regarded God’s presence to creatures. John Milbank explains that Aquinas approached God’s presence to creation under the heading of divine substance, and that this emphasises the fact that, according to Aquinas, God’s omnipresence simply is God himself. There really cannot be any other “being” than God. However, on the other hand, following Dionysius, Thomas asserts that on account of his goodness, God somehow exists outside of himself. This impossible self-exteriorisation explains how there can be something other than God participating in God, when God is in himself the fullness of being. Thus, the dim, intuitive intellection that is the participation in the immediacy of the divine vision, is not something different from the tradition that is read and performed in Scripture. At this point, Milbank comments that the participation of human intellect – dim, unquantifiable – in the divine presence is already grace. Creation is, as it were, en-graced from the beginning. Grace is not only added later. Even while the “autonomy” of human reason is respected, this

---

<sup>412</sup>Milbank, *Truth in Aquinas*, p. 36, 37.

<sup>413</sup>Ibid. p36.

<sup>414</sup>Ibid. p. 43. Cf. Peter M. Candler Jr., *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction, or reading scripture together on the path to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) p. 21 ff.

autonomy is in reality no autonomy at all - it is from the outset only able to function because of grace.<sup>415</sup>

It is the contention of this study that, on this high level, Thomas Aquinas' approach towards reason, especially as represented by Aristotelian metaphysics, could be fruitfully emulated in the conversation with deconstruction and temporal transcendence in immanence. However, some further explanatory remarks on the "method" of transcendence in immanence employed by Aquinas will first be made.

In the course of discussing the function of the negative in Thomas' thought, Te Velde makes the following statement:

"What is God? What is it to be divine? In dealing with these questions Thomas never loses sight of the human standpoint from which the search for intelligibility of God is undertaken. For him there is no point of view 'from nowhere' (Nagel). The inquiry about God assumes a typically dialectical character inasmuch as human thought starts from what is better known to us in order to proceed to what is better known by nature. That from which our knowledge of reality takes its starting-point does not coincide with that from which reality itself takes its starting point. What is needed, thus, is a mediation between the order of knowledge, proceeding from effect to cause, and the order of being, proceeding from cause to effect. In other words we come to knowledge of God through something else (*per effectum*) in such a way that God is known as that primary being through which all other things are".<sup>416</sup>

This distinction between the epistemological modus in which thought cannot but proceed, and the ontological modus that is the reality about which knowledge is to be gained runs like a theme throughout the *Summa Theologiae*. Whereas we humans cannot but use discursive reasoning, on another level the ontological reality of that which is the cause of all that we experience is assumed. According to Te Velde's

---

<sup>415</sup> *Truth in Aquinas*, p. 37.

<sup>416</sup> Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 66.

analysis, it is the underlying assumption of the fivefold way (*quinque via*) of arguing towards the existence of God:

“That God exists can be proved in five ways’, Thomas claims with full confidence at the beginning of the text in which he sets out to prove the existence of God. In a variety of ways it can be shown that things perceptible to the senses, which are better known to us, are indeed ‘effects’ depending on an absolute and primary reality as their cause. Each of the arguments is based on a general ontological feature of sensible reality, in which an essential dependency on something else is implicated: (1) what moves is being moved by something else; (2) each efficient cause depends on a prior cause; (3) what is contingent depends on what is necessary; (4) there are degrees of perfection, which requires a maximum and (5) natural things show in their operations that they are directed to an end, but not by themselves. All five arguments follow a common pattern insofar as they reason from effect to cause.”<sup>417</sup>

The distinction between the order of knowledge and the order of reality also finds expression in Thomas’ treatment of God’s characteristics. According to Te Velde:

“God cannot be known by human reason except indirectly from the world of sensible things, Thomas asserts. This indirect route from creatures to God is based on causality since, insofar as sensible things are known to be effects of God, they lead us to the knowledge of the existence of God as their cause together with the knowledge of what must necessarily belong to God, ‘as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by him.’ What we are to know of God, ascending in this way from the sensible effects to their transcendent cause, is: first, that He is the cause of all things; second, that creatures differ from him inasmuch as He is not one of his effects and, third, that God differs, not by reason of lacking some perfection, but because he exceeds all his effects in perfection. This is, in effect, Thomas’ elaborated and refined version of the *triplex via* according to causality, remotio and

---

<sup>417</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

eminence, which he discerns as underlying Dionysius' approach of God in *De divinis nominibus*."

The distinction and interrelation between the order of knowledge and the order of reality is another way of expressing the notion of transcendence in immanence. The immanent realm opened up by the order of knowledge, which is to say by the operation of reason, is understood according to the best epistemological practices of the day (which, in Aquinas' case, was the philosophy of Aristotle). However, this does not preclude the acceptance of another order, the order of reality, as primary. According to this notion, there is more to reality than can be discerned by reason alone, and this greater reality in fact makes what is discerned by reason intelligible. From the perspective of the order of reality, all immanence is pervaded by the transcendence that it participates in, and is radically dependent on the same transcendence, of which it is the effect.

The notion of transcendence in immanence, as explained in terms of the distinction between the order of knowledge and the order of being, is also used by Aquinas in order to explain the operation of language. It is here that the notion of analogy comes into play. Analogy is central to Thomas' proposal of a solution to the question of how the words of language that belong properly to the sphere of finite immanence can refer to the infinite and transcendent God.<sup>418</sup> Rudi te Velde introduces his treatment of analogy in Aquinas by placing it within the context of the Aristotelian semantic triangle of reality, knowledge and language (*res – ratio – nomen*.) Because the order of reality is pre-accepted and given priority, the relationship between language and extra-mental reality is not as significant a problem as it has become since the epistemological turn associated with modernity. On the other hand, according to Thomas, there is also no immediate access of language to reality. The order of knowledge cannot be discounted:

"The basic relation of signification (a *nomen* signifies a *res*) is mediated through concepts of thought by which a thing is conceived to be such and

---

<sup>418</sup>Ibid. p. 97.

such. A thing is always signified according to how it is known and conceived by us.”<sup>419</sup>

In the signification of words, one has to, therefore, distinguish between the two aspects of *res* and *ratio*. In asking how designations such as “good”, “wise” and “beautiful”, deriving as they do from the world of finite experience, can be used to designate the transcendence of God, Aquinas furthermore stresses the fundamental, unquantifiable disproportion between *res* and *ratio*. The *ratio* of the names does not succeed in adequately representing to the human intellect the *res* as it is in God. On the other hand, the disproportion between *res* and *ratio* should not be regarded as an unbridgeable gulf between the immanence of human language and the transcendence of God. Thomas’ intention is precisely to show how the actual speaking about God in the Christian tradition can be understood as a speaking, properly and intelligibly, about *God*.<sup>420</sup> The point is that some names are positively affirmed of God, even while the way in which their meaning is conceived by human reason (the aspect of the *ratio*) should be regarded as insufficient. This must then be followed by a reaffirmation by which the name’s meaning (the aspect of *res*) is posited, as in God himself, in a manner that goes beyond our understanding. “The transcendence of God and the immanence of language are not allowed to fall apart; they must be kept together in terms of a semantic relation of transcendence-in-immanence, following the transcending immanence of God in his creatures.”<sup>421</sup> Thus analogy as understood by Thomas, especially with regard to speaking the divine names, is another way of saying “transcendence in immanence”.

The above discussion is, of course, not nearly enough to do justice to the breadth and scope of the Thomistic project. The aim of the above remarks has been to highlight a certain approach or methodology. Whereas the Aristotelian philosophy of his day could have been regarded as an atheistic<sup>422</sup> threat to Christian faith in God,

---

<sup>419</sup> Ibid. p. 99.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid. p. 102.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Williston Walker refers to the development in the later thirteenth century of a radical Aristotelianism, the so-called Latin Averroism, which emerged from the influence of the Islamic philosopher, Ibn-Rushd (Averroës). This line of thought regarded Aristotle as supreme among the teachers of truth and was puzzled by the efforts to reconcile Christian revelation with an Aristotelian reason shorn of its Neoplatonic (theistic and mystical) accretions. Best known amongst these “radical” Aristotelians were



Thomas sought to validate Aristotelianism while situating it within a broader frame of reference, and thereby limiting it from within.

At this point, it should be remarked that, on the one hand, the historical situation in the thirteenth century was such that Thomas' synthetical approach was by no means the only option available<sup>423</sup>, and, on the other hand, that modern scholarship also remains ambiguous with regard to the possibilities and parameters of such a synthesis. The first remark may be illustrated by highlighting the attitude of Bonaventure, general of the Franciscan order, towards Aristotle. Early in the thirteenth century, in response to the nascent Aristotelianism, Pope Gregory IX urged Catholic theologians not to allow theology to be placed under the authority of its servant (philosophy). What the Pope called for was an engagement with Aristotelianism, rather than allowing it to become the exclusive remit of the Faculties of Letters at the newly formed universities. Thus, Bonaventure, following his masters, Alexander of Halés and Jean de la Rochelle, initially assumed a great part of Aristotle's heritage. However, when faced with the very real possibility of an autonomous and heterodox Aristotelianism, Bonaventure modified his attitude and denounced "in an eschatological and apocalyptic sense, every philosophy independent of revelation that would wish to snatch us from the hands of the royal fiancée of Christian wisdom."<sup>424</sup> Eventually this impulse developed into a proper neo-Augustinianism, separatist and harking back to the older tradition of *sapientia Christiana*. For a time this alternative approach towards Aristotelianism also had the theological upper hand, as witnessed in the famous condemnations of 1277.

Even after the rehabilitation of the angelic doctor and his elevation to the status of *doctor ecclesiae*, a tradition suspicious of classical philosophy in general and Aristotelianism in particular remained alive and well in subsequent centuries. According to Alasdair Macintyre, Luther, for example, was an heir to this tradition, to

---

two masters in the arts faculty at Paris in the 1260s and 1270s, Siger of Brabant and Boetius of Dacia. (Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 334); cf. also Alliez, *Capital Times*, p. 191, 192.

<sup>423</sup> Alasdair Macintyre goes as far as to suggest that Aquinas' treatment of Aristotle should be regarded as "highly deviant" within the context of his time. Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue – 3d edition* (London: Duckworth, 2007), p. 178.

<sup>424</sup> Alliez, *Capital Times*, p. 191.

the extent that he would have remarked about Aristotle that the latter was a buffoon who had misled the church.<sup>425</sup>

The second remark, to the effect that contemporary Thomistic scholarship also remains undecided about the felicity of Aquinas' transcendence-in-immanence approach to philosophy, may be corroborated with reference to the positions of Etienne Gilson and Alasdair Macintyre. On the one hand, in line with Gilson, the emphasis may be placed on the irreducibility of theology and philosophy to each other in Aquinas' thought. In the preface to the sixth edition of *Le Thomisme*, Gilson states that in dealing with Thomas' philosophy, "I continue to insist on the essentially theological character of Thomas' teaching but I maintain more than ever that his theology by its very nature includes not only in fact but necessarily a strictly rational philosophy."<sup>426</sup> While Thomas' theology includes a philosophy, each approach has its own integrity and any engagement with Thomas' thought should speak both languages, but each on the appropriate occasion (as Thomas himself does, according to Gilson.)<sup>427</sup> Whereas it is, according to Gilson, just as wrong to think that Thomas radically separates the domains of theology and philosophy as it is to think that he confuses them, Gilson nevertheless maintains that theology and philosophy are two formally distinct domains in Thomas' thought.<sup>428</sup>

On the other hand, Alasdair Macintyre seems to hold a position that allows for the mutual inter-penetration of the theological and philosophical in Thomas' thought. The following quotation from *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* is illuminating:

"I also argued earlier that Aquinas does not merely supplement Aristotle, but that he shows Aristotle's account of the teleology of human life to be radically defective. That radical defectiveness in understanding turns out in the light of these sections of the *Summa* to be, on Aquinas' view, not only or so much a radical defectiveness in Aristotle's account as a radical defectiveness in that natural human order of which Aristotle gave his account. A strong thesis

---

<sup>425</sup> *After Virtue*, p. 165, 167.

<sup>426</sup> Etienne Gilson, *Thomism – The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002), p. xiii.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20, 23.

about the inadequacies and flaws of the natural human order emerges, so that the relationship of Aquinas' Aristotelianism to his allegiance to Augustine appears in a new light. The Augustinian understanding of fallen human nature is used to explain the limitations of Aristotle's arguments, just as the detail of Aristotle often corrects Augustine's generalizations".<sup>429</sup>

A salient point to be made here is, therefore, that Aquinas also often reads Aristotle, as it were, against himself. Aquinas reads Aristotle in ways that are very different to the original pathos of the Stagirite. According to Macintyre, this is evidenced, for example, by the way in which the four cardinal virtues of Aristotelian ethics are changed upon the introduction of the Christian virtue of charity.<sup>430</sup>

Far from jeopardising the methodology of transcendence in immanence identified in Aquinas, these two positions of modern Thomistic scholarship – most probably presented in a somewhat stereotypical manner – rather serve to further elucidate it. On the one hand, it is indeed the case that philosophy and theology are formally separate domains. They may not even always be absolutely congenial to each other. Both formally and possibly with regard to material content, theology and philosophy are in a certain sense transcendent to each other. The initial condemnation of Aquinas' theology by the most conservative theological currents of his day clearly shows that there are and should be limits to Thomistic intrinsicism.

On the other hand, the methodology of theological transcendence in immanence is precisely also one of transcendence not left lying separatively transcendent, but of also pervading immanence. The point to be made here is that it is not possible to establish to what extent transcendence changes immanence and to what extent it is left with its own integrity. The relationship between transcendence and immanence is unquantifiable. Whereas it is evident that Aquinas sometimes reads Aristotelian philosophy against itself, it is also true that he granted a certain relative autonomy to reason and wanted to work according to experience and the precepts of reason.

---

<sup>429</sup> Alasdair Macintyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 205.

<sup>430</sup> *After Virtue*, p. 174. This is not to say that Etienne Gilson maintained that Aquinas left all of Aristotelian philosophy unchanged. Cf. *Thomism*, p. 20 on "the transcending influence of faith on reason".

The most prudent approach would be to agree with Rudi te Velde that Aquinas accepts the truth of revelation *a priori*, and this results in the working of human reason being changed *as a whole*. Thus, there is the possibility of the one system of thought inhabiting the other intrinsically, making use of its own innermost precepts, while changing their meaning as a whole, because the system as a whole is changed. In the words of Eric Alliez:

“[T]he genius of Thomas... [rests] largely upon his intuiting the resources of that finalist meta-physics in a crisis situation that was all the more dangerously threatening the unity of Christian thought for its being secretly borne along by the deployment of its transcendence.”<sup>431</sup>

In conclusion, it must be re-emphasised that the whole excursion into the relationship of Aquinas to Aristotle had the sole purpose of providing historical support for the suggestion that theological transcendence in immanence can inhabit (or pervade) temporal transcendence in immanence after the fashion of transcendence in immanence. Even if the historical example of Aquinas' appropriation of Aristotle is shown, by way of alternative interpretations, to be inconclusive, the notion of theological transcendence in immanence itself, as suggested in this study, has enough resources in itself to justify the attempt at inhabiting and incorporating the notion of temporal transcendence in immanence after the fashion of transcendence in immanence.

Having argued for the methodological and historical plausibility of theological transcendence in immanence engaging with philosophical thought after the fashion of transcendence in immanence, the question now becomes one of how this approach would be effected in the conversation with temporal transcendence in immanence - that is, in the conversation with the legacy of Jacques Derrida. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that the incorporation of Derridean deconstruction into a notion of theological transcendence in immanence after the fashion of transcendence in immanence would most probably involve a measure of reading Derrida against himself - in other words, against his own stated intention.

---

<sup>431</sup> Alliez, *Capital Times*, p. 194.

## 5.4 Derrida's impossible God

The difference between a worldview informed by Aristotelian philosophy and a late modern or postmodern worldview is, of course, enormous. Even though it may be described as a more immanent way of philosophising, Aristotelian philosophy nevertheless worked with a reality deriving from first principles and stretching out towards a final telos. In contrast, the epistemological turn, as discussed in the second chapter of this study, seemingly foreclosed any naïve acceptance of a metaphysical reality, apart from what is disclosed to reason via experience. And yet, as has repeatedly been argued in this study, the complete abolition of metaphysics is simply not possible. In its interpretation of experience, reason inevitably accepts certain things as given. The history of thought since the epistemological turn could be described as the history of a stringent and ever-increasing minimalism with regard to metaphysics. Whereas Aquinas had a fleshed out metaphysics to work with in his project of relating the Christian faith to natural reason after the fashion of transcendence in immanence, any attempt to effect a similar relationship with postmodern philosophy will have to take into account this situation of metaphysical minimalism, if not the total rejection of metaphysics in the current intellectual climate.

The only recourse open to an intellectual labour that does not accept an order of reality prior to the order of knowledge of that reality is to work with what appears in experience. This is the logic underlying the whole of the phenomenological tradition. Phenomenology is the intellectual tradition of working with what appears "as such" in consciousness. The concluding contention of this study, being specifically a conversation with Derrida, is that the phenomenological approach, as an approach of appearing and showing, could be investigated and followed in order to argue for the intelligibility of the possibility of God. This is, of course, not an argument to prove the existence of God. Rather, from the vantage point of a prior acceptance of finite creation's radical contingency and dependence on God, phenomenology as an ordering of knowledge may be inhabited and limited, even as it is used to show the intelligibility of the possibility of God. This is, then, the indication that this study would give with regard to the direction of the conversation with Jacques Derrida on the notion of transcendence in immanence.

The idea that the phenomenological tradition is part and parcel of the greater onto-theological tradition of Western thought is a well-established argument within the work of Heidegger and Derrida. What has, however, been suggested earlier in this chapter and which will now have to be elaborated on is that the deconstruction of phenomenology could be interpreted as itself presenting a certain theological point of view. This is the argument made by Hugh Rayment-Pickard in his book, *Impossible God – Derrida's Theology*. Following Rayment-Pickard, the phenomenology of the impossible God, as it emerges in the work of Derrida, will now be traced, specifically with a view to using it as part of a gesture whereby theological transcendence in immanence inhabits temporal transcendence in immanence. In the process, salient features of the earlier work of Husserl and Heidegger will once again be highlighted.

Husserl's phenomenology is based on the possibility of a fullness of appearing inside transcendental consciousness. The suspension of all questions regarding the existence of a world outside of transcendental consciousness opens up a world inside of transcendental consciousness where transcendental objects may be analysed according to the strict rules of logic. In effecting an epochē of the outside world, Husserl attempted to cast phenomenology as a science that works with ideal truth. Phenomenological truths are infinitely repeatable in transcendental experience, and successive experience may elaborate and build on prior experience as the history of our scientific knowledge of the world progresses. What makes this fullness of appearance - the appearance of ideal truth - possible is the living presence that is the substrate of transcendental consciousness. Both terms in the expression *lebendige Gegenwart* are important. By saying that the presence underlying transcendental consciousness is a living presence, Husserl is establishing a binary opposition between life and death. Life is privileged, death denied. Life is what is proper to the realm opened up by the phenomenological epochē. In the same way, the present is raised up above that which is not the present (the past or the future, absence in general.) This putting forward of the living present as what safeguards the appearance of ideal truth is, according to Derrida, a fairly traditional theological gesture. Even though Husserl would protest that the scientific method of phenomenology allows for a thorough critique of metaphysics, the emphasis on the living present and the ideal truth that it promises is the manifestation of theology subsequent to the epistemological (transcendental) turn at the beginning of

modernity. According to Derrida, the living present, as a foundation of phenomenology, is effectively a version of "God."<sup>432</sup> Rayment-Pickard goes as far as to say that all Derrida's writings on Husserl have the underlying purpose of revealing phenomenology as a theological pursuit.<sup>433</sup>

Derrida's deconstruction of Husserlian phenomenology entails a showing of the fact that the *Lebendige Gegenwart* underlying transcendental experience is neither fully alive nor fully present. Derrida's argument, well rehearsed by now, is that "life is characterized by that irreducible secondariness and contingency which has its archetype in writing and which is thematized in Derrida's work under the title of death."<sup>434</sup> Deconstruction shows the impossibility of theology in its modern guise.

The second important step in Rayment-Pickard's analysis of deconstruction as theology is a reading of the work of Martin Heidegger. As has been argued in previous chapters, both Heidegger and Derrida orient themselves, at least initially, in relation to the work of Husserl. Whereas Derrida is influenced in important ways by his older contemporary, Heidegger, his own emphasis in the critique of Husserl nevertheless allows him also to develop a deconstruction of Heidegger's brand of phenomenology.

Heidegger is very much part of the phenomenological tradition, in that his thought remains a thought of "showing." What appears, however, should not be confined to what appears within the horizon of transcendental consciousness. Such an approach would be part of a broader malaise within Western thought, namely that of *Seinsvergessenheit*. The horizon of appearance should be conceived in a way that allows the question of being to be addressed. How does being appear? The early Heidegger seeks to approach this question by suggesting that Dasein is the horizon for the appearance of being. The later Heidegger simply prefers language itself as the "house of being."

---

<sup>432</sup>Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God*, p. 27.

<sup>433</sup>*Ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>434</sup>*Ibid.* p. 28.

According to Rayment-Pickard, Heidegger's phenomenology may be understood as a phenomenology of privation, and it would be precisely this approach that Derrida develops into his own impossible phenomenology of "disappearance."<sup>435</sup> In a sense, all phenomenology is born of privation, as it entails the recognition of some kind of horizon, whereby what is behind the horizon is left out. Yet, it is precisely this leaving out that allows the phenomena to appear at all. Heidegger translates phenomenology onto an ontological plane, asking the question of being. In his view, the pertinent epochē is that of disregarding everything that does not appear within the finitude of Dasein's life. This line of thought makes it clear why death is such an important theme in Heidegger's work. Whereas for Husserl it is the life of intentional consciousness which enables a determination of the transcendental ego (the horizon of experience), for Heidegger it is the death of self, or at least the anticipation of death, which makes his existential conception of the self possible.<sup>436</sup>

Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein.<sup>437</sup> The realisation that it is possible not to exist, the realisation that its existence is finite – a *sein zum Tode* – awakens Dasein to authenticity. In the face of the inevitability of its own death, Dasein is thrown back upon itself. The self of Dasein is an ecstatic self: in its gathering of itself it remains oriented towards the futurity of its own death. Being-towards-death is an orientation towards non-being as a possible alternative condition to being that precisely opens up the possibilities of authentic living. What we find in Heidegger, therefore, is a phenomenology of finitude and temporality. Only in its being-unto-death – the possibility of its own impossibility - can Dasein or language be a horizon for the appearance of being, an appearance that is simultaneously also a withdrawal. Heidegger's phenomenology is thus already a phenomenology of disappearance, an approach with which Derrida will associate himself. In concluding his discussion of Heidegger's phenomenology, Hugh Rayment-Pickard makes the following statement:

"The phenomenological gesture in Husserl and Heidegger is structurally the same: both attempt to secure a foundation which is apodictically certain in the

---

<sup>435</sup> Ibid. p. 69.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>437</sup> *Being and Time*, p. 294.



sense that it cannot be 'outstripped'. This gesture yields what Heidegger calls the 'phenomenological ground' of *Dasein*. Thus Heidegger, like Husserl, is concerned to open up a 'ground' for philosophy. Husserl's ground has been described by Derrida as the 'living present'. Heidegger's ground is Being oriented towards its own oblivion."<sup>438</sup>

The point is that, according to Heidegger, there is still the possibility of an authentic appearing. The phenomenological horizon is a horizon of possibility, profiled over against the possibility of impossibility. According to Derrida, however, possibility is irrevocably contaminated by impossibility. What appears, therefore, in Derrida's phenomenology is the impossibility of possibility and the possibility of impossibility.

Rayment-Pickard expounds his interpretation of Derrida's phenomenology of the *aporia* against the background of Derrida's relationship with Heidegger. In this regard, a useful first step would be to consider the attitude with which Derrida reads Heidegger. According to Rayment-Pickard, a marked change may be discerned in Derrida's attitude towards Heidegger from Derrida's earlier writings to his later work.<sup>439</sup> In his earlier writings, Derrida was more ready to use Heidegger as a kind of stepping stone or foil for his own posturing with regard to the history of metaphysics. Along with Heidegger, he characterised the history of Western metaphysics as a history of presence or logocentrism, but then implicated Heidegger as the last great exponent of this tradition, or, at least, someone balancing on the threshold of the new. According to Rayment-Pickard, this attitude of Derrida's may be termed prophetic - it is accompanied by a vision of a new post-metaphysical philosophy to come – Derrida's own.<sup>440</sup> By contrast, Derrida, in his later writings, notably *Aporias* and *The Gift of Death*, is much less willing to move beyond Heidegger, preferring to see himself as a fellow traveller caught up in the network of Heidegger's paths.<sup>441</sup> This would correspond to what Rayment-Pickard refers to as the move from prophecy to mysticism in Derrida's work. It is precisely this "mystical" element inside a phenomenology which is also a non-phenomenology that affords

---

<sup>438</sup> *Impossible God*, p. 85.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.* p. 114.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.* p. 115.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.* p. 116.

the possibility of appropriating the phenomenology of temporal transcendence in immanence into a broader structure of theological transcendence in immanence.

How does one arrive at a characterisation of Derrida's thought as a mystical phenomenology, which is at the same time also a non-phenomenology? The move in the direction of a post-phenomenological phenomenology may be discerned in Derrida's attempt to show, over against Heidegger, that there is a difference older than being. Whereas for Heidegger the most fundamental difference is the ontico-ontological difference, which is to say the difference between beings and being, Derrida points towards a more archaic difference. A phenomenology based on finitude and temporality must involve an appearing which is at the same time a withdrawal. In this regard, Heidegger was on the right track. However, in using the language of authenticity and proximity, Heidegger was nevertheless clinging to metaphysical vestiges - at the end of the epoch of *Seinsvergessenheit*, the authentic being will once again appear – even in its withdrawal. However, according to Derrida, there is no authentic clearing for being to appear - there is no uncontaminated horizon against which a phenomenon can be profiled. In the words of Rayment-Pickard:

“The point is that although things (beings) may appear within the phenomenal field, and do so precisely on the precondition of the ontological difference, the *difference itself* between a being and Being can never become a phenomenon. This is because the phenomenality of presence is always undivided: *such-and-such a being* appears, but Being does not appear separately... However at this point Heidegger and Derrida begin to part company. For Heidegger the non-phenomenality of the ontico-ontological difference can be overcome when the traces which it leaves imprinted in language speak through the functioning of language itself. For Derrida the non-phenomenality of difference is final, and language, far from rescuing the situation, only enmeshes phenomenality in an endless sequence of signs...”<sup>442</sup>.

---

<sup>442</sup>Ibid. p. 95.

The difference between beings and being cannot constitute a horizon against which something can appear. This is the impossibility of phenomenology. All that there “is” is the trace – a manifestation which is not an authentic appearing, as it is inhabited by absence and lack. The trace is simultaneously a presence and an absence. The difference older than the difference between beings and being is the difference of *différance*: the becoming space of time, which is also the becoming time of space. “*Différance* is what makes possible the presentation of the being-present.”<sup>443</sup> However, most importantly, *différance* does not allow for anything to appear “as such”. And as such it is the impossibility of phenomenology.

If, up to now, Derrida’s own point of view gained profile in the deconstruction of Heidegger’s phenomenology, the question that arises is the following: could Derrida’s own position be formulated in positive terms? This is probably where Derrida himself is at his most hesitant, and he will certainly never give an unparadoxical answer but, nevertheless, this is the direction in terms of which Hugh Rayment-Pickard reads him. Showing the impossibility of phenomenology remains a kind of showing. As such, it is a kind of phenomenology – even as a non-phenomenology. Therefore, the question now becomes the following: what appears “inside” the impossibility of phenomenology?

According to Rayment-Pickard:

“[i]t was not until the 1990’s – in *The Gift of Death* (1992) and *Aporias* (1993) – that Derrida sought to develop the theme of non-phenomenality through a consideration of Heidegger’s being-towards-death. For Heidegger, of course, the reality of *my* death necessarily stands outside living consciousness and provides an exit from the sphere of Husserlian phenomenology. For Derrida, being-towards-death is the *topos* for considering an aporetic phenomenality which is already present in Heidegger, but which requires further development and clarification. *The Gift of Death* approaches the issue of being-towards-death at the edge of a discussion of the possibility of a responsible ethical

---

<sup>443</sup>Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 6.

subject. In *Aporias* Derrida tackles the issue much more directly by asking the very question of the phenomenality of being-towards-death.<sup>444</sup>

An aporia is that which cannot appear or be shown phenomenologically, but which is nevertheless there and simply has to be lived with. In *Aporias*, Derrida indicates this by discussing the impossibility of clearly showing “my death.” While “my death” is what opens up the phenomenological horizon, it is at the same time impossible for it to appear within that horizon. It functions as the irreducible other to any phenomenology. What appears is irrevocably haunted or contaminated by an irreducible other - a “more.” Another model of Derridean impossible phenomenology is to be found in the theme of the pure gift. “The gift does not exist and does not present itself. If it presents itself, it no longer presents itself.”<sup>445</sup> Thus, what we see is the appearance of impossibility. It is the impossibility of possibility, which is at the same time the possibility of impossibility. In this hopelessly aporetic situation, in this fluid, unbounded zone of differences and deferred meaning, there is an (im)possibility beyond the merely possible. Clarity and definition give way to the “more” of mysticism and mystery.

In the words of Raimund-Pickard:

“The possibility which opened up here is of God as ‘the effect of the trace ... the movement of erasure of the trace in presence.’ The possibility of God is tied up with his death: God’s death is what makes God (im)possible. Here Death remains permanently intersected with Life (conceived as God or full presence). In a move that he repeats again and again, Derrida employs ‘God’ (later the gift, aporia, chiasmus, *khora*) in the attempt to describe the opening of language and difference.”<sup>446</sup>

What appears in Derrida’s post-phenomenological phenomenology? It is the impossibility of the possible (conceived in Heideggerian terms), which is also

---

<sup>444</sup> *Impossible God*, p. 107.

<sup>445</sup> Derrida, *Given Time 1: Counterfeit Money*, p. 15.

<sup>446</sup> *Impossible God*, p. 117. The quotation is from *Writing and Difference*, p. 108.

paradoxically the possibility of the impossible. The least that can be said is that all phenomena are haunted by a mystery - there is more to them than what appears.

It is the contention of this study that the trajectory sketched in the development from Husserl, through Heidegger, to Derrida - a path into an aporetic (non)-phenomenology - provides a means of reading temporal transcendence in immanence in a way that enables it to be incorporated into a broader notion of theological transcendence in immanence. To restate what has been repeated many times - this would not be to say that the internal logic of phenomenology will necessarily have to lead to the conclusion that "God" exists. The point is merely that the development in phenomenology may be read in a way that argues for the intelligibility of the possibility of God – a possibility which is *at the same time* a phenomenological impossibility.

The result of this development would then be that temporal transcendence in immanence is incorporated into a notion of theological transcendence in immanence. Why does a stringent phenomenological analysis lead to the conclusion of the impossibility of phenomenology? This is because, from the perspective of theological transcendence in immanence, created finitude is radically dependent on divine infinite being as its transcendent cause and telos. Created finitude partakes analogically in the divine infinite being, and can therefore never be pinned down univocally. There is always more - there is the possibility of the celebration of difference and variety, a difference and a variety that nevertheless always manifest itself in harmonious, albeit non-quantifiable, intervals.

It goes without saying that the suggested appropriation of temporal transcendence in immanence by theological transcendence in immanence, after the fashion of transcendence in immanence, flies in the face of the whole ethos of deconstruction, as envisaged by Derrida. This point may be succinctly illustrated with reference to Derrida's work on the structure and meaning of language. From the introductory chapter of this study, it may be recalled why structuralism can be regarded as an offshoot of phenomenology: a structure is what appears within a network of signifiers, constituting a horizon, whereby a certain meaning is constituted. However, the deconstruction of structuralism entails a showing of the irrevocable

contamination of structure by force - meaning cannot be covered by structure in an exhaustive fashion. There is a structural infinity to language - there is always *more* than can be structurally conceptualised. The point is, however, that for Derrida, the structural infinity of language is a *syntactic* infinity. The infinitisation lies in the unending addition of diacritical marks to the existing series. No richer or rounder grasp of meaning is hereby achieved. What is added is “non-sense, something which by right has no meaning, since it is itself the possibility of meaning.”<sup>447</sup> Derrida is adamant that the structural infinity of language is not a semantic infinity - spacing is not an indication of the movement of a deeper, infinite meaning that inhabits every constellation. Structural infinity and, extrapolating to phenomenology, the impossibility of possibility and the possibility of impossibility, is what happens on the surface. There is nothing more than spacing.

The point is, therefore, that to argue – on the grounds of Derrida’s own thought – for the intelligibility of the possibility of an ontologically transcendent God who is nevertheless intimately, immanently present to his creation, is to read Derrida against himself. However, this is, after all, precisely why theological transcendence in immanence is transcendent to temporal transcendence in immanence – which allows it to appropriate temporal transcendence in immanence after the fashion of transcendence in immanence.

The preceding line of argumentation is furthermore open to misinterpretation on both of its flanks. On the one hand, the interpretive trajectory from Husserl, through Heidegger, to Derrida, as suggested here, may be construed as an acceptance and even condoning of (post)modern philosophy in its phenomenological guise. This, however, is not the case. To say that the impossibility of phenomenology, which is at the same time the possibility of impossibility, is a position which could be incorporated within a notion of theological transcendence in immanence is to make one more remark in the conversation between temporal transcendence in immanence and theological transcendence in immanence. It should be understood against the background of the discussion with Derrida on the notion of transcendence in immanence. While temporal transcendence in immanence would

---

<sup>447</sup>Gasché, *Inventions of Difference*, p. 142.

seek to incorporate theological transcendence in immanence after the fashion of transcendence in immanence, thereby explaining it away, this chapter has advanced arguments in favour of the untenability of such a gesture. On the other hand, the possibility of theological transcendence in immanence incorporating temporal transcendence in immanence after the fashion of transcendence in immanence was also investigated and found to be possible in terms of the interpretive line that leads to an (im)possible phenomenology. Such a gesture would emulate, to some extent, the endeavour of Thomas Aquinas, whereby the latter used the precepts of Aristotelian philosophy to argue for the intelligibility of the Christian faith. The conclusion of this study suggests that the aporetic impossibility of phenomenological possibility – which is at the same time the possibility of impossibility – that is indicated by Derrida could be regarded as leaving open the intelligibility of the *possibility* of God. However, such a gesture should itself be understood against the background of a general critical posturing in relation to the philosophical developments of modernity and postmodernity. Outside of the discussion with Derrida, there is no need to remain with the minimalistic metaphysics of (post)modernity, which works almost exclusively with the order of knowledge, at the expense of the order of being.

On the other hand, to speak of the impossibility of phenomenological possibility could be construed as a theological position that denies philosophy any legitimacy whatsoever inside of theology. This would be the position tended to by Jean-Luc Marion. According to Marion, God is indeed the impossible for man. God, himself without being, gives being as a gratuitous gift. From within the order of knowledge, it would seem, there is nothing that could be used to argue for the intelligibility of the Christian belief in God. The only role of philosophy, in Marion's view, would be to demonstrate this fact. However, this, to restate what has been said at the beginning of this chapter, would be to leave theology and philosophy lying separately transcendent to each other. There is, however, an important difference between the impossibility of God, as presented in Marion's thought, and the (im)possibility of God deriving from a possible reading of Derrida's work and that – it has been suggested – may be inhabited by theology in the fashion of transcendence in immanence. The point here is that from within the order of knowledge, albeit at the furthest extremes of the phenomenological project, transcendence in immanence is to be intimated.

Far from constituting some kind of natural theology or proof of God's existence, this epistemological situation can be incorporated into a broader theological perspective that honours the precedence of the order of being - in other words, a theological perspective that faithfully accepts the presence of God as He reveals himself. Nevertheless, it does grant the order of knowledge a relatively independent existence - a relative immanence. Reason does have a role to play, a role within the wonderful, mysterious relationship of transcendence in immanence.



## 6. Conclusion

It would have become apparent that the present study sought to contribute to current academic research on three interrelated fronts.

In the first place there is a contribution to the growing corpus of Derrida scholarship. In this regard the study sought to contribute to the understanding of the notions of space and time in Derrida's work. Special attention has been given to the meaning of space and time in Derrida, the genitive being understood in a subjective as well as objective sense. On the one hand the role that space and time play in the phenomenological (de)construction of meaning has been investigated. On the other hand the giving way of strictly phenomenological considerations in order for the ontological suggestions with regard to space and time (namely a thoroughgoing immanentism) to emerge, was followed.

Secondly this study sought to develop the notion of transcendence in immanence. It was suggested that the notion of transcendence in immanence may be used, on the one hand as a means of interpreting Derrida's work, but more importantly as the basis for a critical conversation with Derrida. This study proposes that the notion of transcendence in immanence, as distinguished into temporal and theological transcendence in immanence, may be a very useful instrument for, on the one hand understanding the empathy that a Christian theological position has with Derrida's critique of modernity, while on the other hand allowing for a precise identification of the parting of ways with Derrida on the understanding of transcendence, immanence, space, time and change.

The third contribution of this study is methodological in nature. The notion of transcendence in immanence suggests a methodology that does not allow two positions or points of view to remain separatively transcendent to each other, but rather seeks to relate the positions after the fashion of transcendence in immanence. This does not necessarily entail a synthesis of two positions in dialectical tension into a higher unity. A moment of transcendence remains. The methodology of Derridean temporal transcendence in immanence was investigated with regard to its operation on the tradition of Christian theology, and subsequently found wanting. Thereupon a

methodology of theological transcendence in immanence was suggested with regard to the way that Christian theology should relate itself to Derridean temporal transcendence in immanence. An important contribution of the present study is that it suggests an alternative reading of Derrida to the existing Radical Orthodox reading, with which the present study nevertheless has much in common. Authors from a broadly Radical Orthodox persuasion have tended to emphasise the nihilistic consequences of Derrida's thought. While the present study does not deny the nihilistic implications of deconstruction, and have rehearsed the criticism against it, it nevertheless tries not to leave the two points of view lying separatively transcendent to each other. It is suggested that the notion of theological transcendence in immanence itself is resistant to such a stance. If the immanence that created finitude is, is pervaded by the divine transcendence in whose being it shares, then the traces of transcendence within a thought of infinite finitude may be sought, even if that thought itself denies divine transcendence. Accordingly the methodology of theological transcendence in immanence developed in the present study has sought to read Derrida somewhat against himself. The phenomenology of (im)possibility that Derrida's thought may be interpreted as presenting, has been analysed before. The contribution of the present study is that it uses that phenomenology in a reading of Derrida which shows how temporal transcendence in immanence can be inhabited and transcended by theological transcendence in immanence. Such an approach, the present study argues, is truer to the notion of transcendence in immanence than a critique of Derridean thought that dismisses it out of hand.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alliez, E. 1996. *Capital Times – Tales from the Conquest of Time*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Alweiss, L. 2002. "Heidegger and 'the concept of time'", *History of the Human Sciences*. 15(3): 117 - 132.
- Aristotle. 1984. *The Physics*, trans. Hardie, R.P. and Gaye, R.K. In: Barnes, J. (ed.) *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Aristotle. 2004. *The Metaphysics*, trans. H. Lawson-Tancred. London: Penguin.
- Ashworth, E.J. 1991. "Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth-Century Logic: A Preface to Aquinas on Analogy" In: *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, vol. 1.
- Ashworth, E.J. 2004. Medieval Theories of Analogy. In: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/analogy-medieval/> (Accessed on 25-06-2008).
- Bauerschmidt, F.C. 1999. "The Theological Sublime" in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. London: Routledge.
- Betz, J.R. 2005. "Beyond the Sublime: the Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (part 1)", *Modern Theology*, 21:3.
- Betz, J.R. 2006. "Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (part 2)," *Modern Theology*, 22:1.
- Bentley-Hart, D. 2003. *The Beauty of the Infinite – The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Brown, D. & Loades, A. 1995. *The sense of the sacramental – movement and measure in art and music, place and time*. London: SPCK.
- Candler, P.M. 2006. *Theology, rhetoric, manuduction – or reading Scripture together on the path to God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Caputo, J.D. 1987. *Radical Hermeneutics – Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Caputo, J.D. 1993. *Demythologizing Heidegger*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Caputo, J.D. 1997. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Caputo, J.D. 2007. "Temporal Transcendence – The Very Idea of *à venir* in Derrida" In: Caputo and Scanlon (eds.), *Transcendence and Beyond – A Postmodern Inquiry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Cox, H.G. 2009. *The Future of Faith*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Cunningham, C. 2002. *Genealogy of nihilism*. London: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. 1973. *Speech and Phenomena*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, J. 1978. *Writing and Difference*. London: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. 1982. *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University Press.
- Derrida, J. 1986. *Glas*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Derrida, J. 1988. *Limited Inc.* Evanston, Il.: Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, J. 1991. *Given Time- vol 1: Counterfeit Money*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. 1994. *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. London: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. 1995. *On the Name*, trans. David Wood. Stanford: University Press.
- Derrida, J. 1997. *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. & Eisenman, P. 1997. *Chora L Works*, ed. Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser. New York: The Monacelli Press.
- Derrida, J. 2002. "Force of Law", In: *Acts of Religion*, edited by Gil Anidjar. New York: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. 2004. *Dissemination*, trans.: Barbara Johnson. London: Continuum.
- Derrida, J. 2004. *Positions*, trans., Alan Bass. London: Continuum.
- Deutsch, D. 1997. *The Fabric of Reality*. London: Penguin.
- Du Toit, C.W. 2009. "Towards a new natural theology based on horizontal transcendence", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 65(1): 243 - 250.
- Du Toit, C.W. 2010. "Shifting Frontiers of Transcendence in Theology, Philosophy and Science", In: Du Toit, C.W. (ed.) *Homo transcendentalis? – Transcendence in science and religion: interdisciplinary perspectives*.

Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa.

- Eco, U. 1984. *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*. London: Macmillan.
- Funkenstein, A. 1986. *Theology and the scientific imagination – from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gasché, R. 1994. *Inventions of Difference – On Jacques Derrida*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Gilson, E. 2002. *Thomism – The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.
- Goetz, S. & Taliaferro, C. 2008. *Naturalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Goosen, D. 2007. *Die Nihilisme – notas oor ons tyd*. Dainfern: Praag.
- Goosen, D. "Radical Immanence. An Anomaly in the History of Ideas". To be published in 2012.
- Habermas, J. 1992. *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*. Oxford: Blackwell – Polity Press.
- Häggglund, M. 2008. *Radical Atheism – Derrida and the Time of Life*. Stanford: University Press.
- Hankey, W.J. & Hedley, D. (eds.) 2005. *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hardy, D.W. & Ford, D.F. 1984. *Jubilate: Theology in Praise*. London: Darton, 1984.
- Heidegger, M. 1971. *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der Menschlichen Freiheit*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman.
- Heidegger, M. 1977. *The Question concerning technology and other essays*, trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, M. 1992. *The Concept of Time*, trans. W. McNeill. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M. 1995. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. London: Blackwell.
- Heschel, A.J. 1951. *The Sabbath*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Huggett, N. 1999. *Space from Zeno to Einstein*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.

- Hughes, G. 2003. *Worship as Meaning – a liturgical Theology for Late Modernity*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Kant, I. 1964. *Critique of Pure Reason*. London: Macmillan.
- Kant, I. 1982. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Wolfgang Schwarz. Aalen: Scientia Verlag.
- Keller, C. 2007. “Rumors of Transcendence – The Movement, State and Sex of ‘Beyond’”, In: John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.), *Transcendence and Beyond – A Postmodern Inquiry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lasch, C. 1991. *The True and Only Heaven – Progress and its Critics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Lawlor, R. 1982. *Sacred Geometry – Philosophy and Practice*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Louth, A. 2009. “Space, Time and the Liturgy,” In: Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds.) *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy*. London: Ashgate.
- Macintyre, A. 1988. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Macintyre, A. 2007. *After Virtue*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. London: Duckworth.
- Marion, J-L. 2007. “The impossible for Man – God” In: John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.) *Transcendence and Beyond – A Postmodern Inquiry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Marrati, P. 2005. *Genesis and Trace – Derrida reading Husserl and Heidegger*. Stanford: University Press.
- McCool, G.A. 1988. “An Alert and Independent Thomist”, In: McCool, G.A. (ed.) *The Universe as Journey – Conversations with W. Norris Clarke, S.J.* New York: Fordham University Press.
- McCurry, J. 2007. “Towards a poetics of theological creativity: Rowan Williams reads Augustine’s *De Doctrina* after Derrida” In: *Modern Theology*, 23 (3), July.
- Milbank, J. & Pickstock, C. 2001. *Truth in Aquinas*. London: Routledge.
- Milbank, J. 2001. “The Soul of Reciprocity: Part One, Reciprocity Refused”, *Modern Theology*, 17(3).
- Milbank, J. 2001. “The Soul of Reciprocity: Part Two, Reciprocity Granted”, *Modern Theology*, 17 (4).

- Milbank, J. 2006. *Theology & Social Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Milbank, J. 2006. *The Thomistic Telescope: Truth and Identity*. The Centre of Theology and Philosophy online papers. Available at: <http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk>. (Accessed on 03-12-2007).
- Moore, E. 2005. "'Likeness to God as Far as Possible': Deification Doctrine in Iamblichus and Three Eastern Christian Fathers," In *Theandros*, . 3 (1), Fall.
- Norris, C. 1992. "Deconstruction, Postmodernism and Philosophy", In D. Wood (ed.) *Derrida: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Oliver, S. 2001. "Motion according to Aquinas and Newton." In: *Modern Theology*, 17 (2).
- Oliver, S. 2005. *Philosophy, God and Motion*. London: Routledge.
- Penrose, R. 2007. *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe*. London: Vintage.
- Pickstock, C. 1988. *After Writing – on the liturgical consummation of philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Pickstock, C. 2005. Duns Scotus: his historical and contemporary significance. *Modern Theology*,. 21(4).
- Pickstock, C. 2011. "The Late Arrival of Language: Word, Nature and the Divine in Plato's *Cratylus*", *Modern Theology*, 27(2), April.
- Plato. 1977. *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee. London: Penguin.
- Plato. 2005. *Phaedrus*, translated by Christopher Rowe. London: Penguin.
- Ratzinger, J. & Pope Benedict XVI. 2006. "Faith, Reason and the University" Lecture delivered at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents).
- Rayment-Pickard, H. 2003. *Impossible God – Derrida's Theology*. London: Ashgate.
- Rolston, H. 1987. *Science and Religion – a critical survey*. New York: Random House.
- Rorty, R. 1980. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rorty, R. 1989. *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge: University Press.

- Rynasiewicz, R. 2004. Newton's View on Space, Time, and Motion. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/newton-stm> (Accessed on 13-08-2007).
- Sessions, W.L. 1994. *The concept of faith – a philosophical investigation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Silverman, H.J. 1989. "Derrida, Heidegger, and the Time of the Line", In: *Derrida and Deconstruction*. London: Routledge.
- Taylor, C. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press.
- Taylor, M.C. 1984. *Erring – A Postmodern A/theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Te Velde, R. 2006. *Aquinas on God – The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae*. London: Ashgate.
- Te Velde, R. 2007. "Metaphysics and the Question of Creation: Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Us" In: Peter M. Candler jr. & Conor Cunningham (eds.) *Belief and Metaphysics*. London: SCM Press.
- Toolan, D.S. 1996. "Praying in a Post-Einsteinian Universe" In: *Cross Currents*, Fall.
- Vattimo, G. 2007. "Nihilism as Postmodern Christianity" In: John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.), *Transcendence and Beyond – A Postmodern Inquiry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Visser, M. 2002. *The Geometry of Love – Space, Time, Mystery and Meaning in an ordinary church*. London: Penguin.
- Voegelin, E. 1999. *Order and History: Plato and Aristotle*. Missouri: University Press.
- Von Balthasar, H.U. 1995. *Presence and Thought – An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Mark Sebanc. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Walker, W. 1985. *A History of the Christian Church*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd.
- Ward, G. 2000. *Cities of God*. London: Routledge.
- Wilkinson, D. 2009. "Reading Genesis 1-3 in the light of modern science," In: Stephen C. Barton & David Wilkinson (eds.), *Reading Genesis After Darwin*. New York: Oxford University Press.



Whitehead, A.N. 1947. *Adventures of Ideas*. Cambridge: University Press.