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DISCLOSURE AND INSCRIPTION

Heidegger, Derrida, and the Technological Difference

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy**

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Synopsis

The relationship of Jacques Derrida and Martin Heidegger has always been complex, encompassing an entanglement of two already immense networks and suspended between proximities and distances from infinitesimal to radical. Its peculiarity is evident in the way in which Derrida strategically inscribes his own text at the margin of Heidegger's thought via a double or *clôtural* gesture which articulates the paradox that Derrida writes with Heidegger against Heidegger. One of the most decisive aspects of this gesture is Derrida's deconstruction of Heidegger's claims regarding the relation between technology and philosophy. In "The Question Concerning Technology" and accompanying essays Heidegger opens up a way of reflecting upon the essence of technology moves against its metaphysical determination specifying, moreover, the sense of modern technology as a mode of disclosure. These reflections are, however, ambiguous. Heidegger is one of the first thinkers to confront technology in philosophical terms, and yet he wishes to purify thinking of originary technicity. Technology remains a *question*, and *as* a question asked by thinking, thinking is not technical. In other words, thinking for Heidegger, is constituted in its very difference from technology. This is the move that must be deconstructed. In simultaneously repeating and displacing the Heideggerian scheme, Derrida elaborates an infinitesimal and decisive *différance* between the thinking of Being and his own notion of "writing" (*l'écriture*) or generalized inscription. What is crucial is that as against Heidegger's Being, the general text is not an essence of technics nor is it a proper thinking opposed to technology. On the contrary, Derrida's main point, among other things, against Heidegger, is that technology has always already begun, that it is originary with respect to the history of Being and thinking. In this study I examine the stakes and implications of Derrida's move along with a possible Heideggerian response. To begin with, I develop a reading of Heidegger's text that shows the import of technology to his work as a whole and its centrality to the thinking of Being as difference. I then take up the question of Derrida's deconstruction of Heidegger's analysis of the history of Being and its technological completion as this is played out in *The Post Card* and related texts. Following this I revert back to Derrida's now "classic" writings of the late 1960s and early 1970s and explore the arguments that relate contemporary developments in technology, science, and the media to the problematic of writing and to the closure of logocentric metaphysics. The preceding chapters lay the groundwork for me to then offer a critical reading of Derrida's text that locates in the articulations and assumptions of deconstruction certain indications of its belonging within the horizon of Heidegger's thinking of technology. Finally, I offer a reading of some of Derrida's later texts with the aim of showing that and how deconstruction emerges as an affirmative technology.

Abbreviations

Full bibliographical information can be found in Works Cited.

Texts by Heidegger

AWP “The Age of the World Picture”

BPP *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*

BT *Being and Time*

CP *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*

EP “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”

ID *Identity and Difference*

OTB *On Time and Being*

QCT “The Question Concerning Technology”

WCT *What is Called Thinking?*

Texts by Derrida

D “*Différance*”

DI “Deconstructions: The Im-possible”

DIS Dissemination

DE Deconstruction Engaged: The Sydney Seminars

EM “The Ends of Man”

EOT Echographies of Television

FP “*The Future of the Profession or the University without condition (thanks to the “Humanities,” what could take place tomorrow)*”.

- GII “Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand”
- IOG Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction
- OG *Of Grammatology*
- P Positions
- PC *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond.*
- PIO “Psyche: Inventions of the Other”
- SEC “Signature Event Context”
- SM *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International.*
- SOR “Sendings: On Representation”
- SP *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs.*
- SSP “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”
- TS *A Taste for the Secret.*
- TTT “The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations”

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Introduction

Technology, Difference, and the Question of the Thesis

In this study I focus on what for me has always been a particularly obscure and provocative topic: the relationship between the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida where this turns on the question of technology. As anyone familiar with the critical writings on these two thinkers will recall, far more has been written on just about every aspect of what transpires in Derrida's deconstructive engagement with Heidegger's thought than on what happens with regard to the transmission and inheritance of the related problematics of technology and philosophy, technology and metaphysics, technology and the West. Moreover, it occurred to me that if one wanted to understand the particular intellectual, disciplinary, and institutional stakes of Derrida's work where these concern his diagnosis of the "closure" of logocentric metaphysics along with his assertion that "deconstruction" is one of the many metonymic names for what is happening to our world as it becomes increasingly technicized, then one would necessarily be driven to come to terms with Derrida's reinscription of Heidegger's text.

Heidegger's question

As is more or less well known, the question concerning technology dominates Heidegger's thinking of Being. Its peculiarity lies in the manner in which it opens up a way of reflecting upon technology that moves against its metaphysical determination specifying, moreover, the sense of modern techno-science in respect to technology in general. A question that involves the "end" or completion of the history of Western philosophy and the possibility of a new task of thinking. A question that delineates the impending "turn" (*Kehre*) Heidegger wants to think as the moment of danger and saving,

the move from the global framework of *Ge-stell* to *Ereignis* or the “event of appropriation”. For Heidegger, the epochal passage of our moment rotates around an axis that gets articulated by the question of technology, while the question of technology is reopened in the epochal shift that moved away from the metaphysical-productionist determination of that question as one concerned with instrumentality. The major argument is that the traditional view of thinking technology on a horizon and in terms of “means” and “ends,” a determination that pertains to human inventions that alter or manage what is construed to be the natural environment, deprives one of any access to its essence which, as Heidegger famously asserts, is nothing technological. In this case, Heidegger envisions technology not *primarily* as a human invention, nor in the various concrete manifestations it most obviously offers up like motors or engines, but in a way that leads the multiplicity of dispersed phenomena back to their origin in the historical unfolding of metaphysics.

The historical movement at work in technology is metaphysical because it concerns all domains of reality and not just machines. It marks beings in their totality. Technology has the character of Being. The question of technology requires that we address it in its metaphysical history because Heidegger identifies modern technology as “equivalent to the concept of metaphysics completing itself.”¹ It is important that the completion of metaphysics be understood not as something that happens in accordance with the wishes and desires of human beings, nor as an event in the “history of idea’s”; rather, metaphysics is self-completing. It is the event in which philosophy becomes an “objectively” functioning system in the world. Metaphysics is actualized in the permeation of the world by technical relations. With the arrival of technology the everyday thus becomes metaphysical; and metaphysics becomes everyday.

For Heidegger, technical relations are the culmination of the history of philosophy because they make actual the various ways in which beings have hitherto been

¹ Martin Heidegger, “Overcoming Metaphysics” in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

represented in the basic ontological concepts of metaphysical inquiry. At the end of philosophy, that direction which philosophical thought has been pursuing in the course of its history makes itself known. This history is the history of Being itself and in a certain sense, as Samuel IJsseling remarks, it is the technicians who are most true to this history even though Heidegger never formulated it quite so explicitly.² In this respect, all the great thinkers, beginning with the Greeks, “prepared” for the “release of Being into machination”. When Plato represents Being as idea and as the *koinonia* of the Ideas, when Aristotle represents it as *ousia*, Kant as position, Hegel as absolute concept, Nietzsche as will to power, these are not doctrines advanced by chance, but rather words of Being that adhere to a productionist orientation that has determined Western thinking for nearly three millennia. As Heidegger shows, the actualization of philosophy in technology brings to completion the forgetting or erasure of the ontic-ontological and ecstatic difference between Being and beings insofar as Being is founded upon an unthematized privilege granted to the present (over the past and future) as well as to those beings that are represented in their presence precisely as present-to-hand (as “objects”) and as what have been produced. Technology continues the final metamorphosis and materialization of all the activities of objectification. The radical transformations effected by contemporary techno-science come to pass in this culmination.

If his vocabulary is still appropriate Heidegger claims that metaphysics culminates in the projection of a *mathesis universalis* that frames the world as a two-dimensional diagram or map, institutes a separation between subject and object, and opens a network in which subject and object mutually challenge, determine and position each other in such a fashion that the positioning itself reserves priority over both, which are “sucked up” into an ever shifting “reservoir” of manipulable resource. So defined, modern technics constitutes the *Ge-stell*, the reciprocal gathering and dissimulation of mankind and nature through generalized calculating, planning, automatization and cyberneticization. In this

² Samuel Ijsseling, “The End of Philosophy as the Commencement of Thinking” in *Critical Heidegger*, ed. Christopher Macann, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 191-205. p.195.

connection, Heidegger becomes Heidegger through the following four essential claims: 1. “Technology is a mode of revealing.”³ 2. “The revealing that rules throughout modern technology has the character of a setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging-forth.”⁴ 3. “Enframing (*Ge-stell*) means the gathering-together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering as standing-reserve.”⁵ 4. “What we experience in the *Ge-stell* as the constellation of Being and man through the modern world of technology is a prelude to what is called the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*).”⁶ Certainly it is a matter here of four essential views and not just an enunciation of a set of philosophical or theoretical propositions, academic theses or common opinions since these claims are given by way of a thinking that requires that we enter into the framework of technology as it projects itself into a space withdrawn from representationalist or calculative thought. To enter into such a space, and thereby into what remains concealed in technology as a contemporary potential, is precisely the task Heidegger envisages for thinking at the end of philosophy.

Derrida and technics

Now, if the question of modern technology has long been established as an important aspect of Heidegger’s thought, when we consider the reception of the Derridean text technology does not immediately present itself as one of the major themes. Or at least it seemed that way. The first sustained reception of Derrida’s work took place in university departments of literature, a context that was understandably selective and which fostered the common conviction that its concerns were primarily to do with reading and interpretation, with the method and epistemology of textual criticism and analysis. This

³ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 3-35. p. 13; hereafter cited as *QCT*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 36-37; hereafter cited as *ID*.

evaluation characterised the reception of Derrida's work until the latter part of the 1980s by which time, and owing to an increased recognition of its philosophical pertinence, the complex "logic" of "deconstruction" was being untied. By now, Derrida's arguments concerning decentering, supplementarity, marginalization, undecidability, deferment and differentiation have become philosophical commonplaces and are seen to be aspects of a "method" that is not reducible to any particular discipline, institution or practice. Indeed, the conceptual resources and strategies of deconstruction continue to replicate in explosive variants and viral elaborations and numerous interventions in Derrida's work can be seen to have targeted specific problems and fields, from law to architecture, ethics, aesthetics, religion, history, politics, and so on. Amongst these fields we must count technology. Of course, it is true that that technology is not a privileged object of reflection for Derrida. That said, technological considerations in general do play an important role in Derrida's work, from his introduction to Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry* to *The Post Card* and his most recent texts. Indeed, as I will argue in this study Derrida's engagement with technology, particularly its contemporary amalgamation with science and the media, is not merely one theme among others in his text; rather, it is central to his elaboration of deconstruction which, as we shall see, opens the necessity for a rethinking of technicity generally. In this case, it will be a question of drawing out certain aspects and implications of Derrida's work that have been more or less overshadowed by its literary and philosophical receptions and promoting it as a general theory of technics.

Derrida's thinking on the distinct, if closely related, topics of technology, science and the media, is subtle and complex. Like Heidegger, his work takes on the radical consequences of conceiving technology in a way that resists its being totally understood in terms of some posited function or purpose for human beings. And, like Heidegger, Derrida opens up a way of thinking that articulates the relation between technology and Western philosophy. To begin with, as part of his general *program*, from *Of Grammatology* on, and within a very broad conceptual and historical matrix, Derrida

relates technology to the question of the disavowal of *writing*, to its condemnation as *techne*, as merely an instrument in the service of speech and the normative procedures of truth. The disavowal of writing, including as *techne*—technology—is part of the history of Western philosophy and is the condition of the possibility of this history, even though it is writing, including as *techne*, that makes this history possible. The frame of reference into which Derrida fits this articulation generates an exorbitant method—deconstruction—that intervenes in this aporetic circumstance opening up a new field of inquiry into textual processes that involves the elaboration of a general or arche-writing and its supplements text, *gramme*, *différance*, trace, iteration, dissemination, etc. Once writing, condemned throughout the history of philosophy as *techne*—an auxiliary technique, becomes irreducible, so does technology. Hence this perspective generates a very different view of both. Technology—as writing—poses a very different question, the question of a *techne* that comes “before” the “originals”. Or, as one commentator puts it, “there emerges a play where all “befores” and “afters” must be re-played, re-inscribed, although in certain sequences the classical forms of “origin” will have to be preserved; but in a different type of efficacy and “*for other reasons than hitherto*””.⁷ For Derrida, the received concept of the technical must transgress itself in favour of the notion of an “originary technicity”. This becomes a quasi-transcendental term, i.e., one that functions as a general ground or condition in a discourse, but which simultaneously questions the foundational or explanatory power of any ground or condition.

The philosophical disavowal of writing and the elaboration of general writing as originary technicity makes up the concerns of Derrida” now “classic” texts of the late 1960s and early 1970s—*Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*, *Dissemination* and *Margins of Philosophy*—in which, as is well known, Derrida develops deconstruction

⁷ Arklady Plotnitsky, *Reconfigurations*, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1993), p. 315.

with respect to what he takes to be “a new mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing”.⁸ Here it is possible to conceive of deconstruction as grammatology, as a general grammar of technics and technicity as a condition of the im-possibility of logocentrism. In this connection, it is worth reconsidering a number of examples of Derrida’s work in the ambit of this program: if one thinks of Derrida’s insistence on the role of writing given by Husserl in the constitution of ideality in “The Origin of Geometry,” or the irreducibility of the indicative sign in *Speech and Phenomena*, or the place of writing in the constitution of *logos* and *phone* in “Plato’s Pharmacy,” or the logic of iterability in “Signature Event Context,” or the “Mystic Writing Pad” that functions as a necessary supplement to consciousness in “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” or the machines that haunt his reading of Hegel, notably the *machine à drager* in *Glas* (this list could be extended), then each of these discrete arguments can be viewed as claims for the irreducibility of technics. That is, deconstruction underscores the necessity of technics as what is irreversibly and inextricably presupposed in the constitution of the philosophical *episteme*, whether this is the realm of dialogue, of the soul conversing with itself, auto-affection, or the pure ideality of speech and meaning. Yet the necessity of technics to the constitution of philosophy is also the ruination or rendering impossible of the very project it was supposed to make possible.⁹

Now, having said this it would be wrong to think that Derrida’s engagement with technology is solely or primarily an intra-philosophical matter. As I have already said, that approach which takes deconstruction to be primarily a method and epistemology for the critical reading and interpretation of texts is very selective. It severely underestimates the scope of deconstruction which is not reducible to the subjective movement of such an operation. Indeed, Derrida is keen to specify that deconstruction is not a praxis or technique, that it is not an initiative, inspiration or aesthetic fetish to which he can claim

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 8; hereafter cited as *OG*.

⁹ These remarks follow those of Simon Critchley. See his *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought*, (London: Verso, 1999), p. 174.

authorship; rather, what goes by the name of “deconstruction” is an effect of a more general transformation of the contemporary episteme. Like Heidegger before him Derrida articulates the question of technology as a thinking of the event, of what happens to the world and to metaphysics in its actuality. In this case, his diagnosis of the “closure” of metaphysics, of which the grammatological turn is a symptom, is elaborated within the context of an unprecedented technicization of the world and the human—the context, that is, of the massive programming, capitalisation, and appropriation of techno-scientific invention by multinational corporations and nation states. Most strikingly, for Derrida it is the accelerating development of information and communications technology, of the “media,” and tele-technologies of all types that constitutes a “practical deconstruction” of the world. In this context, as Timothy Clark has remarked, one might say, “not that technology is the object of deconstruction as some method of analysis or critique, but rather that it is “in deconstruction” as the originary condition of its Being.”¹⁰

The thesis of originary technicity, as the claim for the irreducibility of technics and the event, is reiterated and reworked across the whole of Derrida’s *oeuvre*. In this regard, while developing over four decades through an astonishing array of styles or strategies, performative experiments and targeted interrogations, Derrida’s work has been entirely consistent with his opening gambit. Whether it is a matter of considering the disavowal of writing in the works already mentioned, the logic of “postality” as in *The Post Card*, of “spectrality” as in *Specters of Marx*, of the archive as in *Archive Fever*, or of the indissociability of the machine and the event as in *Typewriter Ribbon*, what Derrida has managed to write in this time is guided by the desire to render explicit what can be described as a machinic intervention which interrupts the received programs of perception, interpretation, and experience and, in the process of altering this past or archive, the very functioning of it, holds open the space for the arrival of an

¹⁰ Timothy Clark, “Deconstruction and Technology” in *Deconstructions: A User’s Guide*, ed. Nicholas Royle, (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 238- 257. p. 252. See also Clark’s “Computers as Universal Mimics: Derrida’s Question of Mimesis and the Status of Artificial Intelligence” in *Philosophy Today*, Winter 1995, pp. 302-318.

unprecedented event, of a future to-come which is other than those programmatically foreseeable.¹¹

Deconstructing the thesis

Given his concern with technics it should not therefore be surprising that Derrida should choose the question of technology as one of the main threads for his deconstructive reading of Heidegger which at the time of writing is, I presume, still not finished. Indeed, as I will show in this study it is precisely here, around the question of technics, the question of technology and philosophy, of an originary technics no longer subordinate to metaphysical conceptuality nor to a thinking of Being, that the stakes of the relation between Derrida's own work and Heidegger's are played out. The reasons for this lie in the "entire—infinitesimal and decisive—*différance*" that distinguishes Derrida's claims for the irreducibility of writing and technics from Heidegger's thinking of the essence of technology where this thinking adheres to a phenomenological orientation—technology as disclosure—that is constituted in its ontological difference from technological actuality. In order to understand what is at stake here it is necessary to consider that such *différance* would give us to think deconstruction as an affirmative technology against Heidegger's thought which, despite so many denials on the subject, and despite his subtle remarks about the difference between an actual technology and its essence, remains symptomatic of the traditional relegation of technicity to a secondary position in relation to the originality of thinking and Being.

The issue is more general and more complex, of course: more general because for both Heidegger and Derrida technology brings into play the entirety of their thought: more complex because not only are we dealing here with two already immense networks, but Derrida's own work is indissociable from and, in a certain sense, *is* an interminable entanglement with Heidegger. This circumstance presents anyone who would attempt to

¹¹ See Tom Cohen's "Introduction: Derrida and the Future of...", in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1-23.

evaluate the relation between Derrida and Heidegger with enormous problems. Indeed, what I had not initially counted on when I began my research was that it would be beset by a number of difficulties to which, it seems, readers of Heidegger and Derrida (and not just these) are never sensitive enough. These difficulties, which already implicate us in the question of technology, turn on the question of whether what is to be dealt with here can conform to the staging and the particular discursive procedures which dominate academic discourse, in particular the type of text you now have in your hands—the “thesis”.

“How is this text to work...if some day we are to become sensitive, today, as opposed to so many readings that are as partial as they are canonic, i.e., academic, to the essential impossibility of holding on to any thesis within it, any posited conclusion of the scientific or philosophical type, of the theoretical type in general?” This question, which will open us to the “themes” of this thesis, to what is at issue in it, is, of course, Derrida’s.¹² The question that Derrida poses here relates to his resistance to the theoretical, that is, representational, logic of the thesis, a resistance which is part of his deconstruction of the essential tie of the thesis with the ontological and logocentric onto-encyclopaedic idea of the “book”. In “The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations,” the transcript of a presentation given in 1980 at the opening of his own thesis defence at the Sorbonne, Derrida asks “Should one speak of an epoch of the thesis? [...] Or of a thesis whose time would belong to the past? Should one speak of an age of the thesis, of an age for the thesis?”¹³ Derrida’s hesitancy and reservation over the thesis is, he says, “like a discomfiture at the moment of installation, an instability”.¹⁴ This remark reflects more than a mood. As Derrida explains, it was already clear to him that the general turn his research was taking could no longer

¹² Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 261; hereafter cited as *PC*.

¹³ Jacques Derrida, “The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations,” trans. Kathleen McLaughlin in *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 34-50. p. 34; hereafter cited as *TTT*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

conform to the classical norms of the thesis, nor did he think his work fit very well with the laws regulating scholarly discourse:

The very idea of a thetic presentation, of positional and oppositional logic, the idea of position, of *Setzung* or *Stellung* that which I called at the beginning the *epoch* of the thesis, was one of the essential parts of the system that was under deconstruction. What was then put forth under the heading—itsself lacking any particular status—of dissemination explicitly dealt, in ways that were neither thematic nor thetic, with the value of the thesis, of positional logic and its history, of the limits of its rights, its authority and legitimacy.¹⁵

Derrida's resistance to the thesis characterises the relation between deconstruction and the Heideggerian text too since it reflects his conviction that one cannot place oneself in relation to other texts in such a way that a thesis would result. Indeed, as Herman Rapaport points out in his study of *Heidegger and Derrida* (a text which has inspired my remarks here), the position that a thesis would take is inherently threatened by a bivalence of proximities, a bivalence which finds its approaches to figures like Heidegger multiplied and contradictory.¹⁶ As Rapaport says, this avoidance of positioning which detaches Derrida from the ideology of the thesis is not merely a clever attempt to double bind the relation between deconstruction and the Heideggerian text. Nor is it to be viewed as some kind of rhetorical trick designed to undermine the notion of the thesis through the tactics of differentiation. Rather, Derrida is asking us to consider how a thesis can take place in the instability of relation to other figures. And he wonders how given this instability, one can write within an academic framework wherein discourse is regulated by the notion of the thesis. In this case, Derrida's remarks are part of his insistence that

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁶ Herman Rapaport, *Heidegger and Derrida: Reflections on Time and Language*, (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 248.

his thinking is different from Heideggerian philosophizing where such difference must be understood as the *différance* of a dynamic that acknowledges a multiplicity of relationships running between complex formations of knowledge that cannot be reduced to the “differences” of theses with impunity, and which cannot be localised to the historical philosophical framework of a tradition of great minds wherein each thinker is reducible to a thesis or set of basic principles that follows from or differs from the thoughts of predecessors and followers.

What is at issue here is something I take seriously. Although this study will not be performative in a way which could only appear mock-Derrida, I take the point that in any consideration of the relation between Heidegger and Derrida one needs a complex interplay of proximities and distances rather than a simple demarcation along any given set of lines, even if such lines can within certain contexts be drawn and be very effective.¹⁷ While I may not always engage this complexity, I cannot uncritically suspend it. And this is not simply for reasons of having to obey the deconstructive logic of Heidegger’s and Derrida’s texts. It is equally the case that the problematic of technology itself demands such an approach since, as will be apparent from what I have said above, this is deeply implicated in the performative aspects of Heidegger’s and Derrida’s work in its respective enactment of thinking and writing.

Overview

Deconstructions overflow of the logic of the position, its a-thesis,¹⁸ is part of a strategic set of relays whose aim is to expose the strictures of academic presentation. In this regard, Derrida’s text articulates what is one of the most significant aspects of his work—the extent to which the necessity of deconstruction is not primarily a matter of philosophical contents, themes or theses, philosophemes, poems, theologemes or ideologemes, but especially and inseparably meaningful frames, institutional structures.

¹⁷ This is a point made by Plotnitsky. Cf. *op. cit.*, n 7 at p. 46.

¹⁸ On the “a-thesis” see especially *PC.*, p.260-73.

pedagogical or rhetorical norms, the possibilities of representation in terms of its very market. This means to include “deconstruction” itself since among the major stakes of Derrida’s work is the way in which his writings resist, in order to challenge, every movement of appropriation that tends to reduce deconstruction to a body of easily reproducible means, methods and technical procedures; a body of powerful know-how that would be at once understandable and offered for didactic transmission, susceptible of acquiring the academic status and dignity of a quasi-interdisciplinary discipline, and even saleable as a commodity, as merchandise.¹⁹

This aspect of deconstruction has strong resonance with Heidegger’s text. As is well known, one of the central strands of the question concerning technology is the difference Heidegger draws between philosophy and thinking (*Denken*). This difference is not an absolute opposition; rather, it articulates Heidegger’s assessment of the technological bifurcation of modernity as a site of transition in which thought is simultaneously carried into and withdrawn from the representative–calculative operations of completed metaphysics. In this case, thinking is announced as a contemporary potential from out of its actuality as a purely academic and cultural concern—this concern coinciding with what today is presented as “philosophy” in all its interdisciplinary modes. It seems to me that the stakes attached to this aspect of Heidegger’s question are high indeed and should not be underestimated by those who would follow his work. They involve us in the unavoidable issue of what *happens* or takes place today, there, where Heidegger’s own thought becomes present as it moves into its metaphysico-technical determination. That is, they involve us in the question of the production and transmission of Heidegger’s text, of its techno-media-(tiz)ation as an object of academic scrutiny and resource of philosophical scholarship. In this connection, in Chapter 1 of this study I will develop a

¹⁹ See Jacques Derrida, “Deconstructions: The Im-possible,” trans. Micheal Taormina in *French Theory in America*, ed., Sylvère Lofringer and Sande Cohen, (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 13-31. p. 19; hereafter cited as *DI*.

reading of Heidegger's question of technology in the context of a critical discussion of its institutional manifestation. As I will say, the demands of contemporary academic research and publishing have diverted attention away from the peculiar dynamic and long term task of Heidegger's thinking to favouring the current attunements of consciousness where these are concerned above all with deriving, evaluating, explicating and positing the contents and themes of his work in its chronological development. This circumstance has had predictable results: The very movement of Heidegger's thought, its own "immanent transformation" and "pathway character," has become obscured. It is my belief that this dynamic is central to Heidegger's question concerning technology and that its obfuscation has had a considerable impact on our ability to follow this question and track what happens in those texts in which this matter unfolds. This event turns on the ambiguous status of technology in Heidegger's work where it appears simultaneously as the ultimate obstacle to and as the ultimate possibility of thought. In this case, technology must be seen as the decisive condition across which Heidegger's turn out of metaphysics takes place. Indeed, I will assert that it is technology and only technology which opens Heidegger to the most radical developments of the thinking of Being as difference. In this connection, I want to argue for the centrality of technology to the enactment of Heidegger's thinking as a whole where this is key to unlocking the various "correspondences" of his text which is differentiated and pluralized into "Heideggers," *topoi*, and thoughtpaths as he pursues the self-differentiating matter (*Sache*) of thinking. In order to understand what is at issue here it is necessary to come to terms with the performative difficulty of Heidegger's thought where this turns on the paradox that the movement to which his thought opens is understood by Heidegger to have both a gathering and unifying character and that it is differential, that it is projected into a movement which exceeds it and carries it beyond itself. This conjoined dynamic corresponds to the strange mixture of stasis and transitivity which characterises modern technology when this is thought in its essence. One of the central concerns of this chapter

will be the attempt to elaborate this paradox as a corrective to those interpretations which would make of Heidegger's text a thesis and a philosophy. Such interpretations are manifest in a reading which takes Heidegger's meditation on the essence of modern technique to be primarily an exposition on representation whereby the question of technology is elaborated within a constellation or chain of some of the major concepts of metaphysics, all of which can be derived from *Ge-stell*, and all of which are, in effect, connected with a static conception of Being. In this case, Heidegger's thinking remains determined by, and limited to, the restricted economy of representation that it reveals. I will argue that this reading does not go far enough. Not only does it limit the scope of his thought as it enacts the "turn" (*Kehre*) out of metaphysics into a space withdrawn from representation, it misses the decisive import of technology for Heidegger's articulation of a nonmetaphysical notion of Being as event (*Ereignis*) or difference (*Unter-Schied*). In this connection, Chapter 1 will be composed of two parts: in the first I will point up the importance of the immanent dynamic of Heidegger's thinking to the problematic of technology; in the second, I will develop what is said in the first by way of a reading that shows technology to be that condition which opens Heidegger's thinking to that difference which, by remaining unthought, has always dominated metaphysics.

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the passage to Derrida, or rather, to Derrida's relation to Heidegger, since it offers a reading which shows that a certain "tracing" or "inscription" has already taken place in the latter's text. In Chapter 2, I take up this relation as it is elaborated in the context of Derrida's *The Post Card*. It seems to me that this text is the most ideal for establishing what is at issue in this study since it fashions a text which not only articulates the necessary deconstruction of the positional logic of the thesis, but it also elaborates the at once infinitesimal and decisive *différance* between his own text and Heidegger's as regards the question of technology. In *The Post Card* Derrida lets the postcard, the post, and the card become the organizing figures for a discussion of the various deconstructive effects established through the process of a messages transmission

not only as these bear upon the traditional assumptions at work in any delivery system, but also as they affect Heidegger's thinking of the "destiny" or "sending" of Being in its technological outcome. Such a sending destined for "us" and always assured of reaching its destination is, Derrida insists, a "postal idea" that is symptomatic of metaphysical thought. In elaborating the necessary deconstruction of this idea Derrida countersigns a "telecommunicative disposition" which articulates a network comprised of relays, deviations and transferences that both comprehends and subverts Heidegger's text. By way of a selective, filtrating, discriminating reading I will be concerned to assemble from the vast network of *The Post Card* and certain related texts several fragments with a view to marking the juncture or *loci* at which what is at issue here converges towards its most simple, most economical, and most formalizable statement. As we shall see, Derrida asserts that the significance of a text is very much determined by the various media and delivery systems involved in its transmission and that one is very much mistaken to isolate it from its machinic relays, as he says Heidegger does when he takes technology to be derivative with respect to the sending of Being. By transposing Heidegger's ontological vocabulary into the context of the discourse of the general text, Derrida both literalizes Heidegger's Being-historical schema as the postal systems technology and reinscribes what he considers to be the restricted economics of this system in terms of an "originary" *envoi* or "dispatch". In this case, my assessment of Derrida's deconstruction of Heidegger's text will explore the implications of his insistence that "*techne*—this is the entire—infinitesimal and decisive *différance*, does not arrive. No more than metaphysics, therefore, and than positionality; always, already it parasites that to which [Heidegger] says it happens, arrives, or that it succeeds in happening to [*arrive à arriver*]."²⁰

In addition to its significance for Derrida's reinscription of Heidegger's text, *The Post Card* provides the resources for me to begin to elaborate the question of technology and of originary technicity as this unfolds in Derrida's early work. This is the issue I shall take

²⁰ PC., 192.

up and develop in Chapter 3. As I have already said, within his general *program*, from *Of Grammatology* on, and within a very broad conceptual and historical matrix which aligns deconstruction with an unprecedented transformation of the contemporary technological culture, Derrida relates the question of *techne* to the traditional disavowal of *writing*, to the deconstruction of this disavowal and to the elaboration of the co-implication of general writing or inscription (where this means to include *différance*, trace, iteration, supplement, etc.) and originary technicity. The central concern of this chapter will be to draw out and analyse what I take to be the key elements for an understanding of what is involved here. In particular, I will elaborate the clear set of intellectual, disciplinary and institutional stakes of deconstruction as these emerge in Derrida's writings of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As is well known, in this period Derrida develops deconstruction by way of an articulation of the "closure" of logocentrism an event which is registered on two fronts which articulate the epistemic transformation I discussed above: in the movement out of structuralism (and its grid of binary distinctions) in micro terms; and out of metaphysics (and its privileging of presence) in a large scale perspective. Insofar as it impacts on both these cases Derrida's diagnosis of the traditional treatment of writing opens up a space for thinking this event in its both its philosophical and extra philosophical significance. In this case, Derrida negotiates a relation between philosophy and the then triumphalist discourses of the "human sciences" under the aegis of structuralism. One of the decisive outcomes of this encounter was the development of the methodological thrust of deconstruction which enacts a displacement and reorganization of the metaphysical opposition between the transcendental and the empirical, opening up an aporetic and undecidable "position," neither in philosophy (as it is traditionally organised) nor outside it. Asserting the necessity and irreducibility of this double impossibility, Derrida demonstrates how it obliges philosophy to entertain an open matrix of transversal relations with emergent forms of knowledge and their technical elaborations. Its effect is to rethink knowledge as science: internally through its

grammatological unworking; vertically, through its reinscription in a retreating past: and horizontally, through a redistribution of the disciplines along zones of contact rather than confrontation. Philosophy must think its *implication* in these multiple orders even as it thinks their role in it. As I will show, thinking this necessity means thinking the inescapability of inscription in general and of originary technicity. The chapter will conclude with a consideration of some of the ambiguities and questions that are raised as Derrida attempts to elaborate this circumstance.

Derrida's elaboration of deconstruction from out of the implication of philosophy in the emerging and multiple orders knowledge and their techno-scientific instances, constitutes perhaps the most immediate point of reference for understanding the centrality of technics to his early work. Equally, however, this work can be seen as emerging against the background of Heidegger's questioning of cybernetics and information theory as an aspect of his diagnosis of the dissolution of philosophy into the various human sciences in the 1960s. In this connection, in Chapter 4 the focus will turn back to the complex interplay of proximity and distance between Heidegger's and Derrida's texts. My aims here will be twofold: firstly, to further elaborate Derrida's notion of originary technicity in the context of its impact on Heidegger's text; and then, in conjunction with this, to develop a reading that offers a Heideggerian response to this impact. The line of argument I will pursue takes up the question of where such a response would begin if it sought to situate Derrida's notion of originary technicity with the help of issues drawn from the Heideggerian reflections themselves. In this connection, I will develop a reading that elaborates the charge that Derrida's work is symptomatic of thinking in the age of technology in the sense that Heidegger gives it. More specifically, I will be concerned to locate in the articulations and assumptions of deconstruction certain indications of its belonging within the horizon of Heidegger's thinking of the "standing reserve" and the *Ge-stell*. As I will say, the Derridean text has to face up to the incalculable shock that it bears a much closer proximity to Heidegger's thinking of technology than Derrida is able

to show. This assessment will be guided by my conviction that not only can Derrida's elaboration of writing, *différance*, trace, etc., be seen to reiterate the very terms by which Heidegger defines the way in which all that is given under the sway of technology, but also that the deconstructive scope of Derrida's reinscription of Heidegger, his attempt to mark the closure of Heidegger's text, can be taken as exemplary of the type of restricted reading that I problematize in Chapter 1. As I will say, Derrida's reading is one which takes the movement and necessity of the whole Heideggerian meditation on the *Ge-stell* and the modern essence of technique to be organized around the *Stellen* of *Vorstellen*, around, that is, representation. Insofar as such a reading obscures or forgets the irreducible differentiability of Heidegger's thought, it amounts to a letting fail of Heidegger's surpassing of metaphysics. I will argue that in the context of Derridean deconstruction such a move is the result of a strategic misreading that paves the way for a restricted economization of the sheer plurality of the many "ways," "paths," or way-traces of Heidegger's text with a view to integrating it into the general economy of writing as a way of opening up its textuality (as Derrida's own). In this case, Derrida hopes that the entire topology of Being will be subject to the graphic possibilities of originary technicity. If my arguments hold, deconstruction must be reevaluated as an operation which simultaneously arises *from* and comes back *to* the topology of Being—and not the other way around.

Of course, this matter is undecidable. The assertion that Derrida's work belongs to the same as what Heidegger calls *das Ge-stell* cannot be demonstrated as a thesis. If it remains the case that Derrida's text finds itself having to pass through Heidegger's question concerning technology there is nonetheless a fundamental limitation to the strange affinity between Derridean writing and the thought of *Ge-stell*, a limitation which makes all the difference, if not the "infinitesimal and decisive *différance*" of which Derrida speaks. This turns on the circumstance that although Heidegger is one of the first philosophers to be very attentive to the systematic links between technology and Western

philosophy, he nonetheless remains, as Derrida insists, tempted by a certain relegation of technics to a secondary position in relation to the pretechnical originariness of what is taken up as the matter of thinking. In this case, Heidegger's assertion that the essence of technology is nothing technological remains, at least in one of its aspects, traditionally philosophical. It maintains the possibility of thought which questions, which is always thought of the essence, protected from any originary and irreducible contamination by technology. In Chapter 5 I will acknowledge this circumstance with the aim of developing a reading of some of Derrida's more recent texts where deconstruction emerges as what is often called an "affirmative deconstruction". A common feature of deconstruction in its affirmative phase is Derrida's willingness to engage directly with overtly political and religious themes. The idea of Europe and national identity, the legacy of Marx and marxism, justice, democracy, hospitality and religious faith are just some of the themes Derrida has dealt with in the 1990s. If these are the most commonly recognisable features of Derrida's latest writings, it is, however, no less the case that Derrida's elaboration of the indissociability of the event and technology are central to the development of affirmative deconstruction. Indeed, building upon the groundwork of the previous chapters, and following Derrida's lead, I will argue that deconstruction *is* an affirmative technology. The issue continues to be that of a method devoted to originary technicity, of a method that at one and the same time articulates *both* what is happening—the event—*and* technology, but now seen from the perspective of the affirmation of the open future described in terms of the "to-come" (*à-venir*). Among the texts under discussion here will be *Specters of Marx* where I will be interested in Derrida's deconstruction of Marx as this figures in his thinking of "spectrality". This notion, which belongs among the most recurrent of Derridean schema's, articulates the political inflection of Derrida's work as it engages the inventive tele-techno-media(tiz)ation, and thereby deconstruction, of the world. In this context, deconstruction can be understood as the site of a non-formalizable resistance to the totalizing ambitions of contemporary techno-science, and to the massive

capitalization of invention in the guise of programmes of “research and development”. Here, Derrida’s writings affirm a logic of invention that entails a re-invention of the way this concept is conventionally understood; they affirm a logic of the impossible, of what cannot be built, calculated or programmed. Such an invention is *L’invention de l’autre*, the invention of the other, of the wholly other beyond any possible status. The powerful thematic of invention can be clearly identified in several of Derrida’s works and, particularly, in *Psyché: Inventions of the Other* a pivotal essay in this chapter. As an invention of the other, deconstruction is engaged in and by an affirmation of the *in-venire*, the in-coming, the arrival (*venue*) of what is coming, what is to-come (*à-venir*), in and by the future (*l’avenir*) and the adventure (*adventure*) of the future. As I will show this affirmation goes to the very heart of what deconstruction is all about since it remarks Derrida’s assertion that if there is an affirmation, if there is the promise of a future, a to-come, it has to do with some technology, with the deconstruction of the world by, through, or within technology in its becoming other.

1

Re-opening the Question Part 1: “Heidegger Viewed as Commonplace”

Introduction

As part of his *Manifesto for Philosophy* first published in 1989 the French philosopher Alain Badiou rehearses a question which takes aim at contemporary thought and its Heidegger, its modernity, and ultimately, its philosophy. Badiou asks “What does the “current” Heidegger say, the one who organizes opinion?”²¹ Asserting that “He says the following,” Badiou then offers a set of six frames which serve as the basis for a series of judgements on what are taken to be the accomplishments of Heidegger’s arguments regarding the history of Western metaphysics and its technological outcome. Thus we read :

1) The modern figure of metaphysics, such that it has been articulated around the category of the subject, is in the epoch of its completion. The veritable sense of the category of Subject is rendered in the universal process of objectification, a process whose appropriated name is: the reign of technology. The becoming subject of man is merely the ultimate metaphysical transcription of this reign: “The very fact that man becomes subject and the world object is but the consequence of the essence of technology which is in the process of being installed. Indeed, inasmuch as it is an effect of the planetary deployment of technology, the category of subject is incapable of turning thought back towards the essence of this deployment. Thinking technology as the ultimate historical metamorphosis, and closure, of the epoch of the metaphysics of Being

²¹ Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans and ed. Norman Madarasz, (Sunny: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 47.

is the only possible program today for thought in and of itself. Thought cannot thus establish its site from that which the category of subject enjoins us to hold: this injunction is indistinguishable from technology's.²²

Cut. Having cited this much, already more than enough, there is no need for me to quote to all of Badiou's frames. That for Heidegger technology "is the ultimate destiny of the hiddenness of Being," that technology is "the will to en-frame (*Ge-stell*)," that "the only concept of Being known to technology is *raw material*," that "only in the most extreme of perils does what saves also grow," etc., etc., all this it would seem is common enough. Indeed, Badiou's frames are arranged and filed under a chapter entitled "Heidegger Viewed as Commonplace" the provocation of which will be readily apparent to those familiar with Heidegger's work.

For its part Badiou's own effort is directed towards marking a break with what he takes to be the "paralysis" of a thinking that is "closely linked to the constant and pessimistic relation of philosophy to its glorious metaphysical past." As such, he proposes "a violent *forgetting of the history of philosophy*, thus a violent forgetting of the whole historical montage of the oblivion of Being". Consequently, Badiou is compelled to polemically proclaim

We shall not accept that the word "technology"—even were to resonate the Greek *tekhnè* within it—is apt to designate the essence of our time, nor that there can be any useful relation to be thought between "technology's planetary reign" and "nihilism". The meditations, calculations and diatribes about technology, widespread though they are, are nonetheless uniformly ridiculous. And we must loudly proclaim what many refined Heideggerians think in private: Heidegger's texts on this point do not in any way avoid this pomposity.²³

²² Ibid., p. 48.

²³ Ibid., p. 53.

Badiou's polemic turns on what he considers to be the "meagre conceivable sense" of the stereotype and pathos of Heidegger's thinking which, we are told, is "spun only from reactionary nostalgia" and is expressive of an anti-technological archaistic sentiment.

What are we to make of this appraisal of Heidegger's text where it is viewed both as commonplace and, as commonplace, ridiculous with regard to what is taken to be its protest against modern technology? To begin with we would have to take Badiou at his word; what he asserts is neither casual nor arbitrary but is symptomatic of the way in which Heidegger becomes present today for those who would follow his thought.

The necessity that thought is "especially prone to succumb to the danger of commonness" is a circumstance that Heidegger has examined and elaborated since his earliest writings. It forms one of the central threads of a thinking that has to come to terms with the contemporary outcome of philosophy as the techno-scientific dissimulation of Being. In this connection, Heidegger's work has always been prepared in an inner tension; its unfolding is anchored in a certain hesitancy and reserve (*Verhaltenheit*), in the anxiety of having to contend with the recognition that that which he attempted under the heading "thinking" (*Denken*) is bound up with a constellation of all pervasive countervailing forces and interests to which "subjects" and agents—producers and consumers, sometimes they are "philosophers" and always interpreters, too—are never sensitive enough. Indeed, one might want to argue that the question of such forces and interests has been completely evaded by those who would follow and capitalize upon Heidegger's work (and not just Heidegger's). These forces must, however, be taken into consideration from the outset if we are to come to terms not only with Badiou's statement, but also with Heidegger's thinking as a whole. I refer here to one of the peculiarly contemporary features of Heidegger's concern with technology. It has to do with publicity and publication, the media, the accelerating pace at which intellectual and philosophical production is actualized by way of the programming and

technical organization of professional knowledge and competencies, with everything that comes across in the body of today's most *phenomenal* culture and which could be included under the heading of a producing society, of commodity exchange, of spectacle with all the discursive processes and modes of appropriation this implies. In his "Letter on Humanism" Heidegger marks what is at stake here:

When thinking comes to an end by slipping out of its element it replaces this loss by procuring a validity for itself as *techne*, as an instrument of education and therefore as a classroom matter and later a cultural concern. By and by philosophy becomes a technique for explaining from highest causes. One no longer thinks; one occupies oneself with "philosophy." In competition with one another, such occupations publicly offer themselves as "-isms" and try to outdo one another. The dominance of such terms is not accidental. It rests above all in the modern age in the peculiar dictatorship of the public realm.²⁴

In pointing up the distance between the end of thinking and its arrival as an object of scholarship—"philosophy"—Heidegger initiates an analysis of the ongoing extension and consolidation of the administered space of the modern university and its academic functionaries along with the growing importance of publishing in connection with the dominant position of the calculative businesslike character of representationalist thinking. Such an analysis necessarily turns on his own role as a professor²⁵ as well as the "incisiveness" and "ongoing activity" of the modern "researcher" who responds without

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism'" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi. (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 239-276. p. 242.

²⁵ In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes: "The misinterpretations by which philosophy remains constantly besieged are mainly promoted by what people like us do, that is, by professors of philosophy. Their customary, and also legitimate and even useful business is to transmit a certain educationally appropriate acquaintance with philosophy as it has presented itself so far. This then looks as though it itself were philosophy, whereas at most it is scholarship about philosophy." Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 12.

question to the demand to enter into critical debates, negotiate at meetings, and participate in the programs of conferences, the researcher who contracts for commissions with publishers “who determine along with him which books must be written”.²⁶

The stakes of Heidegger’s analysis can be easily formulated. The demands of contemporary academic research in conjunction with those of publishers have diverted attention from the long-range task of thinking to favoring the procedures of “making public”. To be more specific, a diverse and ever growing body of derivative discursive practices including monographs, applications of the texts to particular issues, archival work, editing, translation, journals, conferences, university courses, and academic societies (with all their techniques of distribution and exchange, transversal and transferring coordinations) constitute the most easily identifiable network across which the production and reception (destination) of Heidegger’s thought *takes place* and *works* precisely under the name of “philosophy”. Today, no aspect of that which this name signs appears to have been left unexamined or without comment, whether it be a matter of the man, his thought, his political (mis)adventures, etc. Heidegger himself called this institutional manifestation of his work “chatting,” “passing the word along,” and “scribbling,” and although he repeatedly insisted that his thinking was not to be turned into an object of scholarship, research, doctrine, or program, all of which are technological in the double sense of the construction of a Heideggerian “World Picture” and the systematic reduction of his thinking to a “standing-reserve” of information, it goes without saying that there is no engagement with his thought today that takes place outside this immense and differentiated terrain. Indeed, this very study must contend with this context as its im-possibility.

This reference to the technological determination of Heidegger’s work with respect to those productive forces which facilitate its transmission and reception is important here

²⁶ See Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, (New York:Harper& Row, 1977), pp. 114-154 and especially p. 125; hereafter cited as *AWP*.

because I asked what it means to say that Heidegger is to be viewed as “commonplace”. In considering the vicissitudes of Heidegger’s work, it is crucial to attend to the implication of philosophical thought and its techno-media(tiz)ation, to the question of both, and to what is really at stake today for those in-formed by this machine (whatever their particular “interests”). If Badiou’s assessment is at all intelligible then it must presuppose this implication. That is, when one tries to think what is being said by Heidegger, particularly where this touches upon his concern with technology, then it is impossible to avoid this decisive aspect of his meditation which opens up the question of what *happens* or *takes place* today where his thinking is instituted. In short, Heidegger’s question concerning technology is equally, and just as importantly, the question of the production and transmission of Heidegger’s thought itself and how it becomes present today for those who would who engage his work. As we shall see in the next chapter, what is being marked here has a direct bearing on Derrida’s relation to Heidegger since the relaying of Heidegger’s text, its address and reception (the emitter/transmitter/receptor system), its passage and destination (its “dissemination via the detour of an institutional telecommunication”), along with the various tele-techno-media this implies, are central to his deconstructive re-inscription of Heidegger’s thinking.²⁷ For the moment, however, let me stick with Badiou.

Despite its attempt to set itself off against Heidegger’s thought, or rather, precisely because of this, Badiou’s text is patent and is itself exemplary of the commonplaceness of which it speaks. It is therefore unwittingly implicated in the question of that which it finds “ridiculous”. Regarding Heidegger’s thinking, Badiou’s *Manifesto* clearly speaks both of and for other texts that would appear to say the same: that is, it speaks of the “current” Heidegger, the “one who organises opinion,” and for those Heideggerians—

²⁷ As Derrida says, “In all cases, foci of reflection should be instituted wherever the question of the *end and ends* of the philosophical as such can *take place*, wherever the limit, the borders or the destination of philosophy is at stake, wherever there *is cause to or space to ask: Philosophy in view of what? Since and until when In what and how?* See “Sendoffs” in *Yale French Studies: Reading the Archive: On Texts and Institutions*, 77 (1990), pp. 7-43. p. 19.

refined or otherwise—whose opinions so organised function in such a way that this Heidegger can be viewed as commonplace. In speaking both of and for these other texts Badiou says nothing that hasn't commonly been said (even in private). Thus Heidegger's concern with technology is routinely heard as a "negative" account of technology, that is, as a critically antagonistic and reactionary protest that would pass judgement on the modern world. More importantly, however, I would have to say that Badiou's fascination with what are taken to be the "contents" or "themes" of Heidegger's work along with his desire to construct a "plot," that is, his need to locate, place and narrativize, is symptomatic of an approach to Heidegger's thinking that responds without responding to its metaphysico-technological determination.

"Should one henceforth forbid oneself to to speak of the "philosophy" of Heidegger? Not at all, and there would undoubtedly be no error in principle in so speaking, merely an inevitable *abstraction*. Heidegger's philosophy would mean, in these conditions, the thesis or theme that one has extracted by artifice, by misprison, and abstraction from his thought. Once this abstraction has been supercharged and deployed, it will be extended over all the folds of his work, of its ruses, overdeterminations, and reserves, which the abstraction will come to cover up and dissimulate. In constructing itself, in being posed in its dominant form at a given moment (here that of the Heideggerian thesis or philosophy), his thinking is neutralized in it, numbed, self-destructed, or dissimulated. Nevertheless, the forces that are thus inhibited continue to maintain a certain disorder, some potential incoherence, and some heterogeneity in the organization of the theses. They introduce parasitism into it, and clandestinity, ventriloquism, and above all, a general tone of denial, which one can learn to perceive by exercising one's ear or eye on it. Hence the necessity to to continue to try and think what takes place in Heidegger, with Heidegger, what is shown there, what is hidden."²⁸ In this connection, I shall be concerned with two issues

²⁸ This elaboration is already to let the Derridean text or graft take hold since it is virtually a direct quotation from Derrida's *Khora* where Derrida develops a reading of the "philosophy" of Plato ("Platonism"), which is an ensemble of "theses," of "philosophemes," of thematic philosophical "claims," which correspond to the "dominant," reproductive reading, which can be turned against the "text" of Plato.

which are intimately connected. Firstly, I shall argue that what is often overlooked in Heidegger's concern with technology is precisely its import *as* a question and as a task or *way* of thinking. Too often, it seems, Heidegger's text has been read with a view to appropriating only its content, *what* is thought, with little attention being given to *how* it is thought. As a consequence the active or dynamic "pathway-character" character of Heidegger's thinking has become obscured. In this case, what is passed by is the performative difficulty of Heidegger's thought where this involves the simultaneous comprehension and surpassing of the technological outcome of metaphysics and its representationalist schemas. If we shift our attention from what Heidegger thinks to how he thinks it we see that it implicates the "immanent transformation" of thought in its arrest or capture by what Heidegger calls *die Sache des Denkens*, the matter for thinking. This matter is not a theme, or content of thought, it is not Heidegger's philosophical invention, nor should it be confused with the progress of an intelligible argument. Indeed, what is at issue here exceeds the purview of the theoretical or philosophical gaze as this is traditionally instituted. Rather, *die Sache* is equal to what is the central concern of Heidegger's thinking: namely, the radical happening or event of Being that stands over against the metaphysical ideal of Being as absolute, constant presence, as ultimate cause and foundation. Of thought's transformation, we may say that the questioning relation to technology bears not upon the object of this questioning but upon the enactment of thinking itself where this is understood by Heidegger according to the paradox that it has both a unifying gathering character and a differentiating movement that carries it beyond itself. This dynamic articulates a non-thetic projection or opening which undermines the possibility that what Heidegger offers us is a thesis on or about Being.²⁹ Where such a thesis is produced it takes the form of a philosophical abstraction that fails to take the full

which is an ensemble of textual events—this ensemble without limit which Derrida calls the general text. See Jacques Derrida, *Khora*, trans. Ian McLeod, in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 89-127. p. 119-121.

²⁹ For an interesting discussion of the enactment sense of Heidegger's thought see Karen Feldman, "The Performative Difficulty of Being and Time" in *Philosophy Today*: Winter 2000. pp. 366-379.

measure of the decisive import of technology for Heidegger's thinking as a whole where this is key to unlocking the various "correspondences" of his text which is differentiated and pluralized into Heideggers, *topoi*, and thoughtpaths. In this connection, in the first part of this chapter I will trace the paradox of the transformation of Heidegger's thought as he questions into the essence of modern technology. More particularly, via a clarification of the much discussed "turn" (*Kehre*), I will be concerned to show that the inner convergence between the enactment of Heidegger's thought and its matter articulates and originates from within a transformation that is the occurrence of technology itself. In order to enter onto the path of Heidegger's thinking we must take into account this transformation of technology which (transformation) is the onset of the thinking of Being as event (*Ereignis*) and as difference (*Unter-Schied*). In this case, I will argue that it is technology and only technology which opens Heidegger to the most radical developments of his thinking of Being.

This brings me to my second point of discussion. A dominant interpretation has arisen in the literature that takes the Heideggerian thinking of technology to mean primarily the fulfilment of metaphysics insofar as this is equal to the representing of beings. In this interpretation priority is given to Heidegger's characterisation of the modern age as that which is primarily instantiated in the so-called subject-object schema. This understanding, as far as it goes, does indeed follow Heidegger's thinking as even the most cursory glance at certain texts written in the late 1930's and early 1940s would show. However, such an interpretation has also come to inform and determine Heidegger's later thinking of the essence of technology understood as *Ge-stell*. In this case, technology is understood to mean primarily and fundamentally the *stèle*, the systematic setting-up and positioning of beings in a "standing-reserve" or framework. Again, and to an extent, this reading corresponds to Heidegger's text. However, it tells us only part of what Heidegger has to say and is not applicable without further ado to what the decisive essays of the 1950s onward reveal. More decisively, in his writings of this period technology is now

said by Heidegger—and here I shall pay special attention to the peculiar mobile and transitive character of *Ge-stell*—to be a revealing which extends out beyond the frame of representation opening a site or place whereby the unthought of metaphysics—Being as difference (*Unter-Schied*) or event (*Ereignis*)—first becomes the matter for thinking. Any reading that emphasises the former view without taking into account the latter seriously obscures what is at issue here since it takes Heidegger’s concern with technology to be primarily a meditation organised around a static and thereby metaphysical conception of Being. Such a reading amounts to a letting fail of Heidegger’s surpassing of metaphysics. Once again the the paradoxical and unsettling movement that characterizes Heidegger’s thought in its becoming other is missed and the peculiarity of his response to contemporary technology as it is drawn into a space withdrawn from representation is overlooked. With this in mind my aim in the second part of the chapter will be to develop what is said in the first by showing that far from being merely a meditation on the completion of metaphysics (i.e., the insight that representationalism is the outcome of the history of Being when this history designates Being understood as constant presence), Heidegger’s thinking of the essence of technology as *Ge-stell* is the decisive condition that gives thought its movement out of metaphysics.

The ambiguity of technology (Dreyfus’s thesis: part 1)

Let me proceed by pursuing the tendency towards the obfuscation of Heidegger’s thought in another instance. In an essay entitled “Heidegger’s History of the Being of Equipment” Hubert L. Dreyfus comments on how Heidegger’s occasional retrospective remarks on *Being and Time* are mostly limited to pointing out the way this text is already on the way to overcoming metaphysics by reawakening the concern with Being, or to acknowledging *Being and Time*’s transcendental neglect of the history of Being.³⁰ But, notes Dreyfus, “one looks in vain through Heidegger’s occasional references to his most

³⁰ Hubert L. Dreyfus, “Heidegger’s History of the Being of Equipment,” in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, ed., Hubert L. Dreyfus and Harrison Hall. (Blackwell Publishers, 1992), pp. 173-85.

celebrated work for an indication of how we are to fit *Being and Time* into the history of Being which Heidegger later elaborated”.³¹ In this connection, Dreyfus wonders “To what extent is *Being and Time* itself metaphysical? To what extent is it nihilistic?” As a step towards answering these queries Dreyfus poses what he considers to be a more manageable question: “To what extent is the account of equipment in *Being and Time* a critique of the ontology of technology and to what extent is it a contribution to the technological understanding of Being?”³² Commenting on the fact that in his Nietzsche lectures Heidegger singles out Descartes establishment of the subject/object distinction as the philosophical development that marks the commencement of modern technology, Dreyfus suggests that insofar as Heidegger’s fundamental ontological account of equipmental being-in-the-world offers a phenomenological critique of the subject/object relation, *Being and Time* would seem to stand in direct opposition to the technological understanding. However, elaborating on the question cited above Dreyfus writes

Opposing the Cartesian subject/object distinction in terms of an account of Dasein as a user of equipment becomes an ambiguous form of opposition, for it is no longer clear whether such an analysis offers a critique of technology in the form of a transcendental account of the pre-technological everyday understanding of equipment, or whether, under the guise of a transcendental account of everyday activity, such an analysis reflects a transition in the history of the way equipment is which prepares the way for technology. In other words, it is not clear whether *Being and Time* opposes technology or promotes it.³³

Now, before I offer a response to the problem Dreyfus encounters here let me try to specify the conditions that give rise to it in the first place. Heidegger’s now famous analysis of equipment elaborated in *Being and Time* and related texts, its centrality to the

³¹ Ibid., p. 173.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 175.

project of fundamental ontology as that which will re-open the ancient question of Being, continues to generate much discussion and I cannot possibly do it justice in the space of this chapter. Nor do I wish to. My aim in mobilizing Dreyfus' argument is to mark, in the most provisional way, a link between technology and the movement of Heidegger's thinking as a whole, the demonstration of this link and its significance being my ultimate goal.

As Dreyfus's comments imply, although *Being and Time* does not yet pose the question concerning technology it can be seen that what will later become explicit is in fact already an emerging theme. Indeed, Dreyfus is not the only commentator to see in Heidegger's text a determining, if ambiguous, relation between the thinking of equipment and the so called "later" thinking of the essence of modern technology.³⁴ It is well known that in texts subsequent to *Being and Time* Heidegger opens up a way of questioning into technology that moves against its instrumental determination. It is equally well known, however, that Heidegger's elaboration of this matter is extremely complex and the questions it raises attests to the fact that the difficulty of an interpretation of the meaning of technology for Heidegger is on a par with the difficulty of his entire thought. Technology is the concern of numerous texts which do not always appear to move in the same direction nor on the same level. *On the one hand*, technology is "the supreme danger". As the completion and actualization of Western metaphysics in the modern project of representation and of the subjective setting-up of "what is" as an "object," technology comes to pass when the trace of the question of Being *qua* Being disintegrates, when thinking is left with nothing but the cybernetic regulation of a "standing reserve" of mere beings, and when this leads to what Heidegger calls *Ge-stell*: planetary industrial technics—the systematic and global exploitation of resources, which

³⁴ Don Ihde, for example, offers an interesting attempt to articulate the connection between *Being and Time* and the later texts. See his *Technics and Praxis*, (Holland: D Reidel Publishing Company, 1979) pp.103-129. See also Graham Harman's recent *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, (Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 2002).

implies a worldwide economic, political, cultural, social and military interdependence. *On the other hand*, to argue that technology is equal to the completion of metaphysics is to consider only one side of its “Janus head”. For at the same time as Heidegger questions into the *Ge-stell* we are told “where danger is grows the saving power also.”³⁵ In this case, just as it is equivalent to the completion and actuality of metaphysics modern technology also constitutes its dissolution. In elaborating this paradox Heidegger proposes that technology as the optimization of calculation and the setting into order of all beings, implicates a “peculiar quality” wherein the modern world “projects itself into a space withdrawn from representation and so grants to the incalculable its proper determination and historical uniqueness.”³⁶ As equal to the “objectlessness” (*das Gegenstandslose*) of the standing-reserve technology is not simply the end of metaphysics but also, and just as importantly, the prelude to its “appropriation” (*Ereignis*) and overcoming.

As this brief sketch indicates, technology is ambiguous in Heidegger’s work. It appears simultaneously as the ultimate obstacle to and as the ultimate possibility of thought. This ambiguity is the center of gravity of the Heideggerian text, it is where its drama is played out, and is that with which any interpretation must negotiate. Articulating the analyses of equipmentality at the close of the 1920s (where the theme is inaugurated through the attempt at a destructive retrieve of the Greek “productionist” orientation to Being)³⁷ with the decisive insight into the essence of technology as *Ge-stell* in the 1950s,

³⁵ *QCT.*, p. 28.

³⁶ *AWP.*, pp. 114-154. p. 135-136.

³⁷ Heidegger perceives a decisive but unthematized element at the heart of Greek metaphysics to which he believes philosophy has remained prey throughout its history and that was ultimately to culminate in the technological era. This consists in having taken the understanding of Being appropriate to the everyday activity and experience of production (*poiesis*) as the interpretive horizon for the basic ontological determinations of Being in general—an interpretation which coincides with the conception of Being as presence. This explanatory capacity is so important because “the basic concepts of philosophy” arose from it. In this connection, the metaphysical schemes of Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger argued, were based on the view that the structure of all things is akin to the structure of products or artifacts. Aristotle’s metaphysics, for example, is “productionist” insofar as he conceived of all things as “formed matter.” The most obvious example of such “formed matter” is the work produced by an artisan who gives form to material. Plato and Aristotle seemingly projected onto all entities the structure of artifacts. For Heidegger what such an interpretation inadvertently blocks above all is an adequate ontological account of human being as that

Heidegger's thinking is organized around the "turn" (*Kehre*) or "reversal". As such it is inscribed in a complexity which cannot be reduced to a simple expression and which points to a crucial distinction which the scholarship has not always maintained. Given the importance of this notion to my concerns let me clarify what is at issue here.

***Die Kehre*: Heidegger's ostensible turning**

As one commentator has remarked, "that the key to reading Heidegger is "a" or "the" "turn" or "reversal" has become a commonplace, so much so, that the "turn" seems to have been with us from the very beginning, enabling us everywhere to clarify our reading of Heidegger's work."³⁸ Although the notion is not reducible to any given text, line, or idea, Heidegger scholars have debated several understandings of what this turn is and where it occurs in Heidegger's text. We are told variously that it is the later privileging of Being over *Dasein*, of the "truth" of Being over the "meaning" of Being, truth (as *aletheia*) over time, language over truth, time over beings, to name but a few.³⁹ Despite the many attempts to come to terms with what *die Kehre* is, however, the question still impresses itself upon us: In what might this turn consist and why is it present alongside the key moments of Heidegger's thinking? If we are to provide an adequate response to this question we need to recognize four principles that function as fundamental pre-

which, distinct from the work, engages in productive activity. Only if such an account were secured in contradistinction to the understanding of Being derived from production could, in Heidegger's view, ontology be placed on a firm footing and, as a consequence, could the questioning which aims at retrieving Being from its forgottenness be raised. By way of response, Heidegger's fundamental ontology, insofar as it has the existential analytic of *Dasein* at its centre, has, as one of its primary elements, a deconstructive appropriation of Greek thought—and in particular Aristotle's practical philosophy—such that both the Being of human existence and that of the complex of beings (equipment) with which it deals in productive activity get articulated from out of a structural whole that nonetheless grants both their ontological specificity. For Heidegger's arguments on this see *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); especially pp. 112-122; hereafter cited as *BPP*. For an in-depth discussion of the question of productionist metaphysics and technology see Micheal E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

³⁸ Lawrence Paul Hemming, "Speaking out of Turn: Martin Heidegger and *die Kehre*" in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 6 (3), 393-423. Routledge 1998.

³⁹ Tom Rockmore, for example, distinguishes at least nine ways in which this notion figures in Heidegger's text. See his *Heidegger and French Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1995) pp. 98-103.

conditions for understanding Heidegger's thinking as a whole: 1. The recognition that the question of Being as the grounding question of philosophy is worked out from two different "perspectives"—the perspective of the "transcendental-horizonal disclosure of Being" (fundamental ontology) and the "Being-historical perspective"; 2. the recognition that the emergence of the Being-historical perspective is not at the cost of, but in and through an "immanent transformation" of the transcendental-horizonal perspective, preserving thereby the unity and continuity of Heidegger's thinking; 3. The recognition that Heidegger followed a typical methodological procedure of working out the individual elements of a "one-fold matter (*Sache*)" in his various lecture courses and seminars without letting this matter itself become visible as an object; 4. The recognition that the "pathway-character" of philosophy in general and Heidegger's efforts in particular is decisive for the thought of Being in its technological outcome.⁴⁰

The significance and interconnection of each of these four points for the question of the *Kehre* will be made explicit as I proceed. To begin with let me turn to what W. J. Richardson has set out in his *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*.⁴¹ As is well known, in this pioneering study Richardson first introduced the idea of a "Heidegger I" and a "Heidegger II", a characterization which has played a large part in the common concern of much scholarship to separate an "earlier" from a "later" Heidegger. For Richardson, however, these are not two entirely different characters. Though clearly distinguishing between an earlier and a later phase in Heidegger's way of thinking, Richardson forwards the claim that "Heidegger I and Heidegger II are not the same, but they are one."⁴² This is a clear recognition of the peculiar identity-in-difference of Heidegger's thought. The grasping of this peculiarity has a bearing not only on understanding the history or moves of his way of thinking but also, and quite radically, on

⁴⁰ I am indebted to Thomas Kalary for these points. See his "Hermeneutic Pre-Conditions for Interpreting Heidegger: A Look at Recent Literature" in *Heidegger Studies*, vol. 18, 2002, pp. 159-180.

⁴¹ See William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: From Phenomenology to Thought*, (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1964).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 628; see also p. 625.

discerning his primal experience of Being as the original “matter” (*Sache*) and source of his thinking as a whole. In this connection, Richardson takes great pains to distinguish between (1) Heidegger’s focal topic, *die Sache des Denkens* and (2) what Richardson calls the “shift in focus” or “reversal” in manner and method” that unfolded in Heidegger’s work in the 1930’s as he continued pursuing that single topic. Failure to make this distinction can, as Thomas Sheehan has remarked,⁴³ be disastrous for understanding Heidegger and the danger only becomes more acute the more one tries to fathom the intimacy in which Heidegger’s work is bound to *die Sache*. What, then, does this distinction and this intimacy amount to ?

(a) *Die Kehre*: Being itself

The first issue, *die Sache des Denkens*, locates *die Kehre*. As Sheehan asserts, it is emphatically not a transformation of Heidegger’s thinking, not an episode that could be dated to a particular phase or period in his philosophical career. Nor is it a conceptual construct or image of Heidegger’s thought. Indeed, as Heidegger himself states in his famous preface to Richardson’s book, “I did not invent it, nor does it concern merely my thinking”.⁴⁴ To be sure, one can certainly date when Heidegger’s *insight* into the turn led to *die Wendung im Denken*, the reorientation of his thinking (namely, 1930-1938, and especially 1936-1938). But it is a very different matter with the turn itself. As opposed to being an accomplishment or result of thought, *die Kehre* is one name among many for the abiding topic of Heidegger’s work and for what this work is the response: namely, the radical happening or event of Being that stands over against the metaphysical ideal of Being as absolute, constant presence, as ultimate cause and foundation. Understood in this way the turn is indeed a kind of movement but it is not one that Heidegger’s thought

⁴³ See Thomas Sheehan, “Kehre and Ereignis: A Prolegomenon to Introduction to Metaphysics” in *A Companion to Heidegger’s Introduction to Metaphysics*, eds. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 3-16. p. 3.

⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger, “Preface,” to Richardson’s *Through Phenomenology to Thought*. Cf. *op. cit.*, n 41 at p. xviii.

underwent in the 1930's. Rather, *die Kehre* points to Being itself and its history and only to this. In this respect, as essentially historical Heidegger associates *die Kehre* with *Ereignis* and specifically with the "time-space-play" (*Zeit-Spiel-Raum*), concealing-revealing (*Verborgenheit-Unverborgenheit*), sending (*Geschick*), or difference (*Unterschied*) of *Ereignis*. More specifically still and important for my concerns, Heidegger links this dynamic of *Ereignis* to the thinking of technology. In this case, *die Kehre* indicates an *impending*—or at least possible—turn in Western history, a turning which articulates the outermost point or *eschaton* of Being in which the future of our technological era is at stake. Here, the turn is precisely the axis around which the undecided shift from *Ge-stell* to *Ereignis* comes into play, the interplay between "danger" and "saving" that articulates the stakes of Heidegger's thought. For Heidegger, it is in the *Ge-stell* that "the first oppressing flash of *Ereignis*" is revealed such that *die Kehre* articulates the ambiguity that attends the sudden but uncertain transition out of the reign of planetary technology understood by Heidegger as equal to the completion of the "first beginning" of metaphysics, into the "other beginning" of the future "belonging-together" of man and Being from out of appropriation.

(b) Manifold thought: Heidegger I and II

Bearing in mind what I have just said, let me turn to the second issue; the change or transformation of Heidegger's thinking (*die Wendung im Denken*). This refers to the many and ever more radical ways in which Heidegger formulated and expressed the central matter of his thinking of which *die Kehre* is but one name. It is a change in *das Denken/Sagen der Kehre*. If *die Kehre* refers to Heidegger's central topic, the "thinking and saying" of the turn refers to Heidegger's ongoing efforts to articulate that state of affairs in an ever more primordial fashion.⁴⁵ This must not be understood to mean

⁴⁵ As a subset of this "the change in Heidegger's thinking" refers to Heidegger's shift in orientation from the transcendental-horizonal approach of 1926-28 to the Being-historical perspective that characterized the rest of his career. Indications of a change in Heidegger's thought are evident in the inaugural lecture of 1929 *What is Metaphysics?* And with the 1929/30 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics:*

however that Heidegger's thinking is a thetic positing which, via a series of logical steps, unfolds in a linear sequence of moments from one position to another as if A led to B and B to C etc. Nor must it be taken to mean, as the term "turn" misleadingly suggests, a straightforward circling movement that returns back to a point or position that has remained unchanged throughout the dynamic that thinking entails. Insofar as it is understood by Heidegger to have a gathering and unifying character, his thought does indeed return to the same matter again and again. However, in its attempt to think and say its topic it does not merely return to the same abstract place. Indeed, because this unique subject matter is intrinsically manifold (*in sich mehrfältig*) and abounds in plenitude (*Fülle bergend*), it requires a manifold thought (*mehrfältiges Denken*). As organized around neither a point nor position Heidegger's thinking undergoes a paradoxical double movement such that one must take seriously what I have called its performative difficulty. In this connection, Heidegger's comments on Richardson's identification of a "Heidegger I" and a "Heidegger II" are important:

The distinction you make between Heidegger I and Heidegger II is justified only on the condition that this is kept constantly in mind: only by way of what Heidegger I has thought does one gain access to what is to-be-thought by Heidegger II. But [the thought of] Heidegger I becomes possible only if it is contained in Heidegger II.

Meanwhile, every formulation is open to misunderstanding. In proportion to the intrinsically manifold matter of Being and Time, all words which give it utterance (like

World, Finitude, Solitude. A transformed movement of thinking rooted in the historical unfolding of Being, embracing at the same time the insights gained on the fundamental-ontological approach to the question of Being, comes to light with the lecture "On the Essence of Truth". Only with the availability of the *Contributions to Philosophy* however is one able to see that the Being-historical approach had taken "full shaping" already in the thirties, something that is hardly visible from the lecture courses of this period. Sections 132 and 134 of the *Contributions* give enough textual evidence to show that it is not the realization of the failure of his earlier perspective, but a new insight Heidegger gained into "the turning-in-*Ereignis*" that leads to this change. It is no longer a question of transcending beings to the horizontally projected-opened Being in the manner of transcendence: what counts is to "leap" over the so conceived difference between Being and beings and transcendence in order to inquire inceptually from out the event of Being as *Ereignis*. See Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, (Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1999); hereafter cited as *CP*.

reversal, forgottenness and mittance) are always ambiguous. Only a [commensurately] manifold thought succeeds in uttering the heart of this matter in a way that cor-responds to it.⁴⁶

Heidegger's advice to Richardson, his assertion that only a "manifold thought" succeeds in getting to the heart of what is involved in speaking of a Heidegger I and a Heidegger II, belong within the context of what, in the lecture first published in 1966 "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," he will write regarding the ongoing attempt to subject his thought to an "immanent critique". I shall look in some detail at the significance of what is involved in this attempt below, but let me say straightaway it leads us into the dynamic "pathway-character" of Heidegger's thinking, and to an apprehension that it is the dynamic unfolding of technology which from the beginning claims his thought and gives it its movement as an originary experience of Being as dif-ference.

(c) At the technological end (the origin of thought)

Now, having stressed their distinction, it is apparent that the two contexts I have just marked—*die Kehre* and the transformation of Heidegger's thinking—are nonetheless conjoined, although, as David Krell has noted, one glimpses the relation only after a great deal of study.⁴⁷ What needs to be emphasized here and constantly borne in mind for what follows is that it is within the deep strata of these two interconnected matters that the question of technology is located in Heidegger's work and the ambiguity of his thinking becomes clear, insofar as it is clear, only if it is understood from out of this relation. Such identity-in-difference shows that the *Kehre* and the transformation that Heidegger's thought undergoes in its thinking/saying of this turn stand as explaining each other and as belonging-together in dynamic co-implication. Just as the turn is one name for the

⁴⁶ Cf. *op.cit.*, n 45 at p. xxii.

⁴⁷ See David Farrell Krell, *Intimations of Mortality: Time, Truth, and Finitude in Heidegger's Thinking of Being*. (The Pennsylvania University Press, 1991), p.95.

dynamic event like character of Being itself, so the transformation or change in Heidegger's thinking is the attempt to say this matter in an ever more profound fashion and in a manner that is not thought by philosophy as metaphysics.⁴⁸ Again, Why is the turn present alongside the key moments of Heidegger's thinking? Answer: because the turn opens up the horizon of thought against the horizon of the technological outcome of metaphysics. Heidegger's whole work is the thinking out of this event that is (not even his own) thought, but which emerges at the end of metaphysics in that *topos* which is our own. Understood in this way *die Kehre* articulates the opening for a "task of thinking" that takes up "a *first* possibility for thinking apart from its *last* possibility," a "possibility from which the thinking of philosophy would have to start, but which as philosophy it could nevertheless not experience or adopt."⁴⁹ Thus, the task allotted to thinking gives rise to a questioning of the essence of modern technology as the matter (*Sache*) to which thinking explicitly turns insofar as technology is both that into which the history of the "first beginning" of philosophy as metaphysics is resolved, and that from which the undecided future of the "other beginning" is to take its start. This locks us into the defining problem of our age which is now no longer the question that metaphysics asks, How does it stand with Being, but rather, the more radical question How does it stand with technology? And like the Being question this can be parsed in many ways since "[t[o this [belongs]everything involved in differentiating the guiding question and the grounding question; responding to the guiding-question and actually unfolding it; crossing to the grounding question."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ There is an instructive passage in *CP* in which—as is to be expected from everything that we have said so far—that movement which characterizes Heidegger's ongoing and ever renewed thinking return to the same "matter" is seen to be ground in the "turning in *Ereignis*". Such a grounding even means to include the hermeneutic circle that characterizes the temporal-existential analytic of *Dasein*. This passage reads: "[*Ereignis*] has its innermost occurrence and its widest reach in [*die Kehre*]. The turning that holds sway in [*Ereignis*] is the sheltered ground of the entire series of turnings, circles, and spheres, which are of unclear origin, remain unquestioned, and are easily taken in themselves as the "last" (consider, eg., the turning in the jointure of the guiding-questions and the circle of under-standing)." See *CP*, p. 286.

⁴⁹ Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" in *Basic Writings*, trans and ed. David Farrell Krell, (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 431-449. p. 435; hereafter cited as *EP*.

⁵⁰ *CP*, p. 119.

Let me give what is being said here greater specificity. As Heidegger's text makes clear, without the emergence of modern technology metaphysics cannot signal its end, and the question of Being cannot come into its own without the offering of a wider historical orbit which permits its more radical reformulation as the Being-historical thinking of *Ereignis*. In asking the question concerning technology, Heidegger no longer merely asks the "guiding question" of metaphysics, i.e., the traditional question of Being which metaphysics has answered by way of a series of assertions about beings in terms of their thatness (existence), whatness (essence), and howness (mode). Nor does he ask the phenomenologically reinterpreted question whereby Being is thought from out of the significance, understandability or usefulness of beings, their *presence to and availability as equipment for possible human engagement and inspection*—their humanly specific ("ad hominem") givenness and accessibility. Rather, in asking the question of technology Heidegger delimits the achievements of metaphysics (including his own fundamental ontology) and asks the "grounding question" of metaphysics, the question about its unthought essence. In this way technology brings into play the *Kehre* and provides the opening for Heidegger to be able to traverse metaphysics in its historical unity and see it for what it is and always already was—the "destining" or "sending" of a series of distinct epochs which nonetheless belong-together insofar as they are all characterized by an instrumental-technical relation to beings that conceals or obscures the dynamic event like matter to which his thinking attends. If this is so then technology does not appear simply as one among the arrangement of phenomena that have come to presence and had currency in the West, nor is it simply one issue or theme among others of Heidegger's text. On the contrary, technology is that which guides and gives direction to the entire enterprise of the destruction or dismantling of this arrangement and for its overcoming. As such, it is the central problematic of Heidegger's text. The important point to be made here is that it is technology and only technology that opens Heidegger's thinking to that matter (*Sache*) which by remaining unthought has always dominated the metaphysical

tradition. In a word, modern technology, its unfolding, is always already the provocation and starting point for Heidegger's ongoing attempt to pose the traditional Being question anew; it is the decisive condition—as yet not explicitly recognized and elucidated—from which Heidegger thinks from *Being and Time* and related texts on.

The ambiguity of technology (Dreyfus's thesis: part 2)

Now, having said this much my argument is running ahead of itself since the significance of these remarks will surface and be unpacked as I proceed. At this point let me return to Dreyfus's reading of Heidegger which I took up above. I have cited his questions regarding the relation of *Being and Time* to Heidegger's so-called "later" thought. More specifically, I have noted the ambiguity Dreyfus encounters with regard to Heidegger's analysis of equipmentality in its relation to the later texts on technology. "It is not clear," Dreyfus writes, "whether *Being and Time* opposes technology or promotes it. Now, it is worth noting that in commenting on how Heidegger's occasional retrospective remarks on *Being and Time* are mostly limited to pointing out the way this text is already on the way to overcoming metaphysics, Dreyfus alludes to the introductory remarks made by Heidegger in "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," with regard to the attempt at an "immanent criticism". Such remarks point to what was said above regarding the identity-in-difference of *die Kehre* and the change in Heidegger's thinking. If we take this immanent criticism seriously, that is, if we pay close attention to what is involved, we see that Dreyfus succumbs to the same tendency towards the obfuscation of the performative difficulty of Heidegger's thinking that can be seen to characterize Badiou's text. Like Badiou, Dreyfus becomes overly fascinated with *what* Heidegger says, with the content of his texts, and misses what is involved in *how* it is said. By extracting, examining, and comparing key "doctrines" and "themes," attributing them in the process to different periods of Heidegger's career thereby adopting what Heidegger on occasion called the "short winded consideration" of a "chronological

approach,” Dreyfus subjects Heidegger’s thinking to a restriction that obscures the peculiar movement which articulates the link between thought and technology as the turn out of metaphysics. In this case, Dreyfus is blind to the immanently transformed emergence of Heidegger’s thinking as it attempts to say its central topic across and beyond the purview of the philosophical gaze as traditionally instituted. The important point to be made here is that Heidegger’s response to technology does not revolve around an alternative; it is not “the task of thinking” to oppose technology—nor of course to promote it—but to be *open* to it. Such openness indicates that what endures in Heidegger’s thought is only a passage (*Übergang*), path, or way-trace (*Wegspur*) such that what concerns thinking is a “matter” (*Sache*) whose “contour remains obscure,” whose “coming remains uncertain,” is “only of a preparatory, not founding character,”⁵¹ and which “is still controversial for thinking and is the controversy”⁵² What is involved here, what we now must become involved with, comes into view at the very outset of “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”.

Tracing *die Sache*: immanent criticism

The opening sentence of “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” Heidegger needs, as John Sallis points out, to be taken with the utmost seriousness: “The title names the attempt at a reflection that persists in questioning”.⁵³ As Sallis is keen to stress, it is not only a matter here of recognising the seriousness with which in this text Heidegger persists in questioning, for instance, in the sense of posing questions ever anew, seeking thus to avoid closing off interrogation, nor is it only a matter of reproducing such persistence as one reads Heidegger’s text; rather, it is a matter of letting the persistence itself remain open to interrogation, of not too facilely—or, rather, too

⁵¹ *EP*, p. 436.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 437.

⁵³ Heidegger quoted by John Sallis, “Echoes: Philosophy and Non-Philosophy after Heidegger,” in *Continental Philosophy I: Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman, (London:Routledge, 1998), pp. 84-105. p. 90.

seriously—assuming that it is obvious just what it means to persist in questioning. At the outset, in the brief untitled introduction of his text, Heidegger provides a certain indication of how questioning is to be carried out. The attempt named “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” is placed within a larger context, a more comprehensive attempt, which is described thus: “It is the attempt undertaken again and again ever since 1930 to shape the question of *Being and Time* in a more originary fashion”.⁵⁴ The attempt is—literally—to shape the *Fragestellung*, i.e., the way the question is posed, set up, deployed; and to do so in a way that is more originary. To persist in questioning would be to sustain this attempt to shape questioning more originally, to deploy the question in a way that is more in accord with what it is that is questionable.

What form does this more originary deployment assume? The introductory section of Heidegger’s text gives a further indication: it is the attempt “to subject the point of departure of the question in *Being and Time* to an immanent criticism”.⁵⁵ At the end of philosophy, that is, at its completion where it is “gathered into its uttermost possibilities” a situation which proves to be “the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and the social order proper to this world,”⁵⁶ the thinking now at issue is thus critically engaged with its beginning, with the question of Being as this is posed in *Being and Time*. In this regard, as David Krell has noted, in enacting an “immanent criticism” of *Being and Time*, composed some forty years earlier, Heidegger’s essay is provocative, it seeks to inquire into the “fundamental matter” underlying that book, and the aptness of its “formulations” without however abandoning the *question* of Being.⁵⁷ Accordingly, we are told “the name of the task of *Being and Time* will change”. Heidegger has of course exercised such criticism before, for example in his *Contributions to Philosophy*, and has in fact done so from within the very pages of *Being and Time*

⁵⁴ *EP*, p. 431.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

⁵⁷ Krell’s comments appear in his introduction to Heidegger’s essay. Cf. *op. cit.*, n 49 at p. 428.

itself.⁵⁸ Such a move on Heidegger's part, which marks not so much a play on words or change in terminology as a transformation of the orientation of thinking, invites us to consider that the posing of what during his entire life-span he always insisted was his one and only question is prepared in such a way that it can be said to unfolding in a dynamic that constantly circles back and gathers itself in the same matter even as it exceeds itself and moves forward to this matter saying it in an ever more original way. Just as it returns to the beginning so it emerges or discovers itself thrown or sprung forward into the future, into a new beginning. As such it overturns the usual chronological sense we have of the development of intellectual thought and works against any finite distinctions that might separate an "earlier" from a "later" Heidegger in a strict chronological fashion. Hence, it radically resituates not only how we are to comprehend Heidegger but how we are to evaluate the "correspondences" of his various philosophical moments. In this connection John van Buren's remarks are instructive. As van Buren points out, so radical was Heidegger's repetition of the metaphysical enactment of the Being-question that he eventually stopped using the term "Being" (*Sein*) as a designation for what he was attempting to retrieve from traditional metaphysics. The appellation reiterated throughout Heidegger's thinking from his student days through to his latest texts was in fact the word *Sache*, which can be variously translated as matter, topic, question, provocation, controversy, confrontation, discussion, or point of dispute.⁵⁹ Here, although Heidegger liked to appeal to the word's original sense, namely court case or legal battle whereby the word ranges from outright conflict to the settling of accounts, he also maintained that the

⁵⁸ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John McQuarrie and Edward Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), Section 83; hereafter cited as *BT*. As Jean-Luc Marion has pointed out, several arguments would confirm that already in *Being and Time* we are dealing with a self critique and that the last two pages of the text as it was published puts radically into question the initial decisions for the construction of the *Seinsfrage*. For Marion's remarks and elaborations on this see his *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998) especially p. 135-40. Also, at the very outset of *BPP* a course given in the summer semester of 1927, that is in the work that immediately follows *BT*, Heidegger notes that the text represents "a new elaboration of division 3 of part I of *Being and Time*"; at p. 1.

⁵⁹ See John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger: Rumour of the Hidden King*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 28.

conflict and difference involved here are not initiated by the belligerence of human thought. Rather, the “*Sache*”, the disputed or controversial case, is *in itself* a dispute or discussion.⁶⁰ Understood in this way the word *Sache* coincides with another of Heidegger’s oft used terms—*Aus-einander-setzung* which in its root components is a setting (*Setzung*) out and apart from (*aus*) one another (*einander*). The *Setzung* of *Auseinandersetzung* is itself a laying out and setting forth that differentiates. Likewise the sameness of the *Sache*, its unity, contains difference in itself and is thus not to be confused with abstract identity. As Heidegger puts it in *Identity and Difference*, a text I shall return to below, “the same [*das Selbe*] is not the merely identical [*das Gleiche*]. In the merely identical, the difference disappears. In the same difference appears, and appears all the more pressingly, the more resolutely thinking is concerned with the same matter in the same way”.⁶¹

As van Buren says, Heidegger often used subjunctive phrases such as what is *to be* thought (*das zu Denkende*), what is *to be* said (*das zu Sagende*), and what is worthy of question (*das Fragwürdige*) as synonyms for the *Sache*. This nameless name was not supposed to name anything actual or determinate, but rather invoked a possibility, an indeterminacy that allows itself to be reiterated and reinscribed in different and often clashing ways. Heidegger’s topic is not then an answer, it is not an “accounting for,” a providing of grounds and reasons that is characteristic of philosophy as metaphysics, but is essentially a question that gets articulated over and over on different thoughtpaths.⁶² Consequently, Heidegger eventually gave up the term “philosophy” and preferred to speak rather of “paths” of thinking into the topic. The non-philosophical name that he gave to his thinking was precisely the word *Weg*, way or path. Though he continually

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28. I follow van Buren’s use of hyphenation here to emphasize the dynamic character of what is at issue.

⁶¹ *Id.*, p. 45.

⁶² This can be understood from the perspective of the difference Heidegger draws between metaphysical questioning understood as guiding and questioning understood more originally as grounding. In this regard see Heidegger’s *Nietzsche Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. David Farrell Krell (HarperCollins Publishers, 1984), pp. 192-197.

placed the same topic in discussion (*erörtert*), his paths never stepped in to the identical *topos* twice. In short, and in van Buren's words, "[t]here never was a single Heidegger, Heideggerian topic or philosophy since these are pluralized and differentiated into Heideggers, *topoi*, and thoughtpaths."⁶³ Always dis-puted *die Sache* leaves behind in language *Spuren*, traces, tracks, signs, remnants that point to the double absence of its having-been and of its coming, its no-longer and not-yet, its departure and deferral to a future return. *Die Sache* is not therefore supposed to name anything with positive content as the abstract unity of a thing with itself (where $A=A$ an idea amenable to representation), but rather functions only as a formal indication (*formale Anzeigen*) that allows itself to be re-iterated and re-inscribed along a dif-ferential track.⁶⁴ Thus the matter of Heidegger's *thinking* (*die Sache des Denkens*), formulated the *matter* of thinking is, as a "way" of thinking, traced across many and various elemental terms all of which despite their distinct contexts of inscription "belong-together" and say fundamentally "the Same": *Sinn des Seins, Wahrheit des Seins, Ortschaft des Seins, Da, Welt, das Offene, Seyn, Temporalität, Zeit-Raum, Anwesenheit, Entwurfsbereich, Lichtung, aletheia, phusis, Ereignis, die Kehre, Unter-Schied, das Zwischen, Wesung* and the list goes on.⁶⁵ I emphasize: this whole network of terms comprise something like an infrastructural chain which remark in varying contexts the open but comprehensive fund of *die Sache*. In each of these instances that are traced across the expanses of Heidegger's thoughtpaths the dif-

⁶³ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 59 at p. 28.

⁶⁴ Formal indication, a notion first developed in Heidegger's work of the early twenties (insofar as this is concerned with the possibility of philosophy as a nonobjectifying science), indicates or points to what is still absent in *die Sache selbst*, what is still to be thought and is on the way to language. In fact this pointing is at bottom the very matter of thinking itself, since, *die Sache* articulates its ever-repeatable fulfillment and differentiation in historical situations. As such a formally indicative approach to what is to be thought is dictated by the need to develop a mode of expression that articulates the essentially dynamic structure of this matter and marks an attempt to maintain an opening or *direction* that prevents the tendency towards objective thematization. See especially Heidegger's discussions in his 1921-22 text *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) and his 1923 *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). Theodore Kisiel also offers a good account of what is involved here in his *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993).

⁶⁵ This is a point argued by Sheehan. Cf. *op. cit.*, n 43 at p. 9.

ferentiating of *die Sache* is inscribed. In short, *die Sache* is taken up as the matter of *thinking* and thereby as the *matter for* thinking. Thus, Heidegger's way of thinking is not, as it is sometimes taken to be: monolithic. On the contrary, the various paths he traveled in turning out of metaphysics were always for him, and still are for us, open to deconstructive redraftings pursuing the matter in different contexts.

Now, to the extent that for Heidegger thinking at the end of philosophy comes increasingly into question as it articulates—via the necessity of an immanent criticism—ever more profoundly its initiative to have been a repetition of a determination to question (that is to say, finds in questioning that it is given to question), then to that extent, the matter of Heidegger's thinking is a dif-ference—dif-ference itself—that brings questioning back to itself even as it carries it beyond itself as the philosophic opening of thought. To enter into the openness of questioning, as an articulation of such difference, is for Heidegger the “task of thinking” in the age of technology. Indeed, this peculiarity has been perceptible from the first line of “The Question Concerning Technology”. Heidegger begins not by highlighting technology its how, its about or wherefore, but by reflecting on his own project of questioning on or after technology. This for Heidegger is because “Questioning builds a way of thinking”⁶⁶ and what is to be built by way of this thinking is an appropriate response to the matter than captures it and carries it beyond itself. Heidegger's project of “*questioning* concerning technology” thereby seeks to “prepare a free relationship” to technology where the freedom of this relationship is determined in terms of a thinking response to technology thought in its *essence*.

Mode of disclosure: the non-technical essence of technology

Heidegger's quest for essence appears to be truly philosophical. In “The Question Concerning Technology” Heidegger accepts remaining Platonic in appearance but such an appearance is just that since he makes it quite clear that the thinking of “essence” (*Wesen*)

⁶⁶ *QCT.*, p. 4.

in the phrase “the essence of technology” is not at all to be understood in the metaphysical sense of *essentia*, namely, substantive being or whatness. Nor is essence in this phrase that which remains distant from phenomena. The word *Wesen*, rather, is to be understood verbally as that which accords with *die Sache* of Heidegger’s thinking as I have presented it above, that is, as a conflictual dif-fering in the sense of setting apart and opening up. In this connection technology is above all a highly controversial and provocative matter. Indeed, we are told “it is technology itself that makes the demand on us to think in another way what is usually understood by “essence”.”⁶⁷

What demand does technology make upon thought? As is well known, Heidegger invokes the ancient Greek understanding of *techne* as pertaining to *poiesis*. As poetic, *techne* involves the *movens* of a phenomenon, its “cause,” not to be sure in the sense of a mechanical antecedent that would generate a certain effect, but rather in that sense of indebtedness Heidegger attributes to the Greek word translated by “cause”: *aitia*. The word, he asserts, designates a relationship of “being-due-to” (*Verschuldestein*). This in turn involves not merely a privative or negative relation: to be “due to” is to appear, to be “brought into play (*ins Spiel kommen*) thanks to” something. Through this movement of being “due,” something is “brought forth” (*hervorgebracht*), that is, brought from a kind of concealment out into the open. It is this process of bringing-out or bringing forth that Heidegger associates with the Greek word, *poiesis*, usually translated as “making” or “producing”.

Understood in this way *techne* is a “bringing-forth” that lets something come forward in its presencing (*Anwesen*). That is to say, *techne* comes to pass as a dif-ferentiating that starts something on a way from concealment out into its arrival in the open (*aus der Verborgenheit in die Unverborgenheit*). Recalling the likewise co-ordinate and broad senses of *techne* and *episteme* as original names for a knowing that “provides an opening up,” Heidegger states that “*Techne* is a mode of *altheuein*. It reveals whatever does not

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us.”⁶⁸ Thus, “[t]echnology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence [*West*] in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens.”⁶⁹

In opening onto the essence of technology as a mode of revealing Heidegger valorizes neither machines nor technical procedures, neither does he devalorize them; rather, what is identified as “the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology” is put in question and rendered, in principle, untenable. Questioning the traditional adjectival force of essence as *whatness*, reveals the instrumental and anthropological to be manifestly related terms. According to the former, technology merely embodies neutral “means” used for “ends” projected by human beings. In line with this, the latter states that technology is nothing but “the doing of human beings” who invent, put to use, and control instruments and machines for human goals. For Heidegger, then, the instrumental definition is anthropological and vice versa; it defines both technology and, as *homo faber*, the human being. Now, insofar as it fixes on something pertinent about how technology is commonly understood, Heidegger acknowledges that this definition “is in obvious conformity with what we are envisioning when we talk about technology”. Indeed, it is “so uncannily correct it even holds for modern technology, of which, in other respects, we maintain with some justification that it is, in contrast to the older handwork technology, something completely different and therefore new.”⁷⁰ That said, to follow this path and consider technology exclusively in its obviousness is to conform to technology in its most assured and “outward” aspect: it confirms metaphysics in its actuality as that which fixes its gaze only on beings in their representability. Such a relation to technology fails “to hear the claim of [*die Sache*] which speaks in the essence of technology”⁷¹ In a word, it denies that there is anything controversial, provocative, and thereby questionable, about technology. Consequently, Heidegger will famously assert that “the essence of

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁷¹ *Id.*, p. 34.

technology is not anything human. The essence of technology is above all not anything technological. The essence of technology lies in what from the beginning and before all else gives food for thought.”⁷²

For Heidegger, it is because “technology is nothing of the order of a machine” that we remain barred from experiencing the provocation of our contemporary situation, remain barred, that is, “so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it.”⁷³ Indeed, we are excluded from anything like a question concerning technology, that is, from an opening to what precisely happens or is disclosed there, exactly when we conceive technology as the technological. In other words, because for Heidegger the essence of technology is not technical, the dynamic and open relationship of thinking to technology is not equivalent to the technical facility or experience with technology so often evoked by commentators arguing against or on behalf of Heidegger’s text. Eschewing the calculative and representationalist thought that are the trademarks of this experience, Heidegger points up the need to avoid the staking out and reckoning of his formal indications into fixed positions and demarcations along any given set of lines. For Heidegger, questioning is not so much about outcomes but only starting points that are to be critically repeated and followed up in independent thought toward a renewed discourse about the matter itself. Consequently, the *ergon* at work in Heidegger’s questioning, is not to be understood in terms of the different results, the *logoi*, which it initially seems to entail. Nor following this is Heidegger’s questioning to be reduced to a writing and talking “about” technology, an approach that would enunciate theses, offer simple inspections, or tell stories about it. To question: neither an attitude nor a rhetorical formula, but this remarkable “preparatory exercise” which will be maintained at all costs by Heidegger, separate from all the “operations and programs” cherished by those not accidentally given over to the demands and dictates of

⁷² Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Grey, (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p.22; hereafter cited as *WCT*.

⁷³ *QCT.*, p. 4.

contemporary scholarship. Any opinions either for or against technology as this presents itself in Heidegger's text is a convicted relationship to technology that condemns Heidegger's question to nothing more than a common, mundane, academic experience of Being, that is, to calculative statements about beings.

If in the midst of Heidegger's many extraordinary claims, we are advised therefore to "pay heed to the way, and not to fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics".⁷⁴ This remark suggests that we do not begin to read Heidegger—enter into the matter of thinking—until the surface intelligibility of the language is shaken and we follow not the content, a series of propositions, (or even a series of what may seem to be poetic figures).⁷⁵ Such a reading fragments Heidegger's work into a set of texts with which we can become ever more familiar in their particularity. Rather, in an effort to draw us beyond the conceptual and figurative levels of thinking we are advised to pay heed to the very *movement* of thought as this is enacted from out of the openness of the question, an openness which articulates the immanent transformation of the *Sache* as a tracing of difference. Following this, if within the actuality of modern technology questioning has become nothing other than the organizing of opinions—scholarly or otherwise—and the dissemination of what is "commonplace," we need to pose Heidegger's question once again, to repeat it. We do not do this by questioning technology but by *following the trace (Spur) of questioning as this builds a way of thinking into the essence of technology as a revealing of dif-ference.*

Having said this, I have now reached the end of the first section of this chapter. By way of an examination a number of appropriations of Heidegger's text we have seen what the question is not and have opened onto what the question is. As I move to the second section of this chapter my task is this: In order to fully understand the originality of Heidegger's response to modern technology I must confirm and deepen what was said

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁵ This is a point made by Christopher Fynsk in the Introduction to his *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity*, (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1986).

above with respect to the dynamic aspect of Heidegger's thinking. That is, I must follow Heidegger's questioning. In order to follow this questioning, I must traverse the openness of the essence of technology as a revealing of difference insofar as this designates *die Sache des Denkens*, the matter for thinking. This entails I get on the track of what happens in the text on technology and become open for that which essentially comes to pass in the *Ge-stell* as the achievement of metaphysics. In this connection, I will trace the relation that Heidegger forges between the questioning into *Ge-stell* and the turn of thinking to *Ereignis* with the aim of showing why the completion of metaphysical thinking in technology can, indeed must, at the same time open onto a thinking of difference as such.

Part II. Technology as the Opening of Difference

As was mentioned above, in "The Question Concerning Technology" Heidegger states it is modern technology itself that demands us to think essence in another way than in terms of the traditional thought of *essentia* as substantive being or whatness: "It is," he writes, "precisely [technology] and it alone that is the disturbing thing, that moves us to ask the question concerning technology per se."⁷⁶ As we have seen, in responding to this demand, and by way of the resources of Pre-Socratic thought, Heidegger maintains that "[w]hat is decisive in *techne* does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in revealing...It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that *techne* is a bringing-forth."⁷⁷ Nothing is said yet about the essence of modern technology understood as *Ge-stell*. It too is a mode of revealing but one which articulates an unprecedented transformation of the Greek understanding of *techne* as a poietic bringing-forth. Heidegger's questioning opens on to what he names a "challenging-forth" or "challenging-revealing". This challenging is said to be a "destining" or "sending"

⁷⁶ *QCT.*, p. 13.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

(*Geschick*) which provokes man and starts him “upon the way of that revealing through which the real everywhere, more or less distinctly, becomes standing-reserve (*Bestand*)”⁷⁸ In this case, *Ge-stell* constitutes the reciprocal provocation of nature and humanity through ordering, manipulation and calculation. So defined the essence of technology is the “supreme danger”. The danger that Heidegger speaks of is not singular but a multifarious danger—that reducing the real to a standing reserve “threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied him to enter into a more original revealing...”⁷⁹ If modern technology nevertheless remains a danger, it constitutes what is most properly to be thought. It corresponds to the matter of Heidegger’s *thinking*, which when formulated as the *matter* of thinking, translates *die Sache* as what is provocative or controversial, as a dif-ference, setting-apart or opening that captures thought and carries it beyond itself. Viewed from this angle, *Ge-stell* emerges more clearly for what it is: not simply a determinate historical order of production and existence, but rather the “first oppressing flash of *Ereignis*”.⁸⁰

Now, in order to fully appreciate what is said here we must follow an important transformation of Heidegger’s thinking which articulates a radicalization and translation between certain texts written in the 1930s and 1940s (mostly notably those lectures devoted to Nietzsche and to “The Age of the World Picture”) and the decisive essays of the 1950’s onwards (mainly “The Question Concerning Technology,” “The Turning” and those texts published as *Identity and Difference*). In the differential economy of Heidegger’s thought the former set of texts open onto the emergence of technology via the deconstruction of the history of nihilism as found in Nietzsche and by way of essential reflection on modern science while the latter alone provide the decisive context in which Heidegger raises the question of the essence of technology as precisely that provocative matter which is revealing of dif-ference. It is important to recall the movement of thought

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁸⁰ *Id.*, p. 38.

in these earlier texts since, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, a dominant interpretation has arisen which says that Heidegger's meditation on essence of modern technology is primarily a discourse on the metaphysics of representation, a discourse which takes the so-called "subject-object" scheme as decisive and which emphasizes a static conception of Being and thereby of thinking. This interpretation does not go far enough. It reduces Heidegger's various thoughtpaths to a restricted economy that amounts to a letting fail his surpassing of metaphysics. The failure to give full development to this aspect of Heidegger's thought is a limitation of his text that blocks the turn of Heidegger's thought, its immanent transformation, and so accomplishes and upholds the technological appropriation of Heidegger's text which is manifest in the way it becomes present today. Although this restricted economy is indeed contained in the former set of texts mentioned above it is superseded in certain important respects by the question of the essence of technology thought in terms of the *Ge-stell*. To say straightaway what I shall discuss below, the most important aspect of the transformation of Heidegger's thinking lies in this: under the unfolding of technology as *Ge-stell* the "modern" apprehension of the world as "view," as "object for a subject," is itself dissimulated in the process of taking all that is as "on reserve" for infinite manipulation. In this case, as Heidegger says "[w]hatever stands by in the sense of standing reserve *no longer* stands over against us as object."⁸¹ This shift articulates the whole drama of the Heideggerian text since it is in this movement of thought from the restricted economics of representationalism to the objectless field of a generalized machinism that Heidegger's attempt to elaborate a nonmetaphysical thought of Being as dif-ference is played out. In this case, the bifocal functioning of Heidegger's thinking—in one focus recapitulating the articulations of the metaphysical field in its entirety, and in the other focus anticipating those of a contemporary potential—originates from the double functioning of technology, according to way Heidegger thinks the relation between *Ge-stell* and *Ereignis* as the opening of

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 17. My emphasis.

thought to the self differentiating event of Being. More deeply, to think the essence of technology as something non-technical signifies seeing in *Ge-stell* a cipher of *Ereignis*. Here, the single philosophic importance of Heidegger's question concerning technology can be seen to lie in the way in which it effectively articulates the relations between technology and philosophical thought, between philosophical thought and representationalism, between representationalism and the contemporary technicization of the world, and between contemporary technology and the non-philosophy of the event and difference.

Science and representation

Let me turn then to the those early texts in which the emergence of technology comes to the fore from out of the question of nihilism and of modern science. I shall begin with Heidegger's text on Nietzsche. As is well known, those lectures devoted to Nietzsche concern themselves with demonstrating that and how Nietzsche's self proclaimed overcoming of nihilism—his “revaluation of all values”—remains entrapped within metaphysics occupying the “penultimate stage” in the unfolding of the technological determination of Being. In this regard, Heidegger makes Nietzsche's basic words—Will to Power, eternal recurrence of the same, nihilism, revaluation, “justice,” and overman—his own whilst making Nietzsche the spokesman for technology. As Rainer Schürmann has remarked, “[Heidegger's texts] speak *formally* about Nietzsche, but *materially* about technology; they describe technology as the closing field in the history of presence, as “the release of Being into machination,” but they do so with the help of the vocabulary taken from Nietzsche.”⁸² The Will to Power denominates “the fundamental character of entities,” “the reality of the real,” in short, “the Being of that which is.”⁸³ These equations speak primarily of the technological epoch. They signify that it is the will which sets up

⁸² Rainer Schürmann, *Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, trans. Christine-Marie Gros. (Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 182.

⁸³ Martin Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead” in *QCT*, pp. 53-112.

subjectivity as the unassailable metaphysical principle. Those equations signify moreover that the technological subject wills something. It wills power, a possibility which requires a self-positing which anticipates its own overcoming. Power is power only if it pursues more power, only if it posits the conditions of its own preservation *as* conditions of its enhancement, and vice versa. "Power enhancement is, then, in itself at the same time also the preservation of power." In this connection, to understand the *Heideggerian* concept of Will to Power is to speak not only of the technological triumph of "subjectness" (*Subjektivität*) but also of reification, the triumph of representing and objectification. Indeed, the essence of subjectivism *is* objectivism insofar as for the subject everything turns into an object. As a metaphysical event, the emergence of "subjectness" is not a consequence of the supposed "priority of the ego" as an epistemological given. Instead the latter, and with it the "subject-object relation," has its condition in the will to make certain, to secure to respond to the claim of power. With this "what is" is secured in the "assault" of technology:

Everywhere the Being of what is lies in setting-itself-before-itself and thus in setting-itself-up. Man, within the subjectness belonging to whatever is, rises up into the subjectivity of his essence. Man enters into insurrection. The world changes into object...The earth can now show itself only as the object of an assault that, in human willing, establishes itself as unconditional objectification. Nature appears everywhere...as the object of technology.⁸⁴

Technology as it appears here in Heidegger's text is not thought as the consequence, but as the condition, for the way in which beings are given in their Being as "either the object of the subject or the subject of the subject."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.100

⁸⁵ Ibid.

This movement of thought is also traced in Heidegger's 1938 essay "The Age of the World Picture." Here the task for thinking is to question into the "metaphysical ground" of our age by way of a reflection on one of its most essential phenomena: modern science. Now, though technology is mentioned as an "essential phenomenon" of the modern age, the relationship between science and technology is not investigated here, nor are the results of the metaphysical inquiry into science applicable, without further ado, to the question of technology. The *Stellen* and *Vor-stellen* at issue in this essay are still thought on the basis of "subjectness," a term which is in certain essential respects superceded by the meditation on *das Ge-stell*. That said, the thinking at work in the essay does open onto technology in its meditation on representation as the condition for the transformation of science into research via the projection of object-spheres, the demand for exactness and the challenge of ongoing activity.

What distinguishes modern science is that "the essence of what we today call science is research."⁸⁶ In this connection, Heidegger argues that the essence of science as research consists in "the fact that knowing establishes itself as a procedure within some realm of what is, in nature or in history."⁸⁷ The fundamental event in research is the opening up and delimitation of an object-sphere by means of projection. For example, "the corporeality of bodies, the vegetable character of plants, the animality of animals, the humanness of man"⁸⁸ are projections that determine the objects studied in physics, botany, zoology and anthropology respectively.

To be specific about the case at hand, in modern physics a ground plan of nature is projected; nature is "the self-contained system of motion of units of mass related spatiotemporality."⁸⁹ Such a projection determines in advance the way in which knowledge relates to objects. In this connection, Heidegger's insight is to point out the relation between two senses in which science is *mathematical*. In a broad sense science is

⁸⁶ *AWP.*, p. 119.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

projective; more narrowly science relies upon mathematics. In this case, science does not project because it measures; rather, it measures because it projects and thereby represents nature in advance as quantifiable. Beings as quantifiable objects must conform to the requirements of the modern researching mind which in turn has to adapt itself to its own results a possibility which circumscribes its methodology as “ongoing activity” [*Beitrieb*]. Accordingly, human being continually places itself in the scientific, experimental picture in precedence over whatever is. Such “setting before” is an objectification in representation that secures for the researcher a certainty with respect to the object so represented. Representation is complicit in science as research, for the representation of nature as a calculable coherence of forces determines the rigor of science as exactitude. The representation of the objects of science determines the object-domain of each specialized science and the certainty with which those objects are known. Heidegger argues that science becomes science “when and only when truth has been transformed into the certainty of representation”.⁹⁰ For Heidegger, it is this scientific representation of beings that is the key to the essence of the modern world as picture where “world” refers to beings as a whole in relation to their ground, and “picture” means, not a copy or imitation, but the way in which the world is set before us as something familiar and ready to be acted on:

Hence world picture, understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world, but the world conceived and grasped as a picture. What is, in its entirety, is now taken in such a way that it first is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth. Wherever we have the world picture, an essential decision takes place regarding what is, in its entirety. The Being of whatever is, is sought and found in the representedness of the latter.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.127.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.129-130.

Representing beings as picture means relating them back to human beings, *presenting*, *setting them up*, and *systematically bringing them to stand* in precisely this way. However, as Will McNeill points out in his analysis of Heidegger's text, it is not simply the human being that is decisive here, at least not if by human being we mean an entity or individual subject. Rather, it is this particular form of *relationality* that becomes the definitive or, in Heidegger's words, "normative" realm that provides the measure for the modern understanding of the Being of beings. The modern human being does not understand him- or herself as an already existing "I" or ego, but as an already existing field for every possible making present of beings. It is this total identification of ourselves with the measure of Being itself, this relationality of making things present, of setting things up before us as objects that constitutes, as we have already seen with respect to Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche, the essence of the modern human being as "subject" or "subjectivity".⁹²

Beyond representation: *das Ge-stell* and the transitivity of Being

The above brief sketch has done no more than mark motifs⁹³ that Heidegger's questioning into modern technology in the sense of *Ge-stell* will transform in a significant way. Let me then return to this thought. *Ge-stell* attempts to state in one word the principle and destined unity of modernity. That is not so easy. I have already cited Heidegger's advice that we should not get "caught up in isolated sentences and topics". Such advice is especially pertinent when considering the matter of thinking that is *das Ge-stell*. In using this word to say and think the peculiarity of the modern world Heidegger risks arresting the self differentiating dynamic of *die Sache* into which his question concerning modern technology is built. In this connection, we would do well to

⁹² See William McNeill, *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle, and the Ends of Theory*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 171.

⁹³ For in-depth analysis of Heidegger's thinking of science see Joseph L. Kockelmans, *Heidegger and Science*, *Current Continental Research* 207, (Washington: University Press of America, 1985); and Trish Glazebrook, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

heed the words of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe who writes, “we must not be too quick to translate the word *Ge-stell*. We know, moreover, that it is nearly untranslatable. But even if we could find an approximate equivalent for it—even if we could succeed, as has been the case for quite some time, in convincingly “glossing” the word, we would still not have gained very much. It is not a question of knowing here what *Ge-stell* “means.” Or, at least, this is wholly secondary. The real question is one of knowing how the word *Ge-stell* works, how it functions—what use it serves.”⁹⁴

How, then, does *Ge-stell* function? What happens with *Ge-stell*? In the first place, this: since *Ge-stell* is above all the name for the essence of technology, which is to say a provoking or “challenging-revealing” it marks the inconstant, mobile and transitory Being of entities as they enter into the “standing-reserve”. To think into technology as such, it is necessary to work on the construction of its “fluctuating” (*schwebend*) edifice; *Ge-stell* indicates a world determined solely by surface fluctuations. This understanding, however, flies in the face of what Lacoue-Labarthe tells us takes place. Noting that the analysis of the constellation or chain of terms that can be derived from *Ge-stell*—in current German the term carries the meaning of frame, a scaffold, a structure, but Heidegger treats it as a composite of *Ge* and *stell* where the prefix *Ge* signifies “that which gathers” and the root *Stellen* (which is consonant with *Ve-stellung*) diverges simultaneously toward *Be-stellen* (to set in order, to command), *Her-stellen* (to produce, to reproduce, to make) and *Vor-stellung* (to represent)—has been gone over so much that it is perhaps unnecessary to rehearse it any further, Lacoue-Labarthe then goes on to state,

[I]t will undoubtedly suffice to retain from [this chain of terms] (but everything is in this statement) that the essence of technology entails, by way of *Be-stellen*, a sense of Being as *stance*, *stature*, *station*—as, in “Greek,” *stasis* or *stele*—which is and which has always been, in the West, the sense of Being itself. “Being” (as it happens this word has

⁹⁴ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 59-60.

been written *ester*) means *to stand*. Installation, in technology, is therefore both provocation and stele. And it is this double sense, at least, that one must understand *Ge-stell* (literally the shelf, the *pedestal*) if, besides the *Ge-* of “gathering” and “collection,” besides even the relation that *Ge-stell* entertains with the principle of reason...this word is supposed to “account for” provocation [challenging] insofar as it “sets upon [*stellt*] man to order [*bestellen*] the real as standing reserve [*Bestand*].” But it goes without saying that this double sense is double only inasmuch as we try to make audible in provocation [challenging] a deformed echo of the Greek production, of *poiesis*. What predominates and what joins *poiesis* (or even *techne*) and technology—in a common, though unequally, unthought of *aletheia*—is precisely the *static* determination of Being. *Ge-stell* is primarily and fundamentally the *stèle*.⁹⁵

Now, I have quoted at some length here since Lacoue-Labarthe’s interpretation of *Ge-stell* in terms of static determination of Being is precisely what Heidegger’s thinking works to surpass. As I noted earlier, this understanding does in fact function in the most commonplace account of Heidegger’s thinking on technology and consequently, in this aspect at least, Lacoue-Labarthe’s otherwise impressive reading risks a reduction that places him in the realm of such an account.⁹⁶

In speaking of *Ge-stell* Heidegger “dare[s] to use this word in a sense that has been thoroughly unfamiliar till now.”⁹⁷ According to its common sense and usage the word *Ge-stell* means some kind of apparatus, e.g., a bookrack. *Ge-stell* is also the name for a

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 68.

⁹⁶ The fact that Lacoue-Labarthe’s reading of Heidegger abides by the understanding of technology that is more pertinent to his earlier work of the 1940s is perhaps above all due to the fact that he wishes to define the site of “a new question of the subject” one that attempts to take into account both Heidegger’s deconstruction of this category *and* that about which he thinks Heidegger maintained “a certain obstinately observed silence”. For Lacoue-Labarthe, Heidegger’s thinking of the metaphysics of subjectivity will have elided the “subject of enunciation,” let us say, or of “writing.” (p.62) In this connection, Lacoue-Labarthe will examine the Heideggerian neglect of *Darstellung* as that which belongs to the family of terms that can be derived from *Ge-stell* and which as well as indicating representation in the sense of figure (*Gestalt*) also can function in terms of representation as exposition or “literary presentation”.

⁹⁷ *QCT.*, p. 19.

skeleton. And the employment of the word *Ge-stell* that is now required seems “equally eerie” since Heidegger’s use of *Ge-stell* places considerable emphasis not just on Being as that which is brought to stand, which is set in place or installed as it were (although it obviously does this), but also attempts to articulate a tension between noun and verb that resounds in the German and that points to a strange, indeed uncanny, mixture of stasis and movement. This tension resounds in the word Enframing⁹⁸ proposed by William Lovitt and others to render *Ge-stell*, as it does in Samuel Weber’s preference for “goings-on”.⁹⁹ I would like to mobilize another possibility, however, one that brings into play the German *Enteignis* and which has the virtue of articulating the dynamic that Heidegger’s thinking undergoes in the movement whereby *Ge-stell* opens onto *Ereignis*. I would like to use the word Ex-appropriation. If I prefer this word to those others, it is because it articulates not so much the setting up and representing character of modern technology as it points into the specificity of challenging-revealing as that which opens up the thinking of *die Sache* precisely in the manner I have continuously indicated, that is, as difference, opening, etc. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to the clarification of this matter.

As is apparent, *Ge-stell* retains a semiological link with the thinking of subjectness in which “what is” is experienced as an object of representation. It therefore retains a link with scientific thought. However, in the *Ge-stell* considerably more is at stake than what is said to be the case in those essays discussed above since, as Heidegger explicitly states, what is revealed within modern technology is no longer uniquely articulated within the horizon of representation and so is foreign to the schemes of the “rational animal”.¹⁰⁰ The

⁹⁸ The English translation “Enframing” for *Ge-Stell* is intended to suggest, through the use of the prefix “en-,” something of the active meaning that Heidegger gives to the word; Cf. *QCT* p. 19-20 and note.

⁹⁹ See Samuel Weber, “Upsetting the Set Up: Remarks on Heidegger’s Questing After Technics” in *Modern Language Notes*, vol: 104, 1989, pp. 977-91.

¹⁰⁰ *AWP* does in fact mark the shift away from representation when Heidegger proposes that “everywhere and in the most varied forms and disguises the gigantic is making its appearance.” As the optimization of calculation, the gigantic implicates a “peculiar quality” wherein the modern world “projects itself into a space withdrawn from representation and so lends to the incalculable the determinateness peculiar to it, as well as a historical uniqueness.” See pp. 135-136.

technical world described as *Ge-stell* is indeed the world of self-assured planned production, served by knowledge as representation and it is undeniable that command is privileged here, but to find in the tracing of *Ge-stell* only a generalization about the category of representation would mean to limit oneself to the technicality of technology. We go beyond this if we grasp in its depth what is alluded to by the provocation of *Ge-stell*, namely, the transitivity of Being. In this case, if the institutionalization of the subject/object relation, i.e., the matrix of scientific-representationalist thinking, is a result of the challenging of modern technology, then that very same challenging undermines the objectivity upon which that matrix depends since what is foremost in the modern “sending” is the exigency that requires all beings, including humans, to enter into this general framework of command-resource-production-consumption. Science becomes almost entirely subservient to the essence of technology, to the technological configuration of revealing. Both the represented character of Being and the representing function of the self-certain subject are now seen to be taken up, transformed, and finally dispossessed by the unlocking and exposing of beings as “stock” or “standing reserve”. This term, Heidegger notes, does not merely refer to supply or the available since “[t]he [*Ge-stell*] concerns us everywhere, immediately. [The *Ge-stell*], if we may still speak in this manner, is more real than all of atomic energy and the whole world of machinery, more real than the driving power of organization, communications, and automation.”¹⁰¹ *Ge-stell* “assumes the rank of an exclusive rubric” and “designates nothing less than the way in which everything presences that is wrought upon by the challenging revealing. Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object.”¹⁰² In this connection, Heidegger’s thought traverses the way the modern apprehension of the world as “view,” as “object for a subject,” is itself supplanted by an interlinked series of operations that manipulate “what is” in terms of an ongoing ordering that secures itself within an immense network that relies on storage:

¹⁰¹ *ID.*, p. 35.

¹⁰² *QCT.*, p. 17.

The revealing that rules throughout modern technology has the character of setting upon, in the sense of challenging-forth. That challenging happens in that the energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up is, in turn, distributed, and what is distributed is switched about ever anew. Unlocking, transforming, storing, and switching about are ways of revealing. But the revealing never simply comes to an end. Neither does it run off into the indeterminate. The revealing reveals its own manifoldly interlocking paths, through regulating their course. This regulating [*Steuerung*] itself is, for its part, everywhere secured. Regulating and securing even become the chief characteristics of the challenging revealing.¹⁰³

This network is a system of the self-regulative circulation and exchange of what is as revealed; its concrete form, as Heidegger insists, is *cybernetics*. The science of self-regulation, cybernetics, derives from the Greek *Kubernetes*, which means pilot or governor. The field of cybernetics involves the establishment and investigation of regulatory processes in mechanical, electronic, and biological systems. Insofar as it is based on the instrumentalization of informative messages and on the strictly operational character of every process, cybernetics constructs closed systems through which information acts on information to form feed-back loops that generate increasing complexity. The goal towards which cybernetics advances is the organization of the fields of objectivity so as to be able to dispense with every ontological relation, every reference to a grounding. Technology has an essential need of cybernetics so that it can completely detach the “reservoir” from any relation to ground, or to the fundamental.

Let me reiterate what is said here in Heidegger’s vocabulary. Understood in terms of the *Ge-stell* the chain of cognates built around *Stelle*, “place,” emphasizes the centrality of a conception of placing: setting things in place, holding them in place, ordering them

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 16.

into place, securing their place within a system of placement where everything is posited and has its place (thus technological thinking remains thoroughly representational). But this placing, positing, and delimiting of everything within the system entails precisely a *displacement* from the immediate field of what is brought to stand. Here we can understand Heidegger's assertion that the "end" of metaphysics is not to be understood in a negative sense as mere cessation, as lack of continuation; rather, in being gathered into its "uttermost possibilities" metaphysics is unleashed in its unconditionality. The inconstancy that the "release of Being into machination" entails is what marks it as different from mere objectivity. Within the technological system both natural and human "resources" are integrated into a network or relay which intimates the mutual gathering and dispersal of subject and object in a relation of reciprocal provocation whereby they challenge, determine, and secure each other in such a fashion that the network itself reserves priority over both subject and object, which are "sucked up" into a "reservoir" of differing and deferred availability. Defined by its availability for consumption, the entity as standing reserve, strictly speaking, has no Being or essence in the traditional sense of these terms; it lacks the signature of an identity and the identity of a signature. Lacking the presence of an object or subject it functions in being simultaneously used up and reserved for use. What was still essential to that calculative-representationalist thinking concerned with objects, viz., the establishing of "identity conditions," the pursuit of the essential constitution and limits of the object *qua* object, gives way to an erasure of "proper" differences, an obliteration of contours such that, via a project of a generalized machinism, beings are nothing other than "variables" and are treated as processing materials and as decomposable projections from which "effects" can be extracted through appropriate treatment. The transformation of the "object" to "energy" in contemporary physics, a transformation which guides Heidegger's own reflections, is but the most obvious manifestation of this system. Here, a new basic attitude is assumed the key word for which is *Information*, whereby Heidegger remarks somewhat cynically that we have

to hear the word in its American-English accent. This information, as for example the bio-chemical data encoded in DNA which can be mobilized to facilitate the transformation of living beings into organisms and then into production sites and “molecular machines” can, as Samuel IJsseling remarks, “be understood neither as subject nor consciousness nor as object nor matter. It is neither the same, as was the Platonic *eidōs* nor the Aristotelian *morphe* nor *forma*. All of our philosophical categories are drained of all ontological content. It is a monstrous uncanny possibility, a “most extreme” possibility that all our philosophical concepts have become mere ciphers, monadic carriers of information, units of cybernetic science. This possibility belongs to the essence of the end of philosophy.”¹⁰⁴

Now, having emphasized that Heidegger’s questioning into modern technology is to think it in its essence as that which comes to pass as a “revealing” that “extends into a space withdrawn from representation” and thereby into a space that opens up a possibility beyond the terrain of traditional thought, this is equally to point out that, as if in spite of itself, the advent of calculation effaces or *overwhelms* all its limits and gives way, precisely, to the incalculable, to what is beyond measure. In this regard technology is “in a lofty sense ambiguous.” Such ambiguity “points to the mystery of all revealing”.¹⁰⁵ It expresses technology precisely as a provocation which calls for thinking: “Because we no longer encounter what is called [the *Ge-stell*] within the purview of representation which lets us think of beings as presence—the [*Ge-stell*] no longer concerns us as something that is present—therefore [the *Ge-stell*] seems at first strange. It remains strange above all because it is not an ultimate, but rather first gives us That which prevails throughout the constellation of Being and man.”¹⁰⁶ In this connection, if on the one hand, and in response to the demand that technology itself (as challenging-revealing) issues to thinking, Heidegger identifies modern technology as equal to the Ex-appropriation of beings as

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 2 at p. 194.

¹⁰⁵ *QCT.*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁶ *ID.*, p. 35-36.

well as the condition of the crisis and dissolution of traditional thought, on the other hand this same technology is thereby that place or site (*Ort*) around which a potential turn in the historical constellation of Being is announced such that technology articulates a transition or passage into the unthought essence of metaphysics. In short, modern technology is the evocation of that differential openness which traverses metaphysics in its very possibility and which, at the completion of metaphysics, is manifest as the opening of a possible thinking entry into that radically singular event which is called in the strict sense of the term *Ereignis*. In *Identity and Difference* where perhaps the most concise statement regarding this matter is given, Heidegger says everything that is decisive regarding this point:

The belonging together of man and Being in the manner of mutual challenge drives home to us with startling force that and how man is delivered over to the ownership of Being and Being is appropriate to the essence of man. Within [*die Ge-stell*] there prevails a strange ownership and a strange appropriation. We must experience simply this owning in which man and Being are delivered over to each other, that is, we must enter into what we call [*Ereignis*]...What we experience in [*die Ge-stell*] as the constellation of Being and man through the modern world of technology is a prelude to what is called [*Ereignis*]. This event, however, does not necessarily persist in its prelude. For in the [*Ereignis*] the possibility arises that it may overcome the dominance of [*die Ge-stell*] to turn it into a more original appropriating.¹⁰⁷

Usually translated as event of appropriation and, more recently as enowning, *Ereignis* is, as Schurmann remarks, “the most tenuous issue for philosophy ever and therefore a tenuous thought, only to be hinted at.”¹⁰⁸ It is the incidence whereby Being relates to man by way of “appropriation,” *eigen* meaning “proper”. As Heidegger thinks it, with the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 36-37.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 82 at p. 219.

eventuation of *Ereignis* man is appropriated (*vereignet*) to Being, while Being is consigned (*zugeeignet*) to man. The reciprocal provocation in which man and Being are related in the challenging-revealing of the technological world is the event of the reciprocal trans-propriation of man and Being. To think man and Being in the manner of appropriation, and no longer in terms of subject and object, is thereby to discover both as *transitive*—the “is” here speaks transitively, in transition whereby Being becomes present in the manner of *Übercommnis*, the overwhelming coming-over or transition to beings—and this discovery happens in the *Ge-stell* and nowhere else.

Technology as the site of the event: *das Ge-stell* and *Ereignis*

Despite its perpetual concern with Being and beings, metaphysics has persistently forgotten the event in which one constantly goes over to the other in a movement that is not regulated by a *telos* that would act as a *arche* in the sense of onto-theo-logical constitution. If we ask what Being is, we see that Being is what beings are, it is the Being of *beings*, while beings in their turn are to be defined only as the beings of *Being*, those beings that have Being insofar as they are. What is clear in this transit, is “that when we deal with the Being of beings and with the beings of Being, we deal in each case with a dif-ference [*Unter-Shied*]. Thus we think of Being rigorously only when we think of it in its dif-ference with beings, and of beings in their dif-ference with Being. The dif-ference thus comes specifically into view.”¹⁰⁹ In this connection, if, as Heidegger says, the history of metaphysics is the history of the oblivion of Being as dif-ference, thus of Being as *Ereignis*, it appears to be so *only* when looked at from the dis-location in which *Ge-stell* locates us; there is no thought of dif-ference as such without that revealing which completes and finally determines the history of metaphysics in its “uttermost possibility”. Consequently, the as yet unthought nexus between *Ge-stell* and *Ereignis* underlies the connection between dif-ference as a distinction between Being and beings and dif-ference

¹⁰⁹ *ID.*, p. 62.

as precisely that differentiation which is the essential origin of this distinction. If this is so then modern technology proves to be the decisive condition which, from the beginning, provokes Heidegger into raising the traditional question of Being to the status of *die Sache des Denkens*. That is, Heidegger's thinking, its immanent transformation, originates from within technology which (transformation) is the onset of the thinking of Being as difference. Indeed, as Gianni Vattimo has pointed out, Heidegger is able to perform a repetition of the metaphysical thinking of Being only because and to the extent that Being occurs in the manner of Ex-appropriation, that is, in the manner of *Ge-stell*. Nor, as Vattimo further remarks, could we, with Heidegger, take up the matter for thinking if we were not interpolated by *Ge-stell*.¹¹⁰

Turning, motion, change, transformation, differentiation: these characterize the matter of thinking that is technology. To be more precise, if we are to understand why modern technology is indeed the decisive condition that opens up *die Sache* of Heidegger's thought, we need to bear in mind this mobile and transitive character of Being as affirmed in (the opening of) *Ereignis*; and we need to refer it (without reducing it) to the challenging-revealing that is the essence of modern technology. Here we can again turn to Vattimo for guidance. As I have noted, the most commonly stressed account of Heidegger's questioning into modern technology, an account routinely regarded as negative and sometimes as demonic, is the governance of representing, objectifying and potentially total organization. However, to grasp in its depth what is alluded to in Heidegger's thinking of *Ge-stell* is to trace the event-ual nature of Being, its being given under marks that are different every time. As a revealing which opens out beyond the frame of representation *Ge-stell* is subordinate to an *urging* as incessant change and dislocation, as suggested by Heidegger's use of the various compounds of *stellen* and his choice of the other term *Herausfordern*, challenging. The call of technique in *Ge-stell* means that "[o]ur whole human existence everywhere sees itself challenged—now

¹¹⁰ Gianni Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger*, trans. Cyprian Blamires and Thomas Harrison, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 170.

playfully and now urgently, now breathlessly and now ponderously—to devote itself to the planning and calculating of everything”, persisting with this planning “past all bounds.” As Vattimo remarks, we could call this the “shaking” in which beings find themselves caught in the *Ge-stell* and it is this shaking that makes *Ge-stell* the “liminal appearance” of *Ereignis*.¹¹¹ That this transitivity is predominant in the liminological field of technology is confirmed by other elements, especially the way in which a whole group of terms is employed in those texts that make up *Identity and Difference*, in particular the whole discourse on *Schwingen* or oscillation: “The *Ereignis* is that realm, vibrating within itself, through which man and Being reach each other in their nature, achieve their nature by losing those qualities with which metaphysics has endowed them.”¹¹² Furthermore, ideas like that of the *Sprung* (leap) and the *Schritt zuruck* (step back) are linked to this mobility in *Identity and Difference*; these are features of that thinking-questioning which responds to the demand of technology itself in its essence and thus enters into *Ereignis* as a sphere of oscillation that intimates a post-metaphysical economy.

At bottom this transitivity or oscillation is not to be wholly identified with the ongoing manipulating, trans-forming, and switching about that violently dis-locates beings and man as materials caught in the processes of technology and production. Although it is decisively linked to this world as one of its possibilities, the *Ge-stell* is the undertow of all surface fluctuations such that oscillation is “something all-pervading which pervades Beings destiny from its beginning to its completion.”¹¹³ Oscillation, fluctuation, and the shaking of the challenging revealing of *Ge-stell* means that beings come to be or occur and that their occurring is their givenness from out of and across a process of expropriation-appropriation (hence Ex-appropriation). In this connection, to respond to the provocation of technology and thereby accede to metaphysics in its completion will mean to turn to *die Sache* as a “sphere of oscillation”. It is to attend

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 173.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 37.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 67.

above all to the constellation of an ever shifting event-like network of relations that scatters the general, disregards the particular, and fragments any thought-content other than this or that revealing singularized by its distinct absencing. Such plurification is impossible to transcend and is thinkable only as the differential movement of opening. For Heidegger, to trace this opening *as* opening is the “task of thinking” at the end of philosophy and marks its future possibility.

2

Transition: Re-routing Heidegger

Introduction

One of the central assertions of the last chapter was that any appropriation of Heidegger's work that becomes overly fascinated with *what* it says, that is, with its "contents" and "themes"—an approach which is irreducibly bound up with all the sites of institutionalization and of techno-media(tiz)ation, that determine the way in which this work becomes present for us today—must quickly be perceived to be inadequate since what such an approach underestimates or obscures is the performative difficulty that one must engage if one is to follow Heidegger's response to modern technology (as the opening of dif-ference). In this connection, I emphasized the pathway-character of Heidegger's thought in its capture by the self-dif-ferentiating and indeterminate matter (*Sache*) that allows itself to be reiterated and reinscribed in different and clashing ways. As I said, this movement radically resituates not only how we are to comprehend Heidegger but also how we are to evaluate the various "correspondences" of his thought as a whole in its various philosophical moments. Or, to cite van Buren again, "[t]here never was a single Heidegger, *mens auctoris*, topic, Heidegger's philosophy, since these are pluralized and differentiated into Heidegger's, *topoi*, and thoughtpaths."

Passing as we now are from Heidegger's "thinking" to Derrida's "text" such plurality and differentiation, along with the interpretative problems it gives rise to, is only intensified. Indeed, I agree with Marc Fromment-Meurice who remarks that "if there is indeed some sense in speaking of passing "from" Heidegger "to" Derrida, it is more difficult to assert if this passage would constitute a progression, and in what sense or

direction.”¹¹⁴ In a way, the Heidegger that I have presented anticipates Derrida’s since it points to the necessary dissemination of Heidegger’s thought, to its “tracing” or “inscription”. However, Derrida subjects Heidegger’s already differentiated text to a program that complicates matters considerably. Functioning according to an injunction to choose among several possibilities of an inheritance, Derrida’s writings re-inscribe Heidegger’s various thoughtpaths producing a text that radically puts into question and displaces the chronology and thetic ideology underwriting traditional intellectual history. Here the law that is tradition—the assumption of philosophy’s internal homogeneity, and of its history, as a continuum and record for the development of its idea, of its tensions and contradictions—is not enough to explain everything, and especially cannot bring back the passage to the comforting scheme of filiation and genealogy.¹¹⁵

Writing with Heidegger against Heidegger

How does it stand, then, between Derrida and Heidegger? As is well known, the peculiarity of this relation is evident in the way in which Derrida strategically inscribes his own text at the margin of Heidegger’s thought via a double or *clôtural* gesture which articulates the paradox that Derrida writes with Heidegger against Heidegger. Such a move radically puts into question and displaces the chronology and thetic ideology underwriting traditional intellectual history by articulating a complex interplay of proximities and distances. Indeed, as Arklady Plotnitsky has remarked, between Derrida’s

¹¹⁴ Marc Fromment-Meurice, *That is to Say: Heidegger’s Poetics*, trans. Jan Plug, (Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 204.

¹¹⁵ Even though it is rarely remarked upon this chapter revolves around the question of inheritance, the idea of what comes, is transmitted or destined and which is not reducible to receiving. In *Spectres of Marx* Derrida speaks of an injunction to choose on those who inherit. He writes: “An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction* to *reaffirm by choosing*. “*One must*” means *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause—natural or genetic...The injunction itself (it always says “choose and decide from among what you inherit”) can only be one by dividing itself, tearing itself apart, differing/deferring itself, by speaking at the same time several times—and in several voices.” See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, (London:Routledge, 1994) p. 16; hereafter cited as *SM*.

text and the text of Heidegger, there is, *together with a radical displacement*, a much closer, even infinitesimal proximity.¹¹⁶ *On the one hand*, the challenge which Derrida issues to Heidegger is, or intends to be, utterly devastating. Although involved in the same philosophical enterprise of questioning Western metaphysics, Derrida not only puts into question the very terms of Heidegger's conception of metaphysics as revolving around the repetition of the inaugural question of Being, but he also opens up an entirely different level of debate and practice of philosophizing in the process. Heidegger challenges metaphysics about its failure to question into and thereby think the Being of beings, for forgetting the ontological difference, for remaining riveted to beings, for not asking after the "meaning," "truth," or "history" of Being, and, most decisively, for not questioning into the essence of technology as the necessary prelude to the thinking of the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*). But Being, ontological difference, meaning, truth, essence, man, and appropriation, along with the concomitant privileging of questioning, authenticity, nearness, unity, oneness, property, origin, and primordality which so punctuates Heidegger's text are, for Derrida, so many indices that despite its *radicality*, and perhaps precisely because of its radicality, Heidegger's thinking remains in nostalgic complicity with the metaphysical system whose "end" he had proclaimed. Even granting the many complex and multiple readings of Heidegger's text that he has produced over the years, readings that necessarily are in a state of strategic incompleteness or suspension, Derrida's work points back to, builds upon, and translates a major reservation that can be simply put: having delimited the value of the present as the fundamental but nonetheless unthought presupposition of metaphysics Heidegger's project appears to be content with a re-evaluation or re-valorization of presence, with re-thinking it rather than radically displacing it, a move which only reinstates and affirms metaphysics in its instance of the *logos* and truth.¹¹⁷ In Derrida's words, "the Heideggerian problematic is the most

¹¹⁶ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 7 at p. 46.

¹¹⁷ Although in its widest scope Derrida's deconstruction of "the metaphysics of presence" is by now well known it is nonetheless useful to be precise about definitions. As Leonard Lawlor points out in his recent

“profound” and “powerful” defense of what I attempt to put into question under the rubric of the *thought of presence*”.¹¹⁸ Recognizing that for Heidegger, Being is not some ultimate signified but is “rooted in a system of languages and a historically determined “significance,””¹¹⁹ Derrida argues that Heidegger’s thinking of (the presence of) Being as the difference (between Being and beings and as *Unter-Schied*) is itself a metaphysical determination because, in Heidegger’s own account, such a system effaces difference.¹²⁰ “In order to exceed metaphysics it is necessary that a trace be inscribed within the text of metaphysics, a trace that continues to signal not in the direction of another presence, or another form of presence, but in the direction of an entirely other text”.¹²¹ Derrida’s point is that if difference cannot be named or thought—Being is nothing but the difference between Being and beings—then what has been forgotten in the history of metaphysics and the determination of Being as presence and of presence as present is not difference, which is always determined by the metaphysical order, but the *trace* of difference, which “is neither perceptible nor imperceptible.” It is neither an essence nor something phenomenolizable. It is nothing present nor absent but produces its own erasure. “If one recalls that difference (is) itself other than absence and presence, (is) (itself) trace, it is indeed the trace of the trace that has disappeared in the forgetting of the difference

book on Derrida and Husserl, presence, for Derrida, consists in (a) the distance of what is over and against (object and form, what is iterable), what we could call “objective presence,” (b) the proximity of the self to itself in its acts (subject and intuition or content), what we could call “subjective presence,” and then (c) the unification of these two species of presence, that is, presence and self-presence, in the present (in the “form of the living present,” which Derrida will explain mediates through the voice). “The metaphysics of presence” then, for Derrida, consists in the valorization of presence (as defined in this way which can account for both ancient and modern philosophy), that is, it consists in the validation of presence as a foundation. As Lawler correctly remarks it is important to point out that Derrida never contests the founding validity of presence; there can be no foundation without presence. Yet, for Derrida, there is a non foundation, or, what we could call, following what Derrida says in “Violence and Metaphysics,” the “non-Greek” non-foundation. The metaphysics of presence, however, has decided that the meaning of Being is presence either as subject or object or as their unity. See Leonard Lawler, *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 2.

¹¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 55; hereafter cited as *P*.

¹¹⁹ *OG.*, p. 23.

¹²⁰ See especially Heidegger’s “The Anaximander Fragment” in *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi, (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 13-59.

¹²¹ Jacques Derrida, “*Ousia and Gramme: Note on a Note from Being and Time*” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 29-67. p. 65.

between Being and beings”¹²². The ontico-ontological difference is not originary but is derivative of the trace of *différance*. The notions of trace and *différance* belong to a complex of differentiation, differing, deferring, and so on, that compromise all essences and idealities. Derrida exposes an aporia in Heidegger’s claim that the ontological difference is not thinkable as such. The claim that the difference cannot appear is contradicted by Heidegger’s naming the “ontico-ontological difference.” This difference must be derivative of something “older” and more “originary,” something that erases itself in the metaphysical text—the trace. Following the trace of this trace Derrida’s radicalization of Heidegger’s insights leads to the demonstration that the “source” of all Being beyond the horizon of Being is a generalized, or rather, general, text or writing, whose essential nontruth and nonpresence is the fundamentally undecidable condition of possibility and impossibility of presence and thereby of the meaning, essence, and truth as thought by Heidegger at the “end” of metaphysics. The “source” of Being and beingness is, for Derrida, the system or chain beyond Being of the various undecidables—*différance*, trace, iteration, inscription, gramme, *grapheme*, etc.—that will sufficiently remark Heidegger’s *Seinsfrage* in a way that will take it into account, will re-count it and will integrate into an economy of which it would be an “intrametaphysical effect”. With the introduction of the general text Derrida elaborates a discourse that, although it repeats the question of Being it reinscribes it and thus remains altogether extraneous to this still philosophical question.

On the other hand, although Derrida has never stopped insisting upon the distance “in relation to the Heideggerian problematics” that he has marked in all the essays he has published, a distance that is marked both in content and form, so that in reading only one of these texts we can see that “it does not *look* like a text with “Heideggerian filiation,”¹²³ readers of both Heidegger and Derrida will not be able to avoid recognizing the striking structural similarities between writing and Being, between text and Being.

¹²² Ibid., p. 65-66.

¹²³ *P.*, p. 71.

and between the differential dynamics that articulate their respective conceptions of difference. Indeed, as the above suggests, and as Rodolphe Gasché remarks, “Derrida has made it clear that the word “text” can be substituted for the word “Being”. “Text” is a translation (without translation) of “Being”¹²⁴ Through this translation the legitimacy or even necessity of Heidegger’s “uncircumventable meditation” is not denied nor is the passage through the question of Being dismissed. On the contrary, Derrida has claimed it to be indispensable to place oneself within the opening of Heidegger’s questions and that “from the moment one is having it out with [*s’explique avec*] Heidegger in a critical or deconstructive fashion, must one not continue to recognize a certain necessity of his thinking, its character, which is inaugural in so many respects, and especially what remains to come for us in its deciphering.”¹²⁵ By intervening in the opening of Heidegger’s text and remarking its idiom Derrida maintains the momentum of Heidegger’s delimitation of metaphysics producing a supplement that beckons towards something new, something other. In this sense, I agree with Gasché when he discusses an argument of John Caputo, according to whom Derrida produces “an altered reading of Heidegger which shows that the dissemination and delimitation of the thinking of Being has already taken place in Heidegger’s text.” As Gasché says, Caputo does not mean to say that Derrida has reinterpreted Heidegger’s text in a more fundamental manner, showing that there was always more to him than previously believed, or that Derrida has developed his own thought by couching it in Heidegger’s language. Rather, what he suggests is that in drawing on Heideggerian resources to delimit the question of Being, Heidegger and Derrida as specific philosophical voices, figures, or authorities, dissolve and can be no longer held apart.¹²⁶ In this connection, Derrida’s deconstructive

¹²⁴ Rodolphe Gasché, “Joining the Text” in *Of Minimal Things: Studies on the Notion of Relation*, (Stanford, Calif.:Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 221-241. p. 241.

¹²⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Heidegger: The Philosopher’s Hell” trans, Peggy Kamuf in *Points...Interviews 1974-1994*, trans. P. Kamuf et al. ed. Elizabeth Weber, (Stanford, Calif.:Stanford University Press, 1995) pp. 181-190. p. 183.

¹²⁶ Rodolphe Gasché, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*. (Cambridge, Mass.:Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 79.

reinscription of Heidegger's text treats it in such a way as to release its critical energies. Acknowledging its fecundity and recognizing that Heidegger's thinking remains multiple, enigmatic, provocative, and "still to come," Derrida's "exorbitant" method, as he himself requires of method, performs an operation that produces a writerly graft (as we shall see, actually a machinic parasite) which attaches itself to the Heideggerian *path* and not simply to one of its scholastic effects. Releasing it from itself and from its reduction to a self-evident commonplace, Derrida writes in continuation and extension of Heidegger's work translating and reworking the critique of presence as it makes its way even into Heidegger himself, thereby keeping his thought-paths and way-traces *unterwegs*, en route, differentiated, on the way beyond the metaphysical presuppositions and desire for presence even as that requires a double signing, countersignature or contract without exchange that makes of Heidegger's text a singularity and which gives it its noncalculable future.¹²⁷

The "switch point"

If in reinscribing Heidegger's (already differentiated) thought it is obvious that the Derridean text aggressively eludes the kind of theoretical referentiality to precursors typical of many other philosophical critiques, and if Heidegger and Derrida as specific philosophical voices can no longer be held apart, how, then, is one to speak, or rather write, of the relationship between Heidegger and Derrida, a relationship that absorbs several of Derrida's "own" books and many articles and, in a certain sense, all of his work? The problems posed would be unsurmountable even if one could speak of their relationship as established or establishable, rather than as mobile, and at points, undecidable, which is in fact the case and which makes one think of this passage or

¹²⁷ "There is as it were a dual of singularities, a dual of writing and reading, in the course of which a countersignature comes both to confirm, repeat and respect the signature of the other, of the "original" work, and to *lead it off* elsewhere, so running the risk of *betraying* it, having to betray it in a certain way so as to respect it, through the invention of another signature just as singular." See "This Strange Institution Called Literature: An Interview with Jacques Derrida" in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge. (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 33-75. p. 69.

relationship as what Derrida in his 1980 text *The Post Card* terms “correspondence” or “the postal system”—an immense and interminable network or open matrix of telecommunications comprised of transmissions, relays, delays, dispatches, deferrals, exchanges, and translations that bring the Derridean text into conjunction with Heidegger’s thinking of Being even as “by means of a switching point” this thinking is subjected to various re-inscriptions that re-route it and send it elsewhere.

Apropos *The Post Card* one could hardly find a more suitable description for what is involved here since using the post allows one to make points amidst the impossibility of making points, maintaining a fixed thesis, basis of comparison, or, more generally, proceeding along the lines of positional (oppositional and juxtapositional) logic. The “logic” of the postal would displace the logic of the position without substituting itself for this logic, and above all without being opposed to it; rather, it opens another relation, a relation without relation, or without a basis of comparison. To say it again, the *thetic* (from the Greek for “to place,” which is *ponere/positum* in Latin), representing a pose or a position, is a function of the postal that the Derridean text deconstructs. The thesis thus suspended, one has a glimpse of what concerns all posts and correspondences, and, in the particular case that concerns us here, the relationship between Heidegger and Derrida where this turns on the question of technology. Indeed, what for a moment will be called the postal “analogy” is in fact apposite with regard to what is at issue in this study since part of Derrida’s interest in talking at length about the postal network is that through it the at once “infinitesimal and decisive *différance*” between his “own” text and Heidegger’s is (re)marked and in such a way that it becomes apparent that this difference involves and revolves around the question of *techne* and technology.

The problematic nature of Derrida’s *Post Card*, like that of any text, exists in conjunction with other texts, which may also be described as post cards. “A post card,” Derrida explains, “is never but a piece of a letter, a letter that puts itself, at the moment of

pick up, *into pieces*.”¹²⁸ The letter that deconstructs itself is part of the postal systems technology. So if we are to pick up on what is involved in the *différance* just mentioned, it is fitting we do so through its pieces. In this regard, in this chapter I shall assemble several fragments from *The Post Card* and related texts which will allow me to broach the non-positional, that is, *a-thetic*, structure of the Heidegger-Derrida relation with a view to marking the connection or site of passage at which it converges toward its most simple, most economical, and most formalizable statement concerning what is at stake here. As we shall see, in these texts Derrida lets the postcard, the post, and the card become the (no longer metaphorical) organizing figures for a discussion and deconstruction of the tele-techno-media apparatus of inscription and transmission not only as these bear upon the assumptions at work in any delivery system, but also as they affect the Heideggerian text in one of its central and most decisive aspects—his thinking of the destiny or sending of Being and its technological end.

Proceeding from the *postes*

Without further ado let me turn then to the *The Post Card*. As is well known, in this text or, to be more specific, in “Envois” which is the first of four parts that comprise the text issued under this title in its English translation, the deconstruction of the ontological and logocentric system of metaphysics along with the concomitant turn towards the general textual economics of “writing”, *différance*, the trace, iteration, etc., elaborated by Derrida in the now “classic” texts of the period 1967-72 is re-invented and carried over into a performance—that is, the writing and sending of letters—wherein the closure of the problem or question of *destination* is marked. Opening the text Derrida suggests we might want to read this text as “the preface to a book I have not yet written”.¹²⁹ “Envois” is, then, an advance on a book that has not yet arrived, which is to-come (*advient*). Its domains of address include that of the constitution and structure of the sender/receiver,

¹²⁸ *PC.*, p. 67.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

emitter/transmitter/ receptor system, and thus of the dispatch or send-off and the message (in all its forms and in all of its substances—linguistic or not, semiotic or not), distribution, transmission and delivery in all its forms, the operations of technology in general and the relaying of communications in particular. As Derrida's tells us "It would have treated that which proceeds from the *postes*, *postes* of every genre...[referring] to a history and a technology of the *courrier*, to some general theory of the *envoi* and of everything which by means of some telecommunication allegedly *destines* itself."¹³⁰

According to Derrida's conceit, "Envois" consists of the "remains of a recently destroyed correspondence" which elaborates a whole series of paradoxes that both construct and deconstruct the postal as a concept. Neither the sender nor the addressee remain singular identities. In the case of the sender there are frequent allusions to this effect, to the possibility for instance that the letters are addressed by their author to him- or herself as addressee. Assuming that there is a separate addressee, a more obvious structural paradox occurs. The letters, written on the back of postcards, articulate the event of the separation of the correspondents from each other and written *against* the event of their coming together, for such an event would negate the functioning of the letter. Yet they act as a set of promises, entreaties and arrangements concerning the togetherness that they also ward off. These mechanisms are extremely complex and I cannot in the space of this chapter explore them in the detail they demand. That said, the purpose of my raising them is to underscore what has already been said with regard to the *différance* between Heidegger and Derrida. As I now want to show, this *différance* concerns Derrida's own reception of Heidegger's texts. The "correspondence" between Heidegger and Derrida becomes problematic as both the question of a script's sending and its placement and/or misplacement becomes an issue.

As Derrida's text demonstrates, the placing of posts, the possible and necessary marking of points in a system of relay or transmission, is the condition of the possibility

¹³⁰ Ibid.

of the postal, of any system of addressing or sending. At the same time, however, since the post marks a halt that is also a destination, it succumbs to the structural necessity of non-arrival or “*adestination*,” that is, to misroutings, tonal shifts, elliptical retreats of meaning, cancellation, abrasion and so on. Hence sender and addressee are but the effects of such erratic turnings and routings, effects of the inclinations or directions established through the process of a messages transmission. Said otherwise, there are no pre-existing, phenomenologically intact subjects located at either end of the postal network, no solitary agents that approach and use the post as a reliable means for establishing a communion of minds. And even if such mental units existed, they could not communicate themselves or a piece of their mind to a predestined addressee, not only because such a predestination from same to same effectively contradicts the transcendence of difference that the postal-communicative act is said to accomplish, but also, and more fundamentally, because the very act of writing, signing, communicating a message can take place only under the necessary condition of going astray. As soon as the arrival or thereness of the letter is asserted there is the undecidability, differing or deferring of *différance*.

Derrida’s text was galvanised by a chance encounter with a post card on sale at the Bodleian Library. This card reproduces a thirteenth century engraving from a fortune telling book by Matthew Paris in which, much to Derrida’s delight, Plato stands behind a seated Socrates (apparently) dictating what he shall write. Such an “old cartoon of deconstruction” as one commentator puts it¹³¹ vividly illustrates Derrida’s notion that knowledge constantly creates its own presumed origins. The importance of this scene is that it de-monstrates with one stroke, as it were, the truth of tradition: “everything in our bildopedic culture, in our politics of the encyclopaedic, in our telecommunications of all genres, in our telematicometaphysical archives, in our library...everything is constructed on the protocolary charter of an axiom, that could be demonstrated, displayed on a large *carte*, a post card of course, since it is so simple, elementary, a brief, fearful

¹³¹ Richard Dienst, “Sending Postcards in TV Land” in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*, ed. Peter Brunette and David Wills, (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 296- 307. p. 301.

stereotyping.”¹³² The axiom is, of course, that Socrates comes before Plato, that the order between them is the irreversible sequence of heritage. Derrida’s card however, its image like the idea it marks, challenges this axiom, and along with it the usual concepts of transmission—concepts that are an aspect of the post card itself quite apart from its image. For any post card is part of a apparatus or technics for carrying and delivering meaning. We take for granted this institution taking “what everybody believes they understand under this heading” simply as a service, a technology extending in its history from the ancient runners of Greek or Oriental antiquity to the state monopolies using aeroplanes, the telex, the telegram, e-mail, the different kinds of mailmen and delivery etc.

As Derrida asserts, the entire history of the postal *techne* rivets “destination” to identity such that identity in all its aspects functions as a “postal principle”. On this view the very post and the postal are emblematic of the very idea of “logocentrism” (a synonym for the “postal era”) and of the metaphysics of presence. Indeed, at one point all of culture is cast by Derrida as an immense number of postal transmissions each stamped by authorization and tradition, each cultural artefact/card taking a “position” by imposing itself, even superimposing itself, on the others.¹³³ By subscribing to the notion of destination, subsuming that of the message with the guarantee of presence illustrated by the card or letter, one simply perpetuates the postal principle as what Derrida refers to as “the great epoch (who’s technology is marked by paper, pen, the envelope, the individual subject, addressee etc.) and which stretches from Socrates... to Heidegger.”¹³⁴ But what, we might ask, *takes place* or *happens* to this great epoch of the post in the shift beyond it, to which a radical change in communications technology makes a decisive contribution (such as for example the shift from the book to the internet)? Derrida’s reinscription of Heidegger’s text attaches specifically to this question.

¹³² *PC.*, p. 20.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 100-101.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

Deconstructing the *Geschick* of Being

Derrida's reinscription of Heidegger is both theoretically set out in his 1980 paper "Envoi," which has been translated into English as "Sendings: On Representation,"¹³⁵ and performatively practised in the "Envois" to *The Post Card*. At the time of writing—the letter which concerns us here is dated 6 September 1977—what is being simultaneously articulated and subverted is Heidegger's "Being-historical" claims regarding the unfolding of metaphysics, its technological completion, along with the thinking of the withdrawal or "epochality" of Being. In order to see the significance of Derrida's move let me briefly sketch what is involved as this is played out in Heidegger's text.

According to Heidegger, throughout the course of our Western thinking Being has been granted in different ways, the different modes in which Being has been granted reflect themselves in the changes which have taken place in the various metaphysical concepts of Being. The unfolding of the fullness which shows itself in these changes manifests at first sight as a history of Being. This is not what we ordinarily think of as history, though it may look like it. Heidegger writes: "Being does not have a history the way in which a city or a people have their history. What is history-like in the history of Being is obviously determined by the way in which Being takes place and by this alone...What is historical in the history of Being is determined by what is sent forth in destining, not by an indeterminately thought up occurrence."¹³⁶ Always attentive to the etymology of words, Heidegger understands history (*Geschichte*) and destiny (*Geschick*) in the verbal sense of sending (*schicken*). Being for Heidegger is not outside time and history determining what it means to be for beings and humans, but Being is the dispensing or sending of history itself. Understood in this way, one may say that Being which is granted is that which is sent, and which (as sent), remains in each one of its

¹³⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Sendings: On Representation," trans. Mary A. Caws, in *Social Research* 49, no. 2 (1982), pp. 294-326; hereafter cited as *SOR*.

¹³⁶ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 8-9; hereafter cited as *OTB*.

modifications which we find in history. The history of Being is therefore more properly thought as the sending of Being. As sent, Being offers itself to us in the presencing of beings, but it does not, over and above this presencing, show itself as separate from beings. Being in its disclosure of beings withdraws or holds itself back. Heidegger writes, “the history of Being is the *Geschick* of Being that offers itself to us in the withdrawal of its essence.”¹³⁷ How can we understand this withdrawing or holding back of Being showing itself in the presencing or dispensing of beings? Heidegger attempts to connect the withdrawal of Being in its presencing of beings and the history of Being, for it is precisely the withholding that allows for the sending of beings and the sending of history. This notion of simultaneous sending and holding back, allows Heidegger to articulate sending around the various “epochs” of Being. Heidegger writes:

To hold back is, in Greek, *epoche*. Hence we speak of the epochs of the destiny of Being. Epoch does not mean here a span of time in occurrence, but rather the fundamental characteristic of sending, the actual holding-back of itself in favour of the discernibility of the gift, that is, of Being with regard to the grounding of beings.¹³⁸

Thus, for Heidegger, each historical epoch, in which beings come to presence differently according to the sending of Being, has the dispensation of beings because of the withholding of Being.

Having offered this all too brief sketch of Heidegger’s thinking let me now turn back to Derrida. His intervention into Heidegger’s text opens up two linked questions that intend to display a certain “foreclosure” of thinking at work in Heidegger’s thinking of epocality. To begin with there is the question that leads through the epochal schema itself and the way it preserves traces of what Derrida calls, a little provocatively, the narrative

¹³⁷ Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly, (Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 61.

¹³⁸ *OTB.*, p. 9.

order. In relation to this, there is the question of the way epochality displays what can be called Heidegger's "protectionist" gesture, which Derrida takes to be a rigorous desire to avoid contamination. I shall come to the latter question below. At this point I want to take up the former.

By edging into the Heideggerian sense of the terms *Geschichte-Geschick-Schicken* (history, destiny, sending) Derrida pushes us into another reading of Heidegger by suggesting that Heidegger's thinking, along with his parcelling out of Being into various epochs presupposes the being-together or grouped indivisibility of an original *envoi* of Being, an assemblage which, although it does not have the unity of a totality or system and is not teleologically ordered, preserves traces of such a scheme insofar as it is still part of the same delivery system and thus can be deciphered and spoken of (For Derrida Heidegger's is an apocalyptic utterance spoken with "eschatological eloquence").¹³⁹ Whence, for Derrida, Heidegger's history of Being belongs to the problematic of destination in general and therefore within the framework of the postal system. As Derrida sees it "To coordinate the different epochs, halts, determinations, in a word the

¹³⁹ Everything turns here on what Derrida calls "the unity of a destination, or rather of a 'destinality' of Being," in which an eschatological unity is at work, one that is not only apocalyptic in tone but that is to be distinguished from teleology. As John Caputo has made clear in a close study of what is involved here, for Heidegger an original sending of Being is driven into the extremities of oblivion through a series of epochal configurations which, by a logic of repetition, occasion a new dispatch, a new beginning that would come again at the end. Eschato-logy means that the beginning overtakes the end, that everything withheld and hidden in the interval between the beginning (*arche*) and the end (*eschaton*) is gathered together and pushes the end beyond itself, outdistances and outstrips it (*überholt*) and precipitates the transition to a new beginning. This gathering-together (*logos, legein*) of the whole history of Being in the end—whereby the *eschaton* repeats the *arche*—is the eschatology of Being. Understood in this way eschato-logy is essentially different from teleo-logy. Tele-logy is a rule governed process in which there is a linear development from the beginning to the end, a progressive dynamic in which the accumulated potencies of the Western tradition reach their fulfillment and put an end to the beginning. In eschatology by contrast the beginning overtakes the end and puts an end to the end; in teleology, the end fulfills the beginning and puts an end to the beginning. The very circularity of eschatology which is the code of repetition explains Heidegger's claim that *das Gestell* and *Ereignis*—danger and saving—converge. Such circularity is essentially hermeneutical, it demands the ability to read traces retrace the withheld and long forgotten origin (Cf. *D*, p. 24-25), to understand how the first beginning communicates what is coming and hence to read the "first flash of *Ereignis*" in the dangerous unfolding of technology as the transition to a new beginning. Heideggerian thinking knows how to decipher; it knows the danger is the saving spelt backwards. For Derrida such "eschatological eloquence" does not make thinking any less metaphysical, on the contrary it betrays an apocalypticism—talk about the *end* of this and the end of that—that follows the logic of the postal principle. See Chapter 6 of John D. Caputo's *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 153-186.

entire history of Being with a destination of Being is perhaps the most outlandish postal lure.”¹⁴⁰

What is problematic for Derrida is the *Ge-* of *Geschick* and its gathering *value*, by which in destination Being destines *itself* were the unified subject of destination. Derrida’s move here is a repetition of what he has repeatedly marked since his earliest encounter with Heidegger and attaches to the question of the latter’s complicity with the metaphysics of presence. More specifically, it attaches to what Derrida considers to be the “subtle, hidden, stubborn privilege” in Heidegger’s thought of the values of gathering (*Versammlung*), nearness, togetherness, properness (propriety, propiety, appropriation, the entire family of *Eigenlichkeit*, *Eigen*, *Ereignis*) where these work against the threat of dispersion. What is at issue here about Heidegger’s fundamental commitment to presence is reiterated and brought out very well by Christopher Fynsk who writes,

One has to work terribly hard in each case to bring out the dispersal, the dispersion, or the dissemination...[I]n each case my sense is that one has to work against enormous resistance; and, in that sense, I would be more inclined to stress the kind of structural tendency in Heidegger towards reconstruction of the *same*. It is still one thing, in itself, still a certain oneness, or a certain privileged unity, which is reaffirmed from beginning to end.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ *PC.*, p. 66. It should of course be noted that as is typical of his undecidable reinscription of Heidegger’s text the “sending of Being” is not entirely for Derrida a postal concept. In this regard, Derrida has written “However we interpret them, and whatever credit we grant this thought or this discourse we should pause before this marker: the “destinal” significations (sending or sendoff, dispensation, destiny of Being, *Schickung*, *Schicksal*, *Gabe*, “*es gibt Sein*,” etc.) do not seem to belong to the *within* of onto-theological philosophemes any longer, without being “metaphors” or empirical or derived concepts either.” For these remarks and others which are pertinent to what is under discussion here see Jacques Derrida, “Sendoffs,” trans. Tom Pepper, in *Yale French Studies: Reading the Archive: On Texts and Institutions*, 77 (1990), pp. 7-43.

¹⁴¹ Christopher Fynsk, extract from *Discussion on Heidegger and Derrida in Research in Phenomenology*, vol. XVII, 1987, p. 114.

For Derrida, the value of gathering and the desire for the proper “occurs along the Heideggerian pathways by means of what we might call a magnetic attraction” such that the “continuous depth” at which it operates decides the general orientation of Heidegger’s thinking from beginning to end. In “The Ends of Man” where he gives what remains his most explicit and detailed reading on this point, Derrida asserts that this privilege touches almost every aspect of Heidegger’s text such that “the distinction between given periods of Heidegger’s thought, between the texts before and after the so called *Kehre*, has less pertinence than ever.”¹⁴² Heidegger’s restoration of essence (*Wesen*) with respect to its metaphysical restriction is also the restoration of a dignity and a proximity—the corresponding dignity of Being and man, the proximity of Being and man: “Whence, in Heidegger’s discourse, the dominance of an entire metaphysics of proximity, of simple and immediate presence, a metaphysics associating the proximity of Being [to man] with the values of neighbouring, shelter, house, service, guard, voice, and listening.”¹⁴³

To bolster his reading that this tendency for proximity and “gathering” determines Heidegger’s thinking of the epochality of Being, Derrida turns to “The Age of the World Picture” and to Heidegger’s discussion of the vast difference between the original Greek reception of Being understood as translating *Anwesenheit* or presence, and the modern technological one in which representationality (*Vorgestelltheit*) comes to dominance as the fulfilment of metaphysics and as the oblivion of Being. For Derrida, these terms translate each other and dictate the law of Heidegger’s thinking which “does no more than to redouble and recognise itself in the historical text it claims to decipher”. Thus Derrida is led to write,

In order for the epoch of representation to have its sense and its unity as an epoch, it must belong to the grouping (*rassemblement*) of a more original (*originnaire*) and more

¹⁴² Jacques Derrida, “The Ends of Man” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 109-136. p.124; hereafter cited as *EM*.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

powerful *envoi*. And if there had not been the grouping of this *envoi*, the *Geschick* of Being, if this *Geschick* had not announced itself from the start as the *Anwesenheit* of Being, no interpretation of the epoch of representation would come to order it in the unity of a history of metaphysics...It is in basing itself on this grouped indivisibility of the *envoi* that Heidegger's reading can single out (*détacher*) epochs, including the most powerful, the longest and also the most dangerous of all, the epoch of representation in modern times.¹⁴⁴

Here is the most palpable articulation that for Derrida Heidegger's thinking remains held back within metaphysics. Taking his departure from the destiny and the destination of Being Derrida wonders whether a "postal" version of Heideggerian *Geschick* is one that is dependent on a particular historical location, on an *epoche*, a particular historical configuration and particular localisation, sufficiently determining an identity. What, Derrida asks, if this being-together is always already divided, discontinuous, unable to gather itself and unable to send to a particular destination, unable to secure *the* history of Being? By pointing to an idea of sending which did not as yet gather itself to itself and which would not be a pathway joining pre-existing point of origin and point of arrival but where the actual pathway would determine such points, Derrida opens up the idea of a network which avoids, as he puts it, "submerging all the differences, mutations, scissions, structures of postal regimes into one central post office."¹⁴⁵ In doing so he transposes Heidegger's thinking of the destiny of Being, its withdrawal and appropriation (*Ereignis*), by inscribing it into a discourse that brings it into relation with the post understood in the usual or strict sense—"what everyone believes they understand under this heading"—before submitting it to a more general economy. However, "Would this satisfy Martin?" Permit me to quote at length Derrida's answer:

¹⁴⁴ *SOR.*, p. 321-322.

¹⁴⁵ *PC.*, p. 66.

Yes and No. No, because he doubtless would see in the postal determination a premature (?) imposition of *tekhne* and therefore of metaphysics (he would accuse me, you can see it from here, of constructing a metaphysics of the posts or postality); and above all an imposition of the *position* precisely, of determining the *envoi* of Being as position, posture, thesis or theme (*Setzung, thesis*, etc.), a gesture that he alleges *to situate*, as well as technology, within the history of metaphysics and within which would be given to think a dissimulation and retreat [*retrait*] of Being in its *envoi*. This is where things are most difficult: because the very idea of the retreat (proper to destination), the idea of the halt, and the idea of the epoch in which Being holds itself back, suspends, withdraws, etc., all these ideas are immediately homogenous with postal discourse. To post is to send by “counting” with a halt, a delay, the place of the mailman, the possibility of going astray and of forgetting (not of repression which is a moment of keeping, but of forgetting). The *epoche* and the *Ansichhalten* which essentially scan or set the beat of the “destiny” of Being, or its “appropriation” (*Ereignis*), is the place of the postal, this is where it comes to be and that it takes place (I would say *ereignet*), that it gives place and also lets come to be. This is serious because it upsets perhaps Heidegger’s still “derivative” schema (perhaps), upsets by giving one to think that technology, the position, let us say even metaphysics do not overtake, do not come to determine and to dissimulate an “*envoi*” of Being (which would not yet be postal), but would belong to the “first” *envoi*—which obviously is never “first” in any order whatsoever, for example in a logical or chronological order, nor even the order of *logos* (this is why one cannot replace, except for laughs, the formula “in the beginning was the logos” by “in the beginning was the post”).¹⁴⁶

Now, I have quoted at length here because this extraordinary passage provides the nexus for almost all that is of concern for us in this chapter. Indeed, as Derrida tells us, “[t]his is

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

very difficult but *everything is played out here*.”¹⁴⁷ Derrida’s reading of Heidegger’s text could not, it seems, be more decisive since it appears, all at once so to speak, to oversee the entire topology of what, on occasion, he refers to as Heidegger’s “uncircumventable meditation,” taking into account both the epochal history of metaphysics in its technological outcome as well as the non metaphysical thought of *Ereignis*. What is central is the transposition of Heidegger’s thinking into an economy that would be at once both more general and “originary” than the restricted economics of Being, a by now familiar move which, crossing Heidegger’s text at several decisive points, submits it to the deconstructive graphics of the general text. This means that, for Derrida, *Ereignis* occupies a place in Heidegger which is occupied in Derrida’s own work by the quasi-transcendental chain of writing, *différance*, trace, etc., which is the matrix within which all sendings, transfers, correspondences and communications take place. And the point is that this central processing unit has (always already) been decentered and transformed into a network or relay that can no longer secure the unity of the history of Being. To be more specific, Derrida submits Heidegger’s thinking of the sending of Being to the thought of an “*envoi* in general.” As Derrida makes clear, this does not mean making of the post a “simple metaphor,” restrictive trope, or image of Being (thereby representing the sending of Being according to a thematic that would put it in its place so to speak). Rather, in marking his departure from Heidegger’s text Derrida thinks on the basis of it, on what it presupposes: “as the site of all transferences and all correspondences,” the post is “always already there,” it is “the “proper” possibility of every possible rhetoric.”¹⁴⁸ “By no longer treating the posts as a metaphor of the *envoi* of Being, one can account for what

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 64. My emphasis.

¹⁴⁸ “If I take my “departure” from the destination and the destiny or destining of Being (*Das Schicken im Geschick des Seins*), no one can dream of then *forbidding me to speak* of the “post,” except on the condition of making this word the element of an image, of a figure, of a trope, a post card of Being in some way. But to do it, I mean to accuse me, to forbid me, etc., one would have to be naively certain of knowing what a post card or the post is. If, on the contrary (but this is not simply the contrary), I think the postal and the post card on the basis of the destinal of Being, as I think the house (of Being) on the basis of Being, of language, and not the inverse, etc., then the post is no longer a simple metaphor, and is even as the site of all transferences and all correspondences, the “proper” possibility of every possible rhetoric.” *PC.*, p. 65.

essentially and decisively occurs, everywhere, and including language, thought, science, and everything that conditions them, when the postal structure shifts, *Satz* if you will, and posits or posts itself otherwise.”¹⁴⁹

The *envoi* that Derrida wishes to trace is, as it were, beyond Being, beyond its epochal history, because it does not gather itself together in its essence or it gathers itself only in dividing itself, in differentiating itself a specification that gives one “the possibility of assimilating none of the differences, the (technical, eco-political, phantasmatic, etc.) differentiation of the telecommunicative powers.”¹⁵⁰ The significance of what is said here becomes apparent when we realise that the paradox that an idea of sending in fact depends upon is the simple fact that a letter cannot arrive. Not just the possibility that it may not arrive, that it may be diverted, delayed, or irrevocably lost—which would suggest that those occurrences were accidents that befell the operation or threatened it from the outside—but the structural necessity of non arrival built into the system of address: “Even in arriving (always to some “subject”), the letter takes itself away *from the arrival at arrival*. It arrives elsewhere always several times”¹⁵¹ What is insisted upon here is that the event of addressing and sending can *in no way* guarantee arrival. The event of sending is permanently divided in its constitution. All this is elaborated in detail by Derrida in his debate with Lacan, who, in analysing “The Purloined Letter” concluded that a letter always arrives at its destination. But in *The Post Card* it becomes clear that the idea of spacing that Derrida thus introduces into the system of communication is all that is required to institute the necessity of delay, and hence the postal. Much hinges here on Derrida’s use of the notion of “telecommunication”.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.123.

Writing and telecommunication

Now what can this word signify in the context of Derrida's work? Not only does it appear on the inscribed, inverse side of *The Post Card*, but it occupies a crucial position in "Signature Event Context" the essay that closes *Margins of Philosophy*. Moreover, the term appears in many of Derrida's latest texts suggesting a continuity of interest. The most immediate point of reference is of course technological. That is, "telecommunication" refers us to technics, to tele-technologies, and to the (electronic)media in all its contemporary guises as this has come to pervade our world. Every theorist or philosopher who has addressed the role of these technologies in our contemporary situation, representing every shade of thought from Walter Ong to Hans Ezenberger, from Marshall McLuhan to Jean Baudrillard, from Michel Foucault to Paul Virilio and Bernhard Stiegler, agrees that such technologies are bringing about a radical social, political, economic and cultural transformation whose imperatives in their inherent complexity can no longer be ignored. In this regard Derrida is not exceptional. Anticipating a more detailed discussion in Chapter 3, let me say that Derrida's work must be interpreted as both a response to this transformation and as an attempt to think through the determining effect of the new technologies on the inter-text of those areas—philosophical and non philosophical—with which he continues to be engaged. In an interview given in 1996, for example, Derrida wonders how philosopher's might have responded to the computer. He writes,

I am always wondering what would have happened to Plato, Descartes, Hegel, Nietzsche, and even Heidegger (who, basically, knew the computer without knowing it) if they had encountered this "thing," not only as an available instrument but as a theme of reflection. From Pascal, Descartes, Leibniz to Heidegger, passing by way of Hegel, philosophers have, to be sure, meditated on machines for calculating, thinking, translation, on formalisation in general, etc. But how would they have interpreted a culture that tends in

this way to be dominated, in its very everydayness, throughout the universe, by such technical devices for inscription and archiving? Because everything is at stake, from the relations of thought to the “image,” to language, the idea, archiving, the simulacrum, representation. How would Plato have had to write what is called the “myth of the cave” in order to take account of these transformations?¹⁵²

Derrida’s comments here belong in a context which continues a project he has been involved with since his earliest writings, one that relates the question of the new technologies to that of the closure of Western metaphysics. As is well known, in these early texts, and particularly in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida develops a powerful reading of the tradition indicating the ways “writing” is not merely an artificial or technical appendage of language distinct from and devalued with respect to the spoken word, an instrument for human use, but is instead a perpetual production of differential marks that is the irreducible condition that articulates the difference in language between the materialization of each phoneme or letter and the “acoustic sound” which they presuppose in order to be recognized as such, whatever the form of their materialization. It immediately turns out of course that language is not the only textual system nor even the primary one: writing overwhelms language and is seen to be the condition of the possibility of a general economy within and between all complex systems, an economy which is elaborated under the heading *l’écriture*, or, more properly, arche-writing, a catachretic term which articulates the infrastructural chain of quasi-transcendental “concepts” *différance*, trace, pharmakon, *gramme*, *grapheme*, etc., that are analysed separately and in great detail by Derrida following the discovery of the problematics of writing.

For Derrida, the issue of the primacy of writing was not a revelation. However, the reason as to why it was only recently “in the process of making itself known *as such* and

¹⁵² “Word Processing: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” in *Oxford Literary Review*, vol 21, 2000, pp. 3-17, p. 15.

after the fact” was. In this connection, Derrida has returned repeatedly to the question of how writing and the “book” are today going through a period of general mutation as a result of contemporary transformations in communications technology. As Derrida says in an interview collected in *Positions, Of Grammatology* can be read as “an inquiry into the current upheavals in the forms of communication, the new structures emerging in all the formal practices, and also in the domains of the archive and the treatment of information, that massively and systematically reduce the role of speech, of phonetic writing and the book.”¹⁵³

This is not say, however, that Derrida means to make a positive, sociological or even philosophical statement regarding the changes now taking place: “Perhaps it is that too” Derrida says, but “very secondarily”. In the first instance the accelerating rate and new rhythms of information and communication characteristic of the contemporary world constitute a “practical deconstruction” of the traditional assumptions at work in our understanding of mediation in general; they are part of an inventory of signs that solicit a new undertaking that exceeds the purview of the philosophical or theoretical gaze as it is traditionally instituted.

Following upon developments in telecommunication and control systems which had developed so rapidly during and following the last war, one of the possible signs Derrida identified was the emergent field of cybernetics. Like the biological “*pro-gram*” the most “elementary processes of information within the living cell,” the cybernetic program is also understood in terms of the general field of writing. Derrida asserts that cybernetics is one of the most recent, and most profound manifestations of a development which articulates a delimitation of “logocentrism” (the other factors being phonography, anthropology, linguistics, and the history of writing). As such, the “nonfortuitous conjunction of cybernetics and the “human sciences” of writing” represents a critical moment in the metaphysical history of the West. For Derrida, cybernetics is the drastic

¹⁵³ *P.*, p. 13.

instance of information production and retrieval that is no longer the “written” translation of a language, the transporting of a signified that could be spoken in its integrity: rather, cybernetics is an extreme demonstration that all writing, in order to be what is, must not only be able to function in the radical absence of every empirically determined scripter who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it, but also, by the same token, it must carry the force of breaking with its context, with that set of presences which organise it.

In this connection, following the grammatological program set out by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, arche-writing and inscription can be seen as essentially technical, technological, or even teletheoretical notions at root—albeit in a transformed sense. Writing is a machine Derrida suggests, or machinic function. But instead of faithfully capturing spoken language, representing it and preserving it for later use, the machine remains a signal of separation, of severance, of emancipation. It operates like a power of serial and prosthetic substitution in every mark or utterance, with or without the speaker. As Derrida says in “Signature Event Context”:

To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and rewriting...For the written to be written, it must continue to “act” and be legible even if what is called the author no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, whether he is provisionally absent, or if he is dead, or if in general he does not support, with his absolutely current and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his meaning, of that very thing which seems to be written “in his name.”¹⁵⁴

The ideal of a perfectly functioning writing machine is the ideal of all communications theory: a perpetual-motion machine in which expression—the material sign itself—would

¹⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 307-330. p. 316-317; hereafter cited as *SEC*.

be self-sufficient, fully adequate to all its signifying values. But writing undermines this, or rather, is the condition for of both its possibility and impossibility. Whenever writing functions in such a way as to determine its own meanings, fix a representation of its own reality, or determine its own interpretations, it disrupts the restricted economies of meaning and broaches the general economics of writing, *différance*, trace, etc., that carries with it a force of breaking with its context, that is, the set of presences which organise its inscription. This force of breaking is not an accidental predicate, an empirical contingency. It is the very structure of the written, of its quasi-machine-like survival.

The implications of this are tremendous. With the appearance of the word “telecommunication” in “Signature Event Context” they come into view. As Richard Dienst points out, if writing is the movement of the text as it inscribes its signification, then “telecommunication” involves a movement of transmission, so that the writing machine also becomes a mobile broadcasting device.¹⁵⁵ The word spells itself out: The prefix “tele” makes plain something what was the case all along, that “communication” is something that is always *sent*, or emitted, or diffused, or circulated. The notion of “sending” allows us to imagine a certain temporal and spatial gap in the movement of reference. The force of rupture is due to the spacing which constitutes the written sign: the spacing which separates it from other elements of the internal contextual chain (the always open possibility of its citation and grafting), but also from all the forms of a present referent (past or to come in the modified form of the present past or to come) that is objective or subjective. The sign, in other words, communicates nothing but a machinic repetition, a kind of cutting which is not so much effected by the machine (even though the machine can in fact cut in its turn) as it is the condition of the production of a machine. The machine is cut as well as cutting with regard to an uncertain movement of reference. We can never be sure where it came from or where it is going. This spacing is

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 131 at p. 317.

not the simple negativity of a lack nor is it, as Derrida insists, the work of the negative in the service of meaning (which remains reducible in the *Aufhebung* of dialectics).

This theatre of the prosthesis, of the cut and the graft, is unthinkable outside a certain postal tele-technology, of its procedures of “routing” and of distribution, the paths of transmission. If the message involves transport or movement, if it can be diverted at any point or any number of identifiable material points throughout that movement, and if the fact of some material support, post or card, is the mark of that potential diversion as much as it might be the mark of some potential monumentality, then there can be no arguing for its indivisibility. The post or card becomes, therefore, the material mark of *différance* in the movement of the message, of the possibility of delay and deferral which exists at every point from the conception of departure to the confirmation of arrival and which in turn means some sort of *adestination*, hence the postal principle. The post is thus a beautiful demonstration of the *différance* engine of writing. A type of *postal différence* thus comes into effect within every conceivable event. For Derrida, there is not originally a sending from, because it is not single and nothing present precedes it; and it issues forth only in sending back; it issues forth only on the basis of the other, the other in itself without *itself*. In short: “[e]verything begins by referring back (*par le renvoi*), that is to say does not begin; and once this breaking open or this partitioning divides, from the very start, every *renvoi*, there is not a single *renvoi* but from then on a multiplicity of *renvois*, so many different traces referring back to other traces and to traces of others.”¹⁵⁶

Différance and the non-arrival of techne

Having said this let me now return to the main thread of this chapter. It is apparent that, for Derrida, if the post (technology, position, metaphysics) is announced at the first *envoi*, an *envoi* without identity or togetherness, then there is not simply as Heidegger

¹⁵⁶ *SOR.*, p. 324.

would have it “A” metaphysics, “A” history or destination of Being, nor even “AN” *envoi*. There is no one history or even general history (of Being) but only the *différential* matrix of “les postes et les envois” (the posts and dispatches), *envois* without destiny or destination. Indeed,

As soon as there is there is *différance* (and this does not wait language, especially human language, and the language of Being, only the mark and the divisible trait), and there is postal manoeuvring, relays, delay, anticipation, destination. telecommunicating network, the possibility, and therefore the fatal necessity of going astray, etc.¹⁵⁷

This movement, which articulates the complex interplay between Heidegger’s and Derrida’s texts, seems to Derrida to be “simultaneously very far from and very near to Heidegger’s”.¹⁵⁸ It is very near to the extent that the very idea of destination, of holding-back (delay), of going astray and forgetting are precisely what is at issue in the Heideggerian schema of the epochality of Being in its technological outcome. As Rapaport has noted, through Derrida’s writing Heidegger’s thinking is dictating the script as well as its own self-consciousness about the technology of its correspondence as well as the capacity for its own deconstruction of its own thought. Indeed, I only need quote again Derrida’s assumption that Heidegger “would doubtless see in the postal determination a premature (?) imposition of *techne* and therefore of metaphysics” to show that Derrida’s deconstructive reinscription of Heidegger is an intensive adherence to the “letter” of Heidegger’s thought that has already been displaced since such a version invokes the role of a form of technology, a communications technology, that Heidegger has delimited in advance. Consequently, and at the same time, the movement of Derrida’s text is remote from Heidegger because the script that he has sent is being diverted, re-routed to a new destination it can never reach. This is an “address” wherein filiation is at

¹⁵⁷ *PC.*, p. 66.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

once established and broken. It complements an understanding of Heideggerian thinking according to its own dynamic whereby its sending or delivery of Being (or genealogy, for Derrida) is reinscribed. To quote Rapaport:

only by appropriating or holding on to Heidegger can Derrida demolish the historicity of this hold. But for this to occur, the addressee of Derrida's address must not only be held but held back, subjected to a withdrawal or concealment, so that he can be inscribed into his own problematic of how Being is withdrawn and disclosed at the same time. Given the "holding back" which occurs as Derrida lays "hold" of Heidegger, it is certain that the letter, dispatch, or postcard "sent" to Heidegger will miss its address, and hence Heidegger's philosophy, in being missed, will fail to reach its "destiny," which is the philosophical afterlife it lays claim to in deconstruction.¹⁵⁹

As Rapaport suggests, this is the event of an intellectual history in which Ex-appropriation takes place, the history or temporality of an *Ereignis* whose destiny thwarts the expectations and theses of academic philosophers for whom, despite the content of any philosophy, its history appears teleologically predetermined in a conceptual apparatus which from a Heideggerian perspective has been at once accomplished and surpassed. In this sense Derrida's reinscription is anything but unauthorised from the position of the legator, Heidegger. Rather, given the Heideggerian legacy, always already differentiated from itself, always already deconstructing itself as legacy, the philosophy of Heidegger is posed as problematic for the one who would wish to take up where Heidegger left off, since from the perspective of Heidegger's thinking it would be a metaphysical trap to inherit or lay hold of that in whose *Ereignis* such a laying hold (*lesen*) is undermined. This is a risk, however, Derrida recognises and is willing to take. If Derrida transposes the letter of Heidegger's sending into the transmission of a thinking through the *techne* of the

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 16 at p. 197.

post, it is to demonstrate better the extent to which the Heideggerian notion of the sending of Being has been reconsidered from the perspective of the “post” of the philosophical correspondence. In this context one is so close yet at the same time so removed from Heidegger that the distance in which Heidegger himself has withdrawn gives another perspective on the technological outcome of metaphysics and its appropriation. Here Derrida pushes Heidegger’s thinking to its extreme position and highlights the adventure that is always risked in using the post:

now *techne*, this is the entire—infinitesimal and decisive—*différance*, *does not arrive*. No more than metaphysics, therefore, and than positionality; always, already it parasites [contaminates] that to which he says it happens, arrives, or that it succeeds in happening to[*arrive á arriver*]. This infinitesimal nuance chances everything in the relation between metaphysics and its doubles or its others¹⁶⁰

Here is the infinitesimal and decisive *différance* that Derrida wants to mark between, or, rather, within, his own text and Heidegger’s. It is important to recognise here the link that Derrida forges between *techne* and the differing-deferring economy of the post. As David Wills has pointed out, whereas on the one hand the postal, implying the materiality (and the divisibility) of the letter, exists as perhaps the most simple and obvious case of mediation as *techne*, at least within systems of communication that are the models for representationalist thinking, on the other hand it shows how *techne* in fact inhabits the most fundamental ideas of positioning such as identity, difference and so on. For if the postal as event, and as event of the *techne*, is always already divided by the event of non-arrival, then the concepts such as identity and difference that depend upon it are similarly divided.¹⁶¹ In this context *techne* comes to be the trace of a operation that, crossing out all the epochal configurations in which Being would destine itself, at once *intersects* with

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁶¹ See David Wills, *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory*, (Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 182.

and re-inscribes the instance which, for Heidegger, Being is dissimulated—the technological epoche. The postcard, then, however trivial it may at first appear, functions as a machinic supplement (can there be any other?) to Heidegger's thoughts on the history of metaphysics and its technological completion. Indeed, the postcard is well suited to do so because the dispatch is a space that cannot be disentangled from the duration and tele-technical conditions of its being transmitted. Although for Derrida it is always the same card that is sent, in this identity there is a machinic iteration as the card is spaced, divided, mailed and cut off from its presumed sender. Situating himself at the margin of Heidegger's text Derrida takes into account Heidegger's thinking of the technological outcome of metaphysics only to take account of it, re-count it and re-mark it as that instance to which Heidegger's text itself must submit. Here, Derrida insists that it is the "post" or "posting" which far from being implicated, as Heidegger would say, in the metaphysical technological destination and determination of Being, is in fact the rhythm of *Geschick des Seins*. So that when Heidegger makes *techne* and technology "derivative" (Derrida's word), some kind of dissimulation of Being in the final epoche of its oblivion, he forgets that the very closing into a linked epoch of his history is a postal idea and that always and already from the beginning there is *techne* and technical distribution, differentiation, going astray, etc. Indeed, Derrida counter-argues ("against "Martin"") that any text is determined by the conditions of its transmission and dispatch, and that one is very much mistaken to isolate the message from the technology or relays of its delivery.

The originary technical contamination of Being

Derrida's deconstructive reinscription here, as elsewhere, is intelligible as a problematizing of what he considers to be the Heideggerian desire for rigorous non-contamination. In this connection Derrida has on a number of occasions voiced his disquiet over what he considers to be the code, the logic, the recurrent formula or semantic regularity of Heidegger's repeated valorisation of essential Being (*Wesen*) over

that of which it is the essence. Derrida argues that when Heidegger thinks “essence” as being more primordial than the field(s) it engenders, the rigor and strategy of such a thought is always generated by the desire to affirm and preserve the realm of essences in the science of ontology as well as in the thinking of Being from “contamination,” to keep the aboriginal essence separate and *pure*.¹⁶² The *Wesen* is—its must be, that is what “is” means—uncontaminated by anything entitive or nonessential. Being is—it must be—uncontaminated by beings. About this deeply Heideggerian law which articulates the ontic-ontological difference as the truth of Being *itself* and as the sole matter for thinking, Derrida maintains that such matrix thoughts remain, at least in one aspect, classically philosophical: “It is in any case by a gesture of this type that Heidegger interrupts or disqualifies, in different domains, specular reiteration or infinite regress (*renvoi a l’infini*)”¹⁶³

For Derrida, Heidegger’s stratagem is most explicit in the typical and exemplary question concerning technology, the assertion that its essence is nothing technological. In *Of Spirit* where this problematic is tied together as one of the “guiding threads” (the others being that of questioning, animality, and epochality) that lead into the highly charged political question of Heidegger’s “avoidance” and invocation of *Geist*, Derrida states his reservation in this way:

The concern[...]was to analyse this desire for rigorous non-contamination and, from that, perhaps, to envisage the necessity, one could say the fatal necessity of a *contamination*—and the word was important to me—of a contact originally impurifying thought or speech by technology. Contamination, then, of the thought of essence by technology, and so contamination by technology of the thinkable essence of

¹⁶² For in in-depth discussion of Heidegger’s essentialism see John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, (Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 118-130.

¹⁶³ *SOR.*, p. 324.

technology—and even of a question of technology by technology, the privilege of the question having some relation already, always, with this irreducibility of technology.¹⁶⁴

For Derrida it would be a matter, then, of analysing the Heideggerian desire for rigorous non contamination, linked no doubt to the privilege of the question and to *Dasein's* factual existence in its constitutive openness to Being and its difference from technology.¹⁶⁵ Whereas for Heidegger the essence of technology is said to be nothing technological, is not this or that technical being, this or that piece of technological equipment, or even technical beings as a whole, for Derrida, the limit between what is technical and what is not technical cannot be maintained, it is not safe. There is no essence of technology. Nothing is purely technical either. It is here that one is able to see, from another angle, Derrida's arguments in *The Post Card* regarding the Heideggerian thinking of the history of Being. By organising this thinking around an epochal schema, that is, around an economy of withdrawal, withholding and reserving, Heidegger upholds the thought of the ontological difference as a metaphysical desire to protect Being from any slippage of dissemination in beings. In doing so Heidegger wants to guarantee the history and arrival of Being in its future possibility, he wants to keep *Wesen* safe from, and in excess of, the technological actualisation of metaphysics. To put it another way,

¹⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.10.

¹⁶⁵ I refer here to Derrida's series of "Geschlecht" essays which, together with *Of Spirit*, form part of a network in which Derrida examines the status of bodily existence in Heidegger's work in connection with the privilege granted by Heidegger to questioning as *the* mode of thinking. In "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand" Derrida considers the place of the human hand in *Dasein's* constitutive openness to the question of Being: "The hand reaches extends, receives and welcomes—and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hand of the other. The hand keeps. The hand carries. The hand designs and signs, presumably because man is a (monstrous) sign. [*Die Hand zeichnet, vermutlich weil der Mensch ein Zeichen ist*]" (Heidegger quoted, *Geschlecht II*, p. 168) Heidegger's argument with metaphysics situates questioning and thereby thinking in *Dasein's* being as factual existence. Thought is not cerebral or disincarnate but a craft or Handiwork implicated as as the very condition of Being in *Dasein's* instrumental involvement with its environment, in its factual Being-in-the-world. However, as Derrida shows, by conceiving thought in its facticity Heidegger articulates the desire to shelter thought from any contamination by technology. This desire appears in Heidegger's defense defence of handwriting, of language and thinking made visible in the act of the hand, against the mechanized, deindividualized, script of the typewriter. For Derrida, it is this bias that aligns Heidegger with logocentric metaphysics. See Jacques Derrida, "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand," trans. John .P. Leavey, Jr. in John Sallis, ed. *Deconstruction and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). pp. 161-197; hereafter cited as *GII*.

the withdrawal of Being even as it articulates the oblivion of Being in the *Ge-stell* would articulate the possibility of its re-turn out of technology into the thinking appropriation of *Ereignis*; the piety of questioning-thinking, its possibility and integrity is thereby kept apart from technology and preserved in its integrity as the opening of the future. Conversely, if, as Derrida asserts “*techne* doesn’t arrive,” if it already and originally contaminates that to which Heidegger says it happens, then the “infinitesimal and decisive *différance*” that brings Heidegger and Derrida together in their separation, is seen to rest on on the way each responds to the originality, or not, of technology.

The question to be posed here of course is whether Derrida is sufficiently sensitive to the subtleties of Heidegger’s retrieval of the metaphysical conception of essence. Obviously, Heidegger opens up a radical redetermination of *Wesen* that is no longer a presence, a present, or a presentifiable essence: does not this entail a thinking of contamination? This is the question John Sallis raises in a discussion with Derrida at a colloquium held at the University of Essex in 1986. As Sallis says,

[i]t seems to me that there is a thread in Heidegger’s work that is not entirely different from the kind of contamination that you are sketching. What I am thinking of is the kind of development that one finds most succinctly in *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, though also in the 1937/38 lecture course, where Heidegger uses the phrase *Wesenheit des Wesens*. In questioning *die Wesenheit*, *Wesen*, and *Wahrheit*, what is perhaps most important is that “essence” comes no longer to be determined in a way that simply excludes its opposite, or, I should say, its opposites, because there are several senses of opposition here [...] Rather, essence is redetermined as involving *Un-wesen*, the *Gegenwesen*; that redetermination then leads into the question of *die Irre*, errancy, withdrawal so on [...] I think that in the notion of errancy there is precisely a necessary flowing of essence, as it were, over into[...]a kind of necessary blurring of the distinction between Being and

beings[...]It does seem to me there is something like a kind of contamination of essence going on here, something quiet different from the demand for purity.”¹⁶⁶

In reply to Sallis, Derrida stresses that while he recognizes that for Heidegger Being's difference *from* beings is itself dissimulated *in* beings, and thus appears to be a kind of contamination, he does not believe that Heidegger would consider it to be impurity. As he wonders “Why does this blurring of the distinction have no general effect on all of Heidegger's discourse? Because, when you say the essence of technology is nothing technical [...]then you cannot blur the distinction. But if, in errancy, there is a situation in which this blurring occurs not by accident but unavoidably, this should have effects on the whole *corpus*, on the whole discourse. In that case you wouldn't any longer draw such a rigorous distinction between the essence and that of which it is the essence. So, you can imagine the consequences of this contamination.”¹⁶⁷

Despite Heidegger's insistence that *Wesen* is equally *Unwesen*, that *Wahrheit* is equally *Unwarhrheit*, that *Ereignis* involves *Enteignis* etc, and despite the radicality involved in the attempt to think the reciprocal inter-play, the difference (*Unter-Scheid*) between Being and beings, Derrida says Heidegger would insist that contamination is merely an “ontic” scheme, a mere “metaphor”; he would insist contamination is something which affects only beings, and the language of beings.¹⁶⁸ This reversal or non-identity of essence with itself is not contamination: “It is still too pure,” Derrida says, “too rigorously delimited.” Derrida is not, of course, advocating the blurring of all distinctions, but he wonders whether anything in language and thought can be sheltered absolutely from contamination. As he puts it: “In the very will to protect oneself against

¹⁶⁶ See Jacques Derrida, “On Reading Heidegger: An outline of Remarks to the Essex Colloquium” in *Research in Phenomenology*, 17 1987, pp. 171-185. pp. 180-181.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 180.

“x” one is more exposed to the danger of reproducing “x” than when one tries to think contamination.”¹⁶⁹

Now having said this, reverting to the Heideggerian position itself, let me make this point, which will prepare far in advance a question in its turn on Derrida’s reinscription: in order for the claims for the non arrival of *techne* and for originary contamination to stand, Heidegger’s question concerning technology must be held onto or determined as a thesis and theme; literally, let me highlight again the fact that Derrida insists, or rather anticipates that in reinscribing the thinking of Being in terms of the post Heidegger would accuse him of “an imposition of *position* precisely, of determining the *envoi* of Being as position, posture, thesis, or theme (*Setzung, thesis, etc.*), a gesture that he alleges to *situate*, as well as technology with the history of metaphysics.” The question is, then, how does this anticipation stand. Does it go to the heart of Heidegger’s thinking or is it, perhaps, and given the reading of Heidegger I presented in the last chapter I will want to suggest this, too restricted in its scope to fully comprehend what Heidegger would insist or accuse Derrida of? I will return to my reservations over Derrida’s reading in Chapter 4. Let me now, however, conclude the concerns of this one.

The consequences of Derrida’s reinscription are indeed far reaching. By transposing Heidegger’s ontological vocabulary into the context of the technics of a texts transmission, dispatch, or postal relays, one may deconstruct Heidegger’s still metaphysical recovery of Being, his thinking of *Ereignis*, which accompanies Heidegger’s questioning into the essence of technological completion of metaphysics. In this case, Derrida will point up the irreducibility and necessity of originary technical contamination. This deconstruction occurs, of course, the moment that Derrida receives the Heideggerian dispatch or missive, the moment that, in having Heidegger’s thought delivered to him, it becomes apparent that it has gone astray, has been re-routed, and cannot be disentangled from the effects of its being transmitted, which is to say written,

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 172.

sent, received, read and so on. In this regard the analysis and promotion of those machinic operators involved in the deconstructive movement of reading, as in the rewriting of Heidegger's text, have been inscribed in the general program of Derrida's work from early on—in *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, *Dissemination* and *Margins of Philosophy*. As I have already indicated above, within these texts, and within a very broad conceptual and historical matrix that has as one of its most decisive elements the new information and communication technologies developed in the post-war period, Derrida relates the question of *techne* and technology to the question of *writing*, to its subordination to a secondary and derivative status as mere auxiliary technique and to the contemporary displacement of this subordination. Now it is precisely in this context that Derrida's reception of Heidegger's text along with its reinscription first takes hold. If we are to understand the implications of what has been said above we need to locate and develop what is said in Derrida's now "classic" works with regard to the emergence and articulation of writing as a supplement to Heidegger's thought. It is to these texts that I now want to turn.

3

Technics and the New Mutation in the History of Writing

Introduction

It has often been acknowledged that in his writings of the late 1960s and early 1970s—*Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*, *Dissemination* and *Margins of Philosophy*—the deconstructive elaboration of arche-writing, trace, *différance*, etc., allows Derrida to assert that “writing opens the field of history,” and thus to explore the ways in which it is possible to glimpse the closure of that “historico-metaphysical epoch” he calls “logocentrism”. The project Derrida is working on in these texts has been taken to be part of the programme of the period, that is, part of the movement out of structuralism (and its grid of binary distinctions) in micro terms and out of metaphysics (and its privileging of presence) in a large scale perspective. In the latter case, the question of the closure of metaphysics is part of the complex relation Derrida is building at this point between his own work and Heidegger’s thinking of Being. Indeed, the peculiarity of Derrida’s text is that the problem of metaphysical closure with which the deconstruction of logocentrism gets under way is a resource that Derrida finds chiefly within the Heideggerian thinking of the end of philosophy. That said, it is of vital importance to Derrida that his conception of the closure of metaphysics be distinguished from Heidegger’s thought of its end. Although the Derridean concept of metaphysical closure is not posulated in strict opposition to Heidegger’s thinking, it nonetheless allows Derrida to situate Heidegger in a tradition whose end determines the possibility of his discourse. The Derridean notion of closure which reads the Heideggerian thought of end is, moreover, inseparable from the displacement of another Heideggerian concept; namely, the history or sending of Being. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Derrida’s reinscription of Heidegger’s text as this is worked out in the 1980’s, and

particularly in *The Post Card* and its supplements, opens up an infinitesimal but nonetheless decisive *différance* which turns on “the presumed unity of a history of metaphysics or the West”. What is being challenged by Derrida is the unilateralism of Heidegger’s claim that there is a sending (*envoi*; *Schickung*) of Being from the Greeks through epochs of increasing oblivion, which is gathered into the destiny or destination of Being (*das Seins Geschick*) at the end of philosophy. As Derrida reads it, for Heidegger the epoch of metaphysics is addressed by the Greeks, and destined for “us”: the sending of Being is always assured of reaching its destination and arriving at its technological completion. Deconstructing this restricted economy Derrida releases a plurality of “envois,” inassemblable postcards that would be more “originary”—“older”—than the historical dispensation of Being and would be incapable of being gathered together and represented (appropriated) as a unitary epoch in which representation itself is actualized in the permeation of the world by technical relations. For Derrida, *techne* does not arrive. No more than metaphysics, therefore; always, already it contaminates that to which Heidegger says it happens, arrives, or that it succeeds in happening to.

The exorbitant

Now, if it remains the case that Derrida’s attempt to mark the closure of metaphysics lies precisely in this simultaneous comprehension and reinscription of Heidegger’s thinking, there is, nonetheless, a complication involved which goes beyond the evident problems: where do we stand to make such a move; what can such a movement be and from where can it be charted?¹⁷⁰ In the particular question that concerns us here Derrida speaks of wishing to obtain the “point of a certain exteriority in relation to the totality of the age of logocentrism,”¹⁷¹ the point that gives the leverage to make of metaphysics not just a unified system but also a general text. There is here a certain exorbitance which

¹⁷⁰ This is a point made by Marion Hobson. See *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 15.

¹⁷¹ *OG.*, p. 161.

allows the history of metaphysics to appear in its closure beyond the restricted economy of Being.¹⁷²

As is well known, in a number of places in his early writings Derrida pointed out the logic and risks—“false exits”—involved in the attempt to leave or transgress metaphysics. Two paths presented themselves: either a move that attempts an exit and a deconstruction from within, which risks endlessly confirming and consolidating that which one allegedly deconstructs and “sinking into the autism of the closure,” or an abrupt and discontinuous “change of terrain,” a move which risks “inhabiting more naively and more strictly than ever the inside one declares one has deserted.” Noting that the first path is “mostly that of the Heideggerian questions” while the second is mostly “the one that dominates “France” today,” Derrida affirms that such risks do not suffice to annul the “necessity for a change of terrain.” Consequently, “a new writing must weave and interlace these two motifs of deconstruction. Which amounts to saying that one must speak several languages and produce several texts at once.”¹⁷³ By means of this double play, marked in certain decisive places by an erasure which allows what it obliterates to be read, violently inscribing within the text that which attempted to govern it from without, Derrida says “I try to respect as rigorously as possible the internal, regulated play

¹⁷² It might appear that the deconstruction of epochality that is outlined in *The Post Card* and adjacent texts marks an advance on the historico-metaphysical notion of closure that informs much of Derrida’s earlier work. Indeed, in *Of Grammatology* Derrida does speak of the “epoch” of logocentrism and of its “totality,” which would suggest his reworking of Heidegger’s text has not yet performed the reinscription of the unitary conception of metaphysics that Derrida thinks characterizes the thinking of Being. Coupled with this, though the word closure appears with some regularity in the texts of the late 1960s, it does not survive long after the end of that decade. In this connection, as Simon Critchley has asked “Might one not speculate that disappearance of closure from Derrida’s conceptual vocabulary reflects his growing distance from the Heideggerian conception of the history of metaphysics which underpins the concept of metaphysical closure? Might not the disappearance of closure be linked to Derrida’s renunciation of the history of Being.” To adopt this hypothesis would, as Critchley says, be to go too far. To begin with, such a view would ignore what is already said in both “Différance” and especially “The Ends of Man” with regard to the concepts of epoch and epochality and to Heidegger’s privileging of a “metaphysics of proximity. It would also overlook the fact that although the word closure disappears from Derrida’s vocabulary, this does not mean that the *problem* of closure ceases to be central to Derrida’s work. In this connection the ultimate orientation of texts like *The Post Card* is no different from that of Derrida’s earlier work. For Critchley’s remarks see his *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 82.

¹⁷³ *EM.*, p. 135.

of philosophemes or epistememes by making them slide—without mistreating them—to the point of their nonpertinence, their exhaustion, their closure. To “deconstruct” philosophy, thus, would be to think—in the most faithful, interior way—the structured genealogy of philosophy’s concepts, but at the same time to determine—from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable or unnamable by philosophy—what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into this history by means of this motivated repression.”¹⁷⁴ “Mine then,” Derrida says, “is an *excessively* philosophical gesture: a gesture that is philosophical and, at the same time, in excess of the philosophical. And this raising of the stakes—how to be more than philosophical without ceasing to be philosophical?—marks with its hubris all the themes I have dealt with.”¹⁷⁵

Now, given what has been said so far in this study, it will be apparent that the Derridean gesture cannot simply be seen as one that takes as its philosophical leverage some *point* or *position* that would situate deconstruction with respect to the closure of logocentrism. More specifically, the exteriority that Derrida wishes attain with respect to metaphysics cannot be a possibility that lets itself be *posed there*, or *exposed before you*, gathered and represented as a theme or a system, a thesis or a synthesis ought to do. All of these values are disqualified by Derrida’s text which makes of deconstruction an event or happening which, without being foreign to philosophy, *exceeds the purview* of the theoretical or philosophical gaze as it is traditionally instituted. The consequences of this must quickly grab our attention; they mirror those that I raised in Chapter 1 with respect to Heidegger. As I said, any appropriation of Heidegger’s thinking that fixates on *what* it says, on its contents and themes, must quickly be perceived to be inadequate since such an approach obscures the peculiar immanent dynamic or movement of Heidegger’s thinking that articulates his turn out of metaphysics. Similarly here, if we are to follow the stakes that Derrida raises (how to be more than philosophical without ceasing to be

¹⁷⁴ *P.*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida & Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis, ed. Giacomo Donis and David Webb, (Polity Press, 2001), p. 4; hereafter cited as *TS*.

philosophical) our reading cannot be one that relies solely on “expertise,” on an attitude or ability that indulges the competence to map only its theoretical conditions and accomplishments. On the contrary, one must have assumed or engaged, in advance as it were, those exigencies that led to Derrida’s excessive gesture in the first place. This is a point made by Christopher Fynsk who, wondering what acts (of reading, of writing, or of speech) would allow one to “accompany” Derrida, asks “How many times has Derrida had to write that terms like *différance* or “trace” are not philosophemes or conceptual *topoi*, that the exigencies to which they answer (and which they help to draw forth) escape the order of conceptual exposition?”¹⁷⁶ No doubt, as Fynsk rightly points out, a reader will never grasp the transformative force of a term like *différance* without grasping the theoretical field within which it intervenes, a field that ranges from transcendental phenomenology through the thinking of Being to structural linguistics and beyond. This understanding can be as technically sophisticated as it will. But, and this is the important point, “the reader must also have grasped the thinking engagement that *prompted* Derrida to advance such terms if that force is ever to strike them. To engage the thought, they must have already been engaged by it—a relation must have opened, they must have assumed its engagements in some way as their own.”¹⁷⁷ What then are the engagements that prompted Derrida to mark the closure of metaphysics and, if such engagements cannot simply given as a theme, how are we to think them? Here we must turn to the “historical” occurrence of deconstruction.

The event: “it” deconstructs

As Derrida himself recognizes, many of his texts may give the impression of being without preliminary justification, that is, they appear to begin without that still classic moment according to which one justifies and grounds one’s point of departure on the

¹⁷⁶ Christopher Fynsk, “Derrida and Philosophy: Acts of Engagement” in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 152-171. p. 153. Many of the points Fynsk makes in this essay will be threaded throughout this chapter.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

basis of a situation. (The systematic description of such a situation providing the terms of adequacy and adequation for beginning.)¹⁷⁸ Indeed, Derrida's repeated assertions that the form of the systematic, encyclopaedic or circular book is impossible, that it is no longer possible to write a "great philosophical "machine"" with all the rhetoric of a classic introduction, are well known.¹⁷⁹ This is a circumstance that Derrida believes his microcommunity of readers recognise: "As I write for a highly restricted community of readers who I presume share a philosophical culture with me, I say to myself, also out of modesty: I'm not going to start all over again, I'm not going to open my text as *The Critique of Pure Reason* or *Being and Time* opens".¹⁸⁰ This is not to say, of course, that deconstruction cannot and does not begin. But its beginning is one that depends on an elliptic economy in which the presumed point of departure is inscribed in the process of deconstruction.

Now, if in articulating the closure of metaphysics it is trivially obvious that Derrida's principle interests have been directed towards the great canon of philosophy (and at the same time towards the "minor" loci of their texts including their "literary," "rhetorical" or "metaphorical" performance), it is equally apparent that the closure appears not just under the pressure of philosophical critique, but also by way of philosophy's *exposure* to events that are beyond the purview of traditional philosophy and which require new forms of philosophical response. In this case, deconstruction should not be taken, as it often appears to be, primarily a literary (as conventionally understood) or intraphilosophical occurrence, nor for that matter is it an organized body of easily reproducible means, reading techniques or techniques of critical textual interpretation that have acquired the status and dignity of a quasi-interdisciplinary discipline. Such "transportable *possibilities* and *powers*" are, as Derrida insists, merely one of the forms or manifestations deconstruction has taken. However, they remain necessarily limited, determined by a set

¹⁷⁸ See *TS.*, p. 81.

¹⁷⁹ See especially "Outwork" in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), pp. 3-59; hereafter cited as *DIS*.

¹⁸⁰ *TS.*, p. 81.

of open contextual traits—respected within and appropriate to an Anglo-American academy—that are carried and thus exceeded by “much broader, more obscure and powerful processes, between the earth and the world.”¹⁸¹ More specifically,

“deconstructions,” which I prefer to say in the plural, has doubtless never named a project, method or system. Especially not a philosophical system. In contexts that are always very determined, it is one of the many names for designating, by metonymy in sum, what happens or doesn’t happen to happen, namely a certain dislocation that in fact is regularly repeated—and wherever there is something rather than nothing: in what are called the texts of classical philosophy, of course and for example, but also in every “text” in the general sense that I try to justify for this word, that is, in experience period, in social, historical, economic, technical, military, etc., “reality”.¹⁸²

More specifically still, deconstruction is one of the many names for something new that is taking place in the world (at least in the West), something that points to an unprecedented mutation in our contemporary situation, one that exceeds philosophy’s “phenomenalizing” and “objectifying” potential. This is an important but often underestimated point that Derrida has made on many occasions. As he told Henri Ronsboeche in a 1967 interview collected in *Positions*: “[deconstruction is] a writing interested in itself which also enables us to read philosophemes—and consequently all the texts of our culture—as kinds of symptoms[...]of something that *could not be presented* in the history of philosophy, and which, moreover, is *nowhere present*. Since all this concerns putting into question the major determination of the meaning of Being as *presence*.”¹⁸³ Pointing to his concern at the time with the traditional treatment accorded to writing as a

¹⁸¹ Jacques Derrida, “A “Madness” Must Watch Over Thinking” in *Points...Interviews, 1974-1994.*, ed. Elizabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford.Calif.:Stanford University Press, 1995) pp. 339-364. p. 357.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 356.

¹⁸³ *P.*, p. 7.

particularly revelatory symptom, Derrida goes on to note “And if this symptom is revealed today, it is not at all due to some ingenious discovery initiated by someone here or there. It is due rather to a certain total transformation (a transformation that “can no longer even be called “historical” or “worldwide,” because the transformation infringes on the security of such significations).”¹⁸⁴

Almost thirty years later these remarks are reiterated and expanded upon in a discussion with Gianni Vattimo. Vattimo has just posed the question of what has become of certain important justifications, referring to the circumstances and the time of its writing, that Derrida advances at the beginning of *Of Grammatology* for the necessity of the closure of logocentrism. In reply Derrida states that,

I try to place myself, or find myself placed, before the question: what is going on today [*qu'est-ce qui se passe*], what is happening [*qu'est-ce qui arrive*]? If I am to speak and write publicly, I have to take into account the singular and distinctive happenings of today[...]despite the enormous tradition going back thousands of years something singular is happening today, of which there are a great many signs in the world. Something completely new, to which we have to respond and with respect to which we have to situate ourselves [...] Faced with the singularity of the world event, I have to respond to it singularly, with my signature, in my own way, not as an aesthetic fetish, but to take a responsibility. It happens to me [*ça m'arrive*] and I have to respond, me, with my age, my history, my *ductus*, my way of writing, of making the letters, even if it is illegible.¹⁸⁵

Having said this, and by way of clarification, later in the same interview Derrida adds “I ought to have specified that what happens deconstructs itself in the process. It is not I who deconstruct; rather, something I call “deconstruction” happens to the experience of a

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁸⁵ *TS.*, pp. 78-79.

world, a culture, a philosophical tradition; “it” deconstructs, *ça ne va pas*, there is something that budes, that is in the process of being dislocated, disjointed, disjoined, and of which I began to be aware. Some thing is ‘deconstructing’ and it has to be answered for.¹⁸⁶

As these comments make clear, since 1967 Derrida has elaborated deconstruction within the context of a singular historical event. A situation in which a “certain dislocation” of the present is regularly repeated. “Deconstruction,” Derrida says, “is anachronism in synchronism, it is a manner of attuning to something that is out of joint and out of tune”.¹⁸⁷ While developing over four decades through an astonishing array of styles or strategies, performative experiments, and targeted interrogations, Derrida’s work has been entirely consistent with a movement of thought which pays the greatest attention to the event, to what is happening, as, precisely, that which is dislocated and disjointed, which is not gathered together in its place, and which does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or philosophico-theoretical organization of a subject, or even of modernity. This itinerary, which Derrida admits is “guided by a certain insistence that others may find downright monotonous,” is, as one commentator points out, an assumed paradox: the event of deconstruction, the deconstructive event is unique and the making of an institution, an archive, at the same time. The event, to be worthy of its name, must be both unanticipated and remarkable, that is, capable of being remarked and identified or distinguished from other events. The event then is marked by this compromise, it gives itself as singular and unique and it betrays itself by instituting a system of marks that demand a response.¹⁸⁸ This is the point Derrida makes when he says “Every time I write something, I have the impression of making a beginning—but in fact that which is same in texture is ceaselessly exposed to a singularity which is that of the other (another text, someone else, another word of the language). Everything appears *anew*: which means

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 80-81.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁸⁸ See Joseph G. Kronick, *Derrida and the Future of Literature*, (Albany:State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 32.

newness and repetition together.”¹⁸⁹ This “singularity” of writing, its exposure to the other, means above all, that deconstruction corresponds to the irreducible transformation of a *certain* context, a context that is as contextualizing as it is contextualized. In this connection, deconstruction proceeds from a gesture that has been characteristic of many of Derrida’s initiatives: an enumeration of the historical symptoms or signs that call for the initiative in question. In the present context under discussion such signs are symptomatic of the closure of the logocentrico-metaphysical era as this is outlined in Derrida’s early work and belong to a field of transformations which articulate the shift from “language” to the more general notion of “writing”. As Derrida tells Vatimmo in the discussion cited above, “In beginning *Of Grammatology* I set out from a sort of observation: today language is no longer a region, it has won the totality of space, its reign now has a sort of extension without limits; and, simultaneously, language becomes writing, with an invasion of the graphic structure of experience. I gave a certain number of examples of all of this, in current life, in political life, in genetics, in telecommunications, a sort of photograph, an image of the world and of a world in the process of changing, and thus of “deconstructing”.”¹⁹⁰

Derrida’s observation, his enumeration of the historical signs of the shift from language to writing and thereby of a world in the process of deconstructing, marks in clear fashion those imperatives that prompt the “excessively philosophical gesture” that emerges in Derrida’s work in the late 1960s. Such signs point to the critical interaction of Derrida’s text with a general epistemic shift towards the scriptural and the informational, a move which itself is inextricably implicated in the more general techno-scientific development of post-war culture. As was said in the previous chapter, this context constitutes for Derrida something like a “practical deconstruction”. What I want to do now is make good the promise to discuss this matter in some detail. In this Chapter I shall therefore be concerned to show that deconstruction, as it is formulated in Derrida’s

¹⁸⁹ *TS.*, p. 47.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

early works and understood in terms of the problematic of the closure of metaphysics and of writing, is elaborated and is organized around a context that generates a thinking of technics, of tele-technologies, and as a thinking of tele-technologies, of the “media” in all its contemporary guises. As we shall see, this thinking of technics is not merely incidental to the Derridean text, as if it were one of its many themes. Rather, in accordance with what I shall take to be the “method” of deconstruction, Derrida’s thinking is subject to a necessity that will situate technics at the very heart of his enterprise. In order to understand what is at issue here it is necessary to take account of the clear set of intellectual, disciplinary and institutional stakes of deconstruction that emerge in Derrida’s work of the period and which manifest themselves in the attempt to rethink philosophy through a redistribution of its relations with its outside along zones of implication rather than confrontation. In this connection, the relation that Derrida negotiates between philosophy and the then triumphalist discourses of that loose confederation of disciplines designated in France the “sciences humaines” is important. One of the essential outcomes of these discussions, which take place under the aegis of structuralism, was the development of the methodological thrust of deconstruction which enacts a displacement and reorganisation of the metaphysical opposition between the transcendental and the empirical, opening up an aporetic and undecidable “position,” neither in philosophy (as it is traditionally organized) nor outside it. Asserting the necessity and irreducibility of this double impossibility, Derrida demonstrates how it both obliges philosophy to entertain an open matrix of transversal relations with emergent forms of knowledge and their technical elaborations, whilst pressuring the latter to come to terms with its “transcendental contraband”. As I will show, thinking this necessity means thinking the inescapability of writing or inscription in general where this means thinking the “originary” co-implication between writing and technics. As part of an attempt to come to terms with the difficulty of what Derrida thinks here I shall conclude the chapter

with a consideration of certain ambiguities that are inherent in his attempt to elaborate a system of technical differentiation that would mark the closure of logocentrism.

(The disavowal of) writing

In order that we might advance to these matters let me proceed by offering an account of the arguments and claims that Derrida advances with regard to the traditional treatment of writing as well as his formulation of a generalized writing which displaces this treatment. These arguments, which merge with and co-articulate Derrida's attempt to mark the closure of metaphysics, have often been recounted becoming in the process something of a deconstructive commonplace. That said, it is necessary for what follows that I trace their main outline.

To state it boldly, for essential but determined reasons, and throughout its history, Western thinking has taken writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, as the body and matter external to spirit, to breath, to speech, to memory, to truth, in short to the *logos*. For the early Derrida such an attitude amounts to a disavowal or "motivated repression" of inscription and constitutes something like the major decision of metaphysics which institutes and maintains itself in the oppositional axiomatic—sensible/intelligible, soul/body, nature/culture, universal/particular, infinite finite, etc.—that governs it in its very possibility. It is speech which allows for this illusion of transcending inscription because "the system of "hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak" through the phonic substance...presents itself as the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent signifier."¹⁹¹ Hierarchically subordinated writing is confined to the opposite role as derivative, accidental, particular, exterior, (outside and below) doubling of the signifier, as a mere technical artifice and auxiliary instrument, a *representative* of speech that has no constitutive meaning of its own: "The epoch of the logos thus debases writing considered as mediation of mediation and as the fall into the exteriority of

¹⁹¹ *OG.*, pp. 7-8.

meaning. To this epoch belongs the difference between signified and signifier, or at least the strange separation of their “parallelism,” and the exteriority, however extenuated, of the one to the other”¹⁹² Consequently, “[w]riting will be “phonetic,” it will be the outside, the exterior representation of language and of this “thought-sound.” It must necessarily operate from already constituted units of signification, in the formation of which it has played no part.”¹⁹³

In his work of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s Derrida illustrates again and again this history with a series of examples that will take writing to be not merely derivative but more seriously as that which “menaces,” “corrupts,” and “contaminates” the purity of life; writing is an “evil” or “perversion” that “engenders monsters” and is a “deviation from nature” from which “spontaneous life” must be protected. Tracing the origin of this stance from its ancient Greek roots through certain historians of writing to its latest showings in Husserl, Heidegger, Hegel, Rousseau, Saussure, Levi-Strauss and others Derrida asserts that:

We already have a foreboding that phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of the meaning of Being in general as *presence*, with all the subdeterminations which depend on this general form and which organize within it their system and their historical sequence (presence of the thing to sight as *eidos*, presence as substance/essence/existence [*ousia*], temporal presence as point [*stigmè*] of the now or of the moment [*nun*], the self presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth). Logocentrism would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

Having opened up the disavowal of writing to inspection, linking it in the process to Heidegger's insight into the metaphysical determination of Being as presence, the history of metaphysics is then, for Derrida, more precisely the history of phono-logo-centrism.

Now, by calling this tradition into question Derrida's ambition is not simply to rehabilitate and endorse writing as against the superior truth claims of speech: "It has," he says, "never been a case of opposing a graphocentrism to a logocentrism...it is not a question of returning to writing its rights, its superiority or its dignity."¹⁹⁵ The order of dependence between speech and writing cannot be argued. As long as one thinks of speech and writing in conceptual terms, writing *must* efface itself before speech as its truth. Nor, following this, can the concepts of speech and writing, taken in their common and "literal" sense, serve to explain what Derrida attempts to think here. Rather, Derrida's analyses pursue a different goal, aiming to both establish the law that explains why and how what is presumed to be pure, ideal, transcendental and so on is necessarily interwoven and contaminated by what is taken to be its opposite, and why speech in its purity cannot be thought except by referring to writing. To deconstruct the subordination of writing to speech is thus to construct the universal and irreducible economy that accounts for both exclusion and contamination. The name Derrida gives to this economy is the arche-synthesis of "*l'écriture*," or, more properly, inscription in general or *arche-writing*. Inscription has, he says, nothing mundane about it, it is beyond Being, *epekeina tes ousias*. In short, writing, in the sense of inscription, has little or nothing to do with the (anthropological, subjective, and so on) act of writing; it is not determined by what it is about, nor has it anything essentially in common with the signs present on the page. Nor again does it coincide with the (literary or philosophical) production of these signs. Without worldly value and essence inscription is, as Rodolphe Gasché has famously pointed out, "*only*, if one may say so, the quasi-transcendental synthesis that accounts for

¹⁹⁵ *P.*, p. 12.

the necessary corruption of the idealities, or transcendentals of all sorts, by what they are defined against, and at the very moment of their constitution.”¹⁹⁶

As quasi-transcendental, inscription is not a “theme” of deconstruction, a point, identity, or simple position: it is rather that of which every position is *of itself confounded*...inscription, mark, text and not only *thesis or theme*—inscription of the *thesis*. Position here translates the Hegelian concept of *Setzung*, the determination of one with regard to an other, or to something in contrast with it. Position is thus a form of constitution by means of which something becomes what it is through its relation to something other. As Gasché points out, inscription, however, does not signify such a relation; on the contrary, it is the determination of positional constitution, of the relation of the same and the other, for it demonstrates that this relation refers to something that cannot in any case be posited—the alterity of the other—since this alterity is itself the ground of possibility of a positing self. Inscription in this case refers to an irreducible reference to other, anterior to an already constituted subject that presupposes this reference as well as that which such a subject constitutes through positing. This implies the relation of philosophy to its others cannot be one of opposition.¹⁹⁷

If it is not reducible to a theme or thesis how, then, are we to characterize the achievements of inscription? Recognizing the specificity of Derrida’s reconception of writing in terms of this system of relations—as “quasi-transcendental synthesis”—entails an initial account of the “instituted trace” :

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 frame work of the instituted trace, as the possibility common to all systems of signification.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, (Cambridge, Mass.:Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 274.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁹⁸ *OG.*, p. 46.

The exemplarity of the instituted trace lies in its capacity to play with all the marks and non marks of the other. We are familiar since *Of Grammatology* that the mark or trace is the visible sign of the absent other, but the substitution of trace for other depends upon the instituted trace, the absolutely other that is not the absence of a presence. The instituted trace is the possibility of all systems of signification both graphic and phonic. It is, as Derrida says, unmotivated, in the sense that it is not intentionally or naturally linked to the signified. The trace is not something created, installed, or instituted in the conventional sense, it exceeds the opposition between nature and culture and cannot be thought outside a system where “difference appears *as such*.”¹⁹⁹ The appearance of difference *as such* means the appearance of difference, the other, as “self-occultation. When the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself... that is to say the dissimulation of its “as such,” has always already begun and no structure of the entity escapes it.”²⁰⁰ Hence, “the trace can only imprint itself by referring to the other, to another trace.”²⁰¹ In short, the trace can never appear and manifest itself in its phenomenon.

Given the solidarity between tracing and dissimulation, it follows that it is impossible to ask what the trace *is*, because this would imply that it could appear, come into view, in its essence. To ask what the instituted trace *is* is to presuppose a difference, between appearance and essence for example, which the trace is intended to explain. How then is one to speak of the trace? Here we can again turn to Gasché. As he rightly points out, what is at issue here can be made more precise by determining it in terms of what Derrida calls a “structure de renvoi generalisee” The notion of *structure de renvoi* translates the German *Verweisungsstruktur* and has been rendered by its English translators as “referential structure” or “structure of reference.” The trace is the minimal structure of

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 47.

²⁰¹ *D.*, p. 331.

generalized reference, whereby *reference* must be understood in the broadest sense of referring, as alluding or pointing to something other. The trace is a minimal structure of referral to the extent that it constitutes an economy of difference between terms of entities.²⁰² In this connection, because “this trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relation of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing,”²⁰³ it is the origin of space. Moreover, because the doubling characteristic of the structure of referentiality is a process of temporalization as well, the trace is equally to be seen as the primordial constitution of time. The trace is thus the constituting possibility or “originary synthesis” of the differential interplay which intimately affects everything that enters in to a relation of difference or opposition—presence and absence, self and other, living and non living, indeed of all alterity between terms and entities. All this comes into focus when Derrida writes:

These oppositions have meaning only after the possibility of the trace. The “unmotivatedness” of the sign requires a synthesis in which the completely other is announced as such—without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity—within what is not it. Is announced as such: there we have all history, from what metaphysics has defined as “non living” up to “consciousness,” passing through all levels of animal organization. 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.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Cf. *op. cit.*, n 19 at p. 190.

²⁰³ *OG.*, p. 70.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

At this point I have said enough about the trace to allow us to conclude that inscription in general or arche-writing is something “older,” more “originary,” than writing as material production or the production of signs. As the minimal structure of all difference, and hence of all alterity between terms and entities, it points to the irreducibility of inscription in general. When we speak of arche-writing we refer to the cluster or “unity” of the infrastructural chain of quasi-transcendentals *différance* (spacing/temporalization, differing/deferring), repetition, reserve, iteration, mark, pharmakon, *gramme*, *grapheme*, etc., that Derrida analysed separately following his discovery of the problematics of arche-writing. Inscription in general is therefore to be considered as the specificity, so to speak, of the clustered synthesis of arche-writing. It is the feature common to a variety of infrastructures linked together in what is called general writing. As “originary” synthesizes the quasi-transcendentals constitute the medium or “open matrix” between the binary oppositions of metaphysics and between metaphysics and its others, as well as the non simple element that encompasses these coupled terms. Finally, let me recall Derrida’s assertion that the infrastructures were to be understood as “undecidables”. As he says, to call infrastructures undecidables is to stress that they are “unities of simulacrum, [of] “false” verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophic (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics”.²⁰⁵ In sum, insofar as it is a general theory or system, arche-writing explains the necessary inscription of all of philosophy’s axial concepts (and of what they designate) within differential structures or systems. The instituted trace as writing articulates the same “logic” that also organizes Derrida’s later works: an “originary complication of origin” and a “law of differential contamination” that precedes the opposition between nature and convention, symbol and sign, etc., it therefore accounts for the binary axiomatic (including the constitutive

²⁰⁵ *P.*, p. 43.

contradictions it engenders) of the metaphysical text through a series of terms that represent laws of distribution and disposition. If it allows for the articulation of difference as such, the trace both accounts for the logic of logocentric metaphysics and exceeds it.

Having offered this succinct account of Derrida's philosophy of writing as this emerges in the early work, let me turn to the main concerns of this chapter. I will now take up the issue of Derrida's negotiations between philosophy and the "sciences humaines" under the aegis of structuralism. This episode is an essential preface to the question of the implication of the Derridean text in contemporary techno-scientific culture, as this forms a major part of the context in which his first major works are published. Indeed, as Derrida reports in "The Ends of Man," the "dominating and spell-binding extension of the "human sciences" within the philosophical field" was one of the decisive traits that contributed to the questioning of humanism and thereby to the marking of the closure of metaphysics.²⁰⁶ That said, while Derrida recognises the importance of structuralism to a certain phase of French thought, he is also strongly critical of it, questioning not only its linguistic reductionism and systematic pretensions but more generally the discourse of the human sciences, a discourse insufficiently cognisant of its metaphysical roots.²⁰⁷ As I now want to show, Derrida's deconstructive inheritance of some of the central tenets of the structuralist program can be seen as exemplary of a certain style of philosophizing which is both characteristic of the period and carries with it a clear set of institutional and disciplinary stakes that articulate a "trembling" of the borders between disciplines.

²⁰⁶ *EM.*, p. 117.

²⁰⁷ See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 284-285; hereafter cited as *SSP*.

Deconstructing structuralism: Levi-Strauss and techno-science

It is now generally accepted that there was a significant reorientation in French philosophical thought during the 1950s and 1960s, characterized by a shift of attention away from a philosophy concerned with consciousness, perception, and Being—the “subject” in history—to a discourse centred on the analysis of structure and language. This episode, commonly referred to as the “linguistic turn,” has been well documented and discussed in standard critical accounts of the period, but, as Christopher Johnson has pointed out in a number of important studies, less attention is normally given to the renewed dialogue with science and technology implicit in the structuralist program.²⁰⁸ The normally accepted genealogy of structuralism traces a single line of descent from the structural linguistics of Saussure through to Levi-Strauss’s structural anthropology and the various structuralist approaches it inspired in other disciplines, from psychoanalysis and Marxism to literary criticism and cinema studies. Certainly the reference to Saussure, in particular, is an important component of the theoretical edifice Levi-Strauss constructs under the name of structuralism. It is also the case that for those in the human sciences as a theory of natural language the linguistic model was, and remains, intuitively the most assimilable illustration of the structuralist method. However, as Johnson notes, to treat the linguistic component of structuralist theory as absolute, or even predominant, would be to ignore the context in which the theory was embedded, more specifically, the discourse of the then new technologies of information and the sign sciences of information theory, molecular biology and cybernetics without which the structuralist revolution would have been, quite literally, impossible.²⁰⁹ A strong characteristic of the departing humanist-existential philosophy that had dominated the previous period was of course the general lack of such a dialogue, no doubt, as Johnson says, due in part to

²⁰⁸ See Christopher Johnson, *System and Writing in the Philosophy of Jacques Derrida*, (Cambridge University Press, 1993); “Derrida and Science” in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 3/1998, n° 205. pp. 477-493; and “Ambient Technologies, Uncanny Signs” in *Oxford Literary Review*, Vol 21, 2000. pp. 117-133. My reading of Derrida in relation to the human sciences will draw heavily on these texts.

²⁰⁹ Johnson (2000) Cf. *op. cit.*, n 208 at p. 2.

existentialism's rejection of the neo-Kantian epistemology of its immediate predecessors: "a philosophy of the concrete and of the *vécu* had no need of a transcendental idealism predicated on the example of scientific thought".²¹⁰ Coupled with this phenomenology's desire to demarcate an originary site for human being in its phenomenal or factual existence culminates in Heidegger's most radical developments on Being and his blunt assertion that "science does not think".²¹¹ Very much in contrast to this were the aspirations of structuralism to an objective and scientific status beyond philosophy and ideology, a methodological efficacy in the study of man comparable to that of the exact sciences. In this connection, in an attempt to fuse nature and culture the structural anthropology of Levi-Strauss itself claimed inspiration from the then dramatic advances of a number of auxiliary models with a techno-scientific component—biology, cybernetics, information theory—in addition to, and often inseparable from, the fundamental contribution of linguistics. In this respect it is very instructive to read the introduction to Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics*, published in 1948. The first thing that strikes the reader of this introduction is just how wide Wiener's conception of the field of cybernetics is. In a sentence which must have provided inspiration for Levi-Strauss, having indicated the potential of cybernetics in the fields of physiology, neurology and psychology, Wiener extends the possible interdisciplinary applications of the discipline into the social and human sciences: "As to sociology and anthropology, it is manifest that the importance of information and communication as mechanisms of organization proceeds beyond the individual into the community."²¹² Whatever Wiener's subsequent reservations about the applicability of cybernetics to the social sciences,²¹³ it is clearly his idea of information as a mechanism of regulation that informs Levi-Strauss's thought.

²¹⁰ *Idid.*, p.2.

²¹¹ *WCT.*, p. 34.

²¹² Norbert Wiener, *The Human use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and Society*. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950), p. 18.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

Now, however limited the substance of its claims might appear in retrospect, at least one effect of the structuralist adventure was the opening up of French philosophy to a greater degree of interdisciplinary exchange both within and beyond the traditional circle of humanistic disciplines. In this regard Derrida's deconstructive reading of Levi-Strauss and the scientific claims of structuralism should not be seen as a rejection of the renewed dialogue with techno-science implicit in the structuralist programme. Rather, it is a displacement of this programme in response to the very specific historical circumstance involving the limitation and decentering of the structurality of structure and a change in emphasis from the restricted economy of "language" to the more general economy of "writing": "This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse—provided we can agree on this word—that is to say, a system in which the central signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely."²¹⁴ This shift from "language" to "writing" had a double effect. First, "Man" was irrevocably displaced as a possible object of knowledge, which is to say becomes an object known scientifically as an effect of structure; second, the universals of Western thought were confronted with the enigma of their outside and other. The spreading impact of the human sciences on philosophy, and the resulting collapse of philosophy's traditional "over-arching" position as arbiter of rational enquiry, exposes it to the necessity of rethinking its relation to the multiple orders of knowledge and practice.

This brings me to what is one of the most discussed moments of the period, what is now conventionally presented as a minor epistemic shift occurring within structuralism, or between structuralism and post-structuralism (or ultra-, neo-, or superstructuralism), but which is actually much more complex.²¹⁵ The different humanist reactions to

²¹⁴ *SSP.*, p. 280.

²¹⁵ For a wide ranging discussion of the complexities involved here see Tilottama Rijan, *Deconstruction and the Reminders of Phenomenology*, (Stanford, Calif.:Stanford University Press, 2002).

structuralism could be characterized as a rearguard action of a more traditional philosophy that has registered the trauma of its subjection to the rapid transformations of post-war techno-scientific culture, but had never assimilated or accepted the lessons of the human sciences. On the other hand, certain figures of French philosophy, and particularly Derrida, had both assimilated the lessons of structuralism and were prepared to take them a step further.

As is well known, Derrida initially offered grammatology as “the science of textuality,” claiming that it “must go beyond metaphysical positivism and scientism, and accentuate whatever in the effective work of science contributes to freeing it of the metaphysical bonds that have borne on its definition and its movement since its beginnings.”²¹⁶ Furthermore, he proposed that “grammatology must pursue and consolidate that which, in scientific practice, has always already begun to exceed the logocentric closure”.²¹⁷ By this he means scientific practices that take *logos* as central, which assert the prevalence of the spoken word, need to be examined and explored at their limits. Grammatology takes up the question of science as *logos* and considers the extent to which it can take itself as a science. Grammatology “inscribes and delimits science”²¹⁸ That is, grammatology writes or rewrites the features or conditions of a particular science and at the same time demonstrates the limits, margins, places of closure which that particular science or even science-in-general sets for itself by its very practice. Such a move is evident in Derrida’s encounter with Levi-Strauss. For as Derrida effectively shows, however radical Levi-Strauss’ work may appear, there is a conceptual threshold that he is unwilling, or perhaps simply unable, to cross. In this case, Derrida’s deconstructive reading of the structuralist programme articulates what may be seen as a central paradox in Levi-Strauss’s thought: that while he is impeccably *modern* in his mediation of the science and technology of his time, he is at the same time entirely

²¹⁶ *P.*, 36.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

traditional in his failure to think through the implications of this ambient culture. Thus, while Levi-Strauss draws on both the information sciences and the cybernetic model his thinking is symptomatic of the metaphysical impulse that Derrida articulates through his elaboration of the traditional treatment of writing. This is apparent from Derrida's now classic reading in *Of Grammatology*.²¹⁹ Gathering a series of remarks and narratives from Levi-Strauss's work, Derrida underlines how the anthropologists distinction between primitive and civilized societies depends upon a distinction between speech and writing that is derived from the concepts and values of metaphysics. More specifically, Levi-Strauss's unarticulated use of this distinction is predicated on the logocentric disavowal or inscription whereby writing is primarily seen as an auxiliary technology, an instrument or tool with respect to speech—where speech *precedes* writing and the two are distinct. Levi-Strauss's apparent exit from philosophy through the human sciences naively repeats traditional philosophical values in producing itself through schema that are complicit with the very discourse from which he wishes to wrest himself. When least metaphysical Levi-Strauss is at his most metaphysical. The naivety of Levi-Strauss's enterprise is not, however, a historical contingency, nor can it be reduced. As Derrida says:

This necessity is irreducible, it is not a historical contingency; we should carefully consider all its implications. But if no-one can escape it, if no-one is therefore responsible for giving in to it, however little, this does not mean that all ways of giving in to it are equally pertinent. The quality and fecundity of a discourse are perhaps to be measured by the critical rigour with which this relation to the history of metaphysics and inherited concepts is thought through. This is about a critical relation to the language of the [human sciences] and a critical responsibility of the discourse itself. It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which

²¹⁹ See *OG.*, pp. 101-40.

borrowed from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself. A problem of *economy and strategy*.²²⁰

Of economy and strategy and, therefore, we might want to say, of the calculation of writing and the stakes of deconstruction. What I want to do now is examine these stakes in more detail as they emerge from out of Derrida's entry into the debate between philosophy and the human sciences, a context which, as will now be apparent, points to the interaction of Derrida's work with a wider contemporary episteme, and, within that episteme, the singular discourses of the sciences and new information and telecommunication technologies.

Aporetic middle ground: reinscribing Husserl

As I have said, Derrida's negotiation between philosophy and the human sciences along with his deconstruction of the structuralist program carries with it and develops a clear set of intellectual, disciplinary and institutional stakes. Such stakes, which have often been ignored or underestimated by Derrida's interpreters, go to the heart of his articulation of the closure of metaphysics and of the elaboration of general or arche-writing. On the one hand, Derrida wishes to show that it is impossible to dominate philosophical concepts from *outside* philosophy, since the attempt meets an essential limit in the very philosophical nature of the terms being used to dominate it. In this case Derrida's patient interrogation of, for example, the terms of propriety embedded in the discourses of linguistics, poetics, rhetoric, anthropology, sociology, history, even psychoanalysis, involves demonstrating that in every case the very concepts supposed to operate the reduction of traditional philosophical problems to various positive conditions are themselves blindly and uncritically inherited from the philosophical tradition. Here, according to a mechanism Derrida will later describe as "transcendental contraband," the

²²⁰ *SSP.*, p. 282.

very concept supposed to reduce the transcendental claims of philosophy itself comes to occupy a transcendental position which the discourse in question has no further means of understanding, just because it is premised on the claim to reduce the transcendental claims of philosophy to more “positive” realities of whatever order. In the absence of critical analysis of this mechanism in general, the human sciences and indeed science per se remains in thrall to the very metaphysical concepts it claims to reduce. On the other hand however, and for the same reason, philosophy is incapable of dominating the “empiricity” or “facticity”—that is, their inscription—of these same discourses since this empiricity and facticity inform its very gestures when it is least aware of it.²²¹ The consequent negotiation between philosophy and the human sciences enacts a displacement and reorganization of the “metaphysical” opposition between a transcendental approach and an empirical approach opening up an aporetic and uncontrollable “position” that privileges neither the inside nor the outside, but analyses what constitutes the very possibility of these oppositions by placing the opposites back into the transductive relation in which they are compounded with one another. What is important is that, for Derrida, it places us in a *middle* ground, neither suspended in the transcendental nor rooted to the empirical, neither in philosophy nor any empirical negotiation of the world that refuses to pass through the transcendental.

The preceding is intimately informed and corroborated for Derrida by a fundamental insight achieved in the late work of Husserl. His previous radicalization of the Husserlian insight in both *The Problem of Genesis in the Philosophy of Husserl* and his introduction to *The Origin of Geometry* as well as the elaboration of the trace in *Speech and Phenomena* form the background to immense weight of Derrida’s argument showing how it is both “possible” *and* irreducible thereby connecting it to the problematic of writing. Derrida’s arguments here are well known but in the context of the above argument with regard to the structuralist programme it will be useful to briefly refer to them in turn.

²²¹ For a fuller account of this pervasive structure in Derrida’s writings see “Derridabase.” in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), pp. 267-284.

For Husserlian Phenomenology the difference between the transcendental and the empirical assumes the form of, on the one hand, ideal objects—attained through what Husserl calls the phenomenological reduction, “bracketing” or epoché of the life world with all its variations and contingencies—and, on the other, the world in its difference and empiricity. In Husserl’s “The Origin of Geometry” this difference was radicalized when he derived the possibility of the phenomenological reduction of the world—and the accompanying access to transcendental ideality—from writing; for Husserl, ideality *must* be embodied and repeatable to escape the limitations of a unique present. This understanding derives from an “intentional analysis” that preserves writing’s relation to a pure consciousness and disregards writing’s “factuality,” its worldly existence. However, thereby lies the paradox of the Husserlian text and what I said above with regard to Levi-Strauss’s relation to the modern techoscientific world—he is both modern and traditional—can equally be said of Husserl with the difference that whereas Levi-Strauss would wish to effect the reduction of philosophy Husserl works in the opposite direction seeking to protect the philosophical gaze from an empirical and historical outside to which it opens itself. With an increasing incisiveness Derrida analyses the Husserlian corpus in terms of the evasions and substitutions used to achieve this. He takes up Husserl’s anxiety over “a certain technician and objectivist irresponsibility” in the practice of science and philosophy, along with a “historicism blinded by the empirical cult of *fact* and causalist presumption.”²²² At the risk of oversimplification let me say Husserl worried over the circumstance that geometrical theorems can be deduced algebraically—in effect that Euclid can be replaced by a machine. Technicization, as the repeatability of or manipulation of marks not ground in some conscious intuition, is presented as a loss of memory. Husserl agonized about the power of calculative formulations in philosophy and in the sciences generally. He argued that hypomnesic calculation had come to determine the essence of modernity, usurping the originary eidetic intuitions upon which certainty of

²²² Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavy, Jr. (Lincoln:University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 26; hereafter cited as *IOG*.

deduction in geometry should have been founded. Trying to trace the historical genesis or constitution of ideal meaning Husserl insisted upon the “imperative of univocity,” that the same idealities bear the same meaning across time, that later generations be able to repeat and reactivate exactly the same sense, in order thereby to allow communication and hence progress among generations of investigators.

In deconstructing Husserl, Derrida does not renounce the constitution of meaning and scientific ideas, even while he emphasizes the inscription of ideality in the flux of writing. In an often quoted passage of *Of Grammatology* he writes:

Writing is not only an auxiliary means in the service of science—and possibly its object— but first, as Husserl in particular pointed out in the *Origin of Geometry*, the condition of the possibility of ideal objects and therefore of scientific objectivity. Before being its object, writing is the condition of the *epistémè*....Historicity itself is tied to the possibility of writing ; to the possibility of writing in general, beyond those particular forms of writing in the name of which we have long spoken of peoples without writing and without history. Before being the object of history—of an historical science—writing opens the field of history—of historical becoming. And the former (*Historie* in German) presupposes the latter (*Geschichte*).²²³

To the extent that writing is necessary for the constitution of sense, Husserl’s phenomenology does not leave the realm of factuality, but it is not an empiricism; it is a science of origins insofar as it insists that the historical habitat authenticate truth. History is where instituting fact is singular, irreducible and invariable. In seeking the primordial constitution of truth, phenomenology proceeds from the sedimentation of tradition, from history, to the institutive act, an origin, “the unique fact of the *first time*,”²²⁴ We may venture that this sedimentation constitutes an archive. Writing inscribes the past in a way

²²³ *OG.*, p. 27.

²²⁴ *IOG.*, p. 48.

that produces a new relation to the present and future, which may now be conceived within the horizon of a historical temporality, and as the element of (the transmission of) ideality. As Derrida is keen to emphasize, writing constitutes ideal objects by enabling them to transcend the facticity of a particular time and place. Yet the condition of ideality is the repetition of a written mark through time and space, an inscription that is itself a sedimentary deposit, necessarily restricting the purity of the transcendence from the sediment that is aimed at. Conversely, the sedimentary mark that makes up the support of ideality does not have the status of a substantial thing, for such repetition is not possible unless the difference of each inscription re-marks the inscription. This movement reveals that, if writing constitutes transcendence, arche-writing comprehends the very process of constitution. Arche-writing “originates” in the very genativity *of*—a written origin or *inscription*, “an origin which has no meaning before the *of*, an origin inseparable from genativity and from the space that it engenders and orients: an inscribed origin. The inscription is the written origin: traced and henceforth inscribed in a system, in a figure which it no longer governs.”²²⁵ In contrast to Husserl’s concept of writing as what emancipates sense from the factual or worldly realm, Derrida’s notion of inscription points to a dehiscence, an opening, that confounds the opposition of the finite and the infinite, same and other, being-sense and graphic sign. Whereas the phenomenological reduction is aimed at essences, an inscribed origin exceeds any notion of a singular or pure source; writing is what frees sense from the temporal and spatial limits of the speaking subject to create “an intentionality without intentum”; that is, writing displaces phenomenological intentionality with an “autonomous [quasi]transcendental field”.²²⁶

²²⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 115.

²²⁶ *IOG.*, p. 88.

The method of deconstruction: an argument for historical necessity

This excursion into Derrida's engagement with Husserlian phenomenology allows us to approach the question aporetic status of the deconstructive gesture. Derrida's thinking, it now seems reasonably clear, follows a rhythm which shuttles between what would traditionally be distinguished as the transcendental and the empirical (as philosophy and its others), asserting the priority of neither and the subordination of both to a wider movement of generalized inscription neither is in a position to understand. Richard Beardsworth has called this orientation the method of deconstruction.²²⁷ Now, as anyone who is familiar with Derrida's work will recall, the use of the term method as a means of characterizing what goes on with deconstruction is controversial. As Derrida has repeated insisted, deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one, especially if the technical and procedural significations of the word is stressed. Recognizing the necessity of Derrida's resistance to this term Beardsworth emphasizes that his use of it is contextually determined and strategic, motivated by a wish to press home the precise disciplinary and institutional stakes of Derrida's text. In citing Beardsworth I want to take up this task but with the additional aim of tying this to the historical dimension of Derrida's argument. In this connection, if, like Beardsworth, my use of the term method underscores the necessity of thinking through the institutional and disciplinary implications that follow from Derrida's reinscription of the metaphysical opposition between the transcendental and empirical, it also emphasizes the peculiarity that will make of deconstruction a radical empiricism that proceeds according to what Derrida takes to be the necessity of a certain "historical analysis".

In order to open onto what it at issue here let me pose an open set of questions that are in fact first asked by Gayatri Spivak in her preface to the English translation of *Of Grammatology*.²²⁸ Spivak has been discussing a number of small but decisive changes

²²⁷ See Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 5.

²²⁸ *OG*, pp. ix-lxxxvii.

and interpolations that have made their way into the first part of Derrida's text (Part 1 of *Of Grammatology* is an expanded version of a number of review articles of books published in the early 1960s), changes which turn on Derrida's arguments for the fact that the change in emphasis from language to writing are historically necessary events. Let me briefly sketch what Spivak is referring to. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida characterizes the present age as one in "suspense between two ages of writing," one in which "linear writing" and "the book" are "[b]y a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible," marked by a closure we thereby merely glimpse. Opening the first chapter of part I of the text ("The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing") Derrida reads the signs of this closure, which has "already been announced...*as such* and *after the fact*," in a generalized crisis, an *exhaustion*, which is also a symptom which indicates that "a historico-metaphysical epoch *must* finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon."²²⁹ Insofar as the definition of language that Derrida is working with here takes its point of departure in certain working hypotheses of classical structuralism (mainly in the officially sanctioned reading of Saussure's differential notion of the sign as outlined in his *Cours de linguistique générale* and in the writings of Levi-Strauss which Derrida takes to privilege a theoretically comprehensive and enclosed system which attaches it in general to "hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak") such a crisis marks a decentering of the structuralist "taxonomy" which "strictly speaking, amounts to destroying the concept of the "sign" and its entire logic." Again, this is a matter of necessity since, as Derrida states, "[u]ndoubtedly, it is not by chance that this *overwhelming* supervenes at the moment when the extension of the concept of language effaces all its limits."²³⁰ In the same movement whereby language effaces all its limits, at that moment when it ceases to be "*guaranteed* by the infinite signified that seemed to exceed it," there is announced a new situation for the Western concept of language where it is revealed as the guise or disguise of a writing, "more fundamental than that which,

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

before this conversion, passed for the simple supplement to the spoken word”.²³¹ Yet again, “[t]hese disguises are not historical contingencies that one might admire or regret. Their movement is absolutely necessary, with a necessity that cannot be judged by any other tribunal.” Thus, *Of Grammatology* marks a response to a situation which indicates nothing but the necessity of the “death of speech (of so called full speech) and a new mutation in the history of writing, of history as writing.”²³² Consequently, all those domains, both natural and cultural, which for a certain period had been conceived on the restricted economy of “language” are now being reconceived on the more general economy of writing. As we have seen, writing is the constituting possibility or “originary synthesis” of the differential interplay which intimately affects everything that enters in to a relation of difference or opposition—presence and absence, self and other, living and non living, indeed of all alterity between terms and entities. All the manifestations of the resurgence of the graphic, so visibly different, share an irreducible and invisible element—the *gramme* or *grapheme*, the trace: hence inscription in general.

Having offered this sketch let me return to Spivak; she asks: “In a text where he elaborately launches a theory against teleological patternings of history and thought, where he delivers the notion of the play of necessity and contingency, why does Derrida fabricate so strong an argument for historical necessity? Why is the opening chapter—“The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing”—full of a slightly embarrassing messianic promise? If we really do not believe in “epistemological cut off points,” or in the possibility of stepping out of the metaphysical enclosure by simply deciding to, or in the linearity of time, then with what seriousness can we declare a different “world to come,” a world where the “values of sign, speech, and writing will be made to tremble.” How reconcile ourselves with this break between the world of the past and the world of the future? It seems,” Spivak asserts, “an empiricist betrayal of the structure of difference

²³¹ Ibid., p. 7.

²³² Ibid., p. 8.

and postponement, and any deconstructive reading of Derrida will have to take this into account.”²³³

Now, in the light of Derrida’s latest concerns, Spivak’s assertion that a “slightly embarrassing messianic promise” pervades *Of Grammatology* appears somewhat ironic since both the messianic and the promise have become central concerns of Derrida’s more recent texts. To stick with our present discussion however, let me suggest that judging by her remarks Spivak has not taken the measure of Derrida’s reinscription of Heidegger’s thinking of the history of Being. As we have seen, Derrida’s text carries the full weight of this thinking even as it transforms it, even as, for example, he rethinks Heidegger’s thinking of the end of philosophy as its closure. It would seem Spivak has not taken the implications of this distinction on board since it undermines any “break between the world of the past and the world of the future”. As Derrida tells Henri Ronsboeuvre (remarks that could be taken as a reply to Spivak), “one would be mistaken in coming to the conclusion of a death of the book and a birth of writing from that which is entitled “The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing.” One page before the chapter which bears this title a distinction is proposed between *closure* and *end*. What is held within the demarcated closure may continue indefinitely. If one does not simply read the title, it announces precisely that there is no end of the book and no beginning of writing. The chapter shows just that: writing does not begin. It is even on the basis of writing, if one can put it this way, that one can put in question the search for an *archie*, an absolute beginning, an origin. Writing can no more begin, therefore, than the book can end.”²³⁴

Just as she has missed the distinction Derrida wants to think between end and closure, in speaking of an “empiricist betrayal of the structure of difference and postponement” Spivak seems to have underestimated what is at stake in the method of deconstruction. Indeed, it is precisely here that one can provide the test for the questions she raises. If this method articulates the necessity of reinscribing the metaphysical opposition between the

²³³ Ibid., p. lxxxii.

²³⁴ *P.*, pp. 13-14.

transcendental and the empirical, thinking this necessity means thinking the inescapability of inscription in general—which would include the instances of history, world, experience, thought, genetics, technics, etc. Inversely, thinking inscription in general is to trace the closure of the logocentric-metaphysical era. Said otherwise, it is in the irreducibility of the double move or method of deconstruction (neither in philosophy nor outside it) that Derrida locates the historical necessity—the “new mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing”—to which this method corresponds. This aporetic middle ground opens up a movement that consists not only in inscribing itself in a context, but thereby also in producing a context, transforming a given context, opening it up and bringing about a new contextual giving. From this point of view, deconstruction inflects a context and, in so doing, appeals for a new one from where the future of thinking and practice (writing) is thought.

“We must begin wherever we are”: Derrida’s radical empiricism

Let me take a closer look at what is involved here as it emerges in the argumentation of *Of Grammatology*. In this text the method of deconstruction merges with the question of the exorbitant: “*But what is the exorbitant?*”²³⁵ Derrida writes, “I wished to reach the point of a certain exteriority in relation to the totality of the age of logocentrism. Starting from this point of exteriority, a certain deconstruction of that totality which is also a traced path, of that orb (*orbis*) which is also orbitary (*orbita*), might be broached. The first gesture of this departure can not be given methodological or logical intra-orbitary assurances.”²³⁶ Rather,

The [deconstructive] *departure* is radically empiricist. It proceeds like a wandering thought on the possibility of itinerary and of method. It is affected by nonknowledge as by its future and it *ventures out* deliberately. I have myself defined the form and

²³⁵ *OG.*, p. 161.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

vulnerability of this empiricism. But here the very concept of empiricism destroys itself.²³⁷

To exceed the metaphysical orb, to trace its outline or margin, is to think the entirety of the classical metaphysical oppositions, particularly the one within which the value of empiricism is held—the opposition of philosophy and non philosophy (another name for empiricism). The consequences of Derrida’s “radical empiricism” are quickly brought out: “We must begin *wherever we are* and the thought of the trace which cannot not take the scent into account, has already taught us it is impossible to justify our point of departure absolutely. *Wherever we are*,” Derrida continues, “in a text where we already believe ourselves to be”.²³⁸ This syntactically enigmatic supposition of the “already” is crucial; it illustrates Derrida’s notoriously misunderstood “axial proposition” that “there is nothing outside the text [there is no outside-text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]”²³⁹ This might more helpfully be phrased as “there is nothing outside context” (but only on condition of trying to situate an experience of context as necessarily in excess of, supplementary to and breaking with any experience, presence or intention.) Indeed, what is interesting here is that the continuum of writing, as Derrida presents it, is not only a structural one, but also, inevitably, a historical one—or rather, more precisely, a natural historical one (these terms of course being presented under erasure by Derrida). The processes of differentiation and deferment—*différance*—that the tracing of the graphic makes possible is part of a “pluri-dimensional” process of “evolution” which precedes, conditions, and cuts across (or, rather, cuts together and grafts) all orders of beings extending far beyond the narrowly conceived instance of the “human”:

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 162.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 163.

This movement goes far beyond the possibilities of the “intentional consciousness.” It is an emergence which makes the *grammè* appear *as such* (that is to say according to a new structure of non presence) and undoubtedly makes possible the emergence of systems of writing in the narrow sense. Since “genetic inscription” and the “short programmatic chains” regulating the behaviour of the amoeba or the annelid up to the passage beyond alphabetic writing to the orders of the *logos* and of a certain homo sapiens, the possibility of the *grammè* structures the movement of its history according to rigorously original levels, types and rhythms.²⁴⁰

All this points to the fact that Derrida’s radically empiricist deconstructive method depends on a strategy that justifies its *departure* as an “historical analysis,” a move which requires that an incision be made in the general movement of the field in the process of deconstruction. Derrida summarizes these arguments in *Positions* when he writes:

The *incision* of deconstruction, which is not a voluntary decision or an absolute beginning, does not take place just anywhere, or in an absolute elsewhere. An incision, precisely, it can be made only according to lines of force and forces of rupture that are localizable in the discourse to be deconstructed. The *topical* and *technical* determination of the most necessary sites and operators—beginnings, holds, levers, etc.—in a given situation depends upon an historical analysis. The analysis is *made* in the general movement of the field, and is never exhausted by the conscious calculation of a subject.²⁴¹

As an historical analysis Derrida’s exorbitant method traces a certain force of dislocation or heterogeneity, a disjunction of the present in which something happens. Here, let me recall Derrida’s insistence that “Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 84.

²⁴¹ *P.*, p. 82.

await the deliberation, consciousness or organization of a subject, or even of modernity. *It deconstructs it-self. It can be deconstructed.*[Ça se déconstruit.] The “it” [ça] is not here an impersonal thing that is opposed to some egological subjectivity. *It is in deconstruction* (the *Littré* says, “to deconstruct it-self [*se déconstruire*]...to lose its construction”).²⁴² Indeed, it is this question which opens the program of *Of Grammatology*. Part I of this text (“Writing before the Letter”), in which Derrida relates the problematic of writing as idea and as phenomenon to both the mainstream of Western philosophy and its other(s), constitutes a manifesto for what deconstructs itself. As such it is something of a declaration that,

corresponds to a condition of forces and translates a historical calculation. Thus, over and above those that I have already defined, a certain number of givens belonging to the discourse of our time have progressively imposed this choice upon me. The word [writing] must refer itself to a certain number of contemporary discourses whose force I intend to take into account. Not that I accept them totally. But the word [writing] establishes the clearest connections with them and thus permits me to dispense with certain developments which have already demonstrated their effectiveness in those fields.²⁴³

In pointing up this attachment to a certain number of contemporary discourses, contextual givens (“lines of force”) of the general movement of the field in deconstruction, Derrida attests to those exigencies that prompted him to advance the historical analysis of the closure of the logocentric-metaphysical era. In this connection, as I noted at the outset of this chapter, *Of Grammatology* proceeds from a gesture that has become characteristic of many of Derrida’s initiatives—an enumeration of the historical signs or symptoms that

²⁴² Jacques Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” trans. David Wood and Andrew Benjamin in *Derrida and Difference*, ed. D. Wood and R. Bernasconi, (Evanston:Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 1-5. p. 4.

²⁴³ *OG.*, p. 70.

call for the initiative in question. In this case the signs pointing to the necessity of the transition from language to the more general notion of writing. In Derrida's words,

And if this symptom is revealed today, it is not at all due to some more or less ingenious discovery initiated by someone here or there. It is due rather to a certain total transformation (that can no longer even be called "historical" or "worldwide," because the transformation infringes on the security of such significations) that can also be ascertained in other determined fields (mathematical and logical formalization, linguistics, ethology, psychoanalysis, political economy, biology, the technology of information, programming, etc.).²⁴⁴

This inventory of signs for the global liberation of the graphic can (and should) be extended. Indeed, insofar as writing is the "medium of the great metaphysical, scientific, technical and economic adventure of the West" as well as of the "cultural areas" on which it imposes its "laws," such signs are, at least potentially, limitless. That said, it is not a matter of an overwhelming range of phenomena, an unmanageable empirical abundance; it is a matter, rather, of a series of transformations which, exceeding the orbit of logocentric-metaphysics, bring about a thinking of the general economy within which the restricted economies of the specific disciplines must be approached so as to rethink their implication in the event. This is precisely the method of deconstruction and points up its disciplinary and institutional stakes. What I want to do now is press home these stakes. This will lead me to my main interest of the chapter which is to demonstrate the irreducible implication of deconstruction and technics.

²⁴⁴ *P.*, pp. 6-7.

Transversal relations: Derrida and techno-science

Being concerned with all manner of inscription and with the question of how any experience, practice or mode of knowledge relates to writing, the Derridean delimitation of metaphysics articulates an open set of *transversal* relations—*envois* without destination to use Derrida's postal discourse—with emergent forms of knowledge and their technical elaborations. In this regard *Of Grammatology* anticipates many of Derrida's later works where we find an explicit call for trans-lating and trans-fering coordinations—multiple passages (of thought) that traverse institutional boundaries (“an immense and differentiated terrain”) and open up entirely new problematics and institutional (or extra-institutional) spaces.²⁴⁵ The collapse of philosophy's traditional “over-arching” position, articulated across Derrida's reinscription of Heidegger's thinking of the history of philosophy along with his reworking of traditional opposition between the transcendental and empirical, exposes it to the necessity of rethinking its relation to multiple orders of knowledge and practice and, in particular, to the techno-scientific mutations that affect them. It must think its *implication* in these multiple orders even as it thinks their role in it.²⁴⁶ In calling for this new philosophical undertaking Derrida participates in and radicalizes the structuralist program, thereby marking the closure of an epoch of specialization (marked in all its breadth by so called “fundamental” and so called “applied” or “end-oriented” research),²⁴⁷ toward the discursive formation of disciplinary

²⁴⁵ I refer in particular to Derrida's extensive writings on the institution of philosophy collected in *Du Droit à la philosophie*, (Paris: Galilée, 1990), writings that range from the earliest proposals and essays written for GREPH (the “Groupe de recherches sur l'enseignement de la philosophie”) to the more recent work on behalf of the Collège International de Philosophie.

²⁴⁶ This is a point Fynsk makes. Cf. *op. cit.*, n 176 at p. 154-156.

²⁴⁷ I am marking here a quiding thread that weaves together Derrida's interrogation of the thought of “destination” as an integral element of his articulation of the closure of metaphysics. Such a thought condenses and formalizes possibilities for thinking philosophy's engagement in the transversal relations to which it is called. On the one hand, Derrida says, the turn (and return) to philosophy on the part of the human or social, life or natural sciences, takes the form of a meditation on ends or finality (which along with the question of “destination” in all its breadth, forms the basic lines of Derrida's schema). This turn meets in philosophy itself a fundamental transformation of the problematic of ends and transmission in the form of a new thought of “dispensation,” “sending,” “the postal,”—a thought which no longer belongs to philosophy proper and, as we have seen in our discussion of Derrida's reinscription of Heidegger's epochal schema of the history of metaphysics, has the force to recast the history of philosophy as a thinking of Being

syntheses, including, such composites as semiology, molecular biology, cybernetics and systems theory.

It should be clear by now that the intertext of the vocabulary of these disciplines is symptomatic and not simply a passing gesture to the intellectual fashion of the moment. On the contrary, the philosophical project that Derrida undertakes in *Of Grammatology* and related texts cannot be abstracted from the wider disciplinary context with which philosophy has to reckon. It is essential to his affirmation of the urgently contemporary relevance of his philosophy of inscription and thereby to the historical strategy (contextualization) of the deconstructive method. Indeed, as Johnson says, Derrida's work would be "unintelligible if it were abstracted from the context of the post-war advances in the related fields of biology and cybernetic theory".²⁴⁸ Of course, as Johnson rightly points out, the sciences Derrida refers to here are not *any* of the sciences. Modern molecular biology and cybernetics occupy what might be termed the "soft" end of the "hard"

and thereby all the fundamental questions of philosophy and techno-science. In this regard see "Sendoffs" in *Yale French Studies*, n° 77, 1990 Yale University. pp. 11-43.

²⁴⁸ See Johnson, (1993) Cf. *op. cit.*, n 208 p. 143. As Johnson points out some of the insights provided by these disciplines were being given more general expression in the fields of systems theory which addresses the following problems: 1) the self-organization of complex systems and 2) their self-regulation through operations such as feed-back; 3) the passage between the differing levels of a system; 4) the modalities of openness and closure of a given system; 5) the question of teleology and finality; 6) the concept of code. Along with Johnson a number of commentators have variously pointed to the parallels between his notion of *differance* and the concepts of difference and feedback in cybernetics. As early as 1972 Anthony Wilden gave a reading of Derrida of Freud and Derrida that compares Derrida's presentation of *differance* with Gregory Bateson's idea of information as difference. For her part Irene Harvey (1986), asks: "Is not not this reflexivity or "circular causality", characteristic of cybernetics, which Derrida himself is aiming towards with his notion of *différance* as economy?" Derrida's relation to biology, cybernetics and information theory is also treated by Richard Doyle in his *On the Living Beyond* (1994), Chapter 5, "Allergies of reading: DNA, language, and the problem of origins". Within the wider scientific field Arklady Plotnitsky's *Complementarity* (1994) details the "analogies," "affinities," and "metaphoric parallels" of the Derridean text with that of Niels Bohr, thereby showing a generalized "anti-epistemological" effect of an ineluctable loss of meaning accompanying the necessary replacement of the restricted economy of classical physics and metaphysics by a general economy. In connection with this see also Plotnitsky's "But It Is Above All Not True: Derrida, Relativity, and the "Science Wars" (1997) which offers a response to the attacks on Derrida by Gross and Levitt in *Higher Superstition* (1994) and by Alan Sokal in his *Social Text* (1996). Christopher Norris, on the other hand, enlists Derrida's aid in reining in Plotnitsky in support of a defence of some minimal commitment to ontological realism in science. (See especially Chapter 4, "Quantum mechanics: a case for deconstruction" in Norris, *Against Relativism*, 1997.) A number of other studies have, with varying degree's of success, attempted to offer analogies between Derrida's work to that of chaos theory. In this regard see N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound* (1990), especially Chapter 7, "Chaos and poststructuralism"; Laurie McRobert, "On fractal thought" (1995); Robert Smith, "Short Cuts to Derrida" (1996); and Alexander Argyros, *A Blessed Rage for Order: Deconstruction, Evolution, and Chaos* (1991).

sciences, and are of interest to philosophy and the human sciences precisely because they touch more immediately upon questions concerning the cultural fabric of “life”. The preoccupation of cybernetics with information transfer (feedback) and auto-mobile processes (communication and control) in animals, machines and humans has placed a large question mark over what we mean by the “life” sciences offering as it does new ways of thinking the relationship between the animal and the human, the human and the technological. The latter question, the question concerning technology, also reminds us that Derrida’s own thinking of writing is not simply inspired by scientific *theory* (given Derrida’s deconstruction of the empirico-transcendental difference it is precisely the traditional oppositions of “theory” and “practice,” of “pure” and “applied” science which are in question here) but also, inseparably, by the *practice* of the new information and communication technologies developed in the post-war period.²⁴⁹ In this case, *Of Grammatology*, announcing the “death of the book,” participates in a “practical deconstruction” which covers electronic messages and which are part of the domain of inscription in general. Thus:

The development of the *practical methods* of information retrieval extends the possibilities of the “message” vastly, to the point where it is no longer the “written” translation of a language, the transporting of a signified which could remain spoken in its integrity. It goes hand in hand with the extension of phonography and of all the means of conserving the spoken language, of making it function without the presence of the speaking subject. This development, coupled with that of anthropology and that of the history of writing, teaches us that phonetic writing, the medium of the great metaphysical, scientific, technical, and economic adventure of the West, is limited in space and time and limits itself even as it is the process of imposing its laws upon the

²⁴⁹ Johnson, 1998. Cf. *op. cit.*, n 208 at p. 478.

cultural areas that had escaped it. But this nonfortuitous conjunction of cybernetics and the “human sciences” of writing leads to a more profound reversal.²⁵⁰

Along with those already quoted this statement highlights the considerable importance that the recent onset of that set of technologies—designed to optimize the transmission of data and relay of information—termed telecommunicational (in the broadest sense) have for Derrida’s program in general.²⁵¹ Indeed, it must be emphasized that from his earliest texts on Derrida is aware of, and makes clear, the fact that the logocentric repression of writing is only now visible and understandable in the light of recent developments in the wider interdisciplinary context, that is, the context of what were at the time still recent developments in the techno-sciences and most strikingly where this concerns the new information and communications technologies. This is point made by Gregory Ulmer who argues that Derrida’s negotiation of the historical transition toward writing “reflects an internalization of the electronic media, thus marking what is really at stake in the debate surrounding the closure of Western metaphysics”. He then states “a fuller appreciation of the import of Derrida’s style for philosophy is possible in the context of this technological transformation, indicating the position that enables him to compose scripts “beyond the book.””²⁵² Notwithstanding Derrida’s resistance to any notion of internalization, Ulmer’s point is taken; the relevance and scope of Derrida’s grammatological articulation of the closure of metaphysics is made more intelligible if we consider it in conjunction with contemporary technological formations in which it is manifest. Johnson who, as I have already indicated, makes much of the resonance between Derrida’s formulation of writing, trace and other afferent concepts to some of the central concepts of information, cybernetic, and systems theory goes further taking Derrida’s program to be directly

²⁵⁰ *OG.*, p. 10.

²⁵¹ In “Sendoffs” Derrida calls for a ““Fundamental” reflection on the concepts of “communication” and “long-distance communication,” on the no doubt structural and thus irreducible links between *techné* in general

²⁵² Gregory Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 303.

implicated in the more general technological evolution of modern society. He writes, “[Derrida’s] diagnosis of a certain “end” of (logocentric) metaphysics, of which the grammatological turn is a symptom, depends on the total social fact of this qualitative as well as quantitative evolution of technological culture”²⁵³ For Jean-Joseph Goux, whom Johnson also cites, among other historical factors it is the fact of the new ambient technologies which have made possible Derrida’s deconstruction of the traditional downgrading of writing as mere *techne*. Goux writes:

The scriptural and graphical operation, which moreover, raises the very question of technology, of the general relation between the living and the machine, is no longer an object of disparagement. There is no longer a philosophical downgrading of the material reality of the signifier, what cybernetic theory readily refers to as the “support” of a “semantics”...As we know, for the new technicist thought, meaning or information have no intrinsic essentiality. According to the cyberneticians, meaning is nothing more than the ensemble of actions it both activates and regulates from machine to machine. It is clearly this new phase of information technology, still in its early stages, which Derrida alludes to, this revolutionary event in the history of the gram that, among other historical determinants, has made possible the new grammatological enquiry.²⁵⁴

Following Goux’s remarks let me now insist on this point: contemporary technological society as a whole far from being merely a theme of the Derridean text does in fact constitute the field from which the closure of the logocentric epoch can be understood and is the key to its deconstruction.

Such insistence must, of course, be tempered. For it remains the case that even as he asserts that the transformations effected by the contemporary techno-sciences constitute a practical deconstruction of the world, Derrida makes no systematic use in his work of the

²⁵³ Johnson (1993) Cf. *op. cit.*, n 208 at p. 6.

²⁵⁴ Jean Joseph-Goux cited by Johnson (1993). Cf. *op. cit.*, n 208 at pp. 5-6.

developing conceptual and methodological matrix that the new technologies bring. Even in what has to be seen as the most declarative of his texts in this respect, *Of Grammatology*, the substance of Derrida's references to cybernetics and biology is more of the order of allusion and evocation than of direct and active engagement. The passage devoted to "The Program" in the first chapter of *Of Grammatology* is brief and summary, while the third chapter, "Of Grammatology as a Positive Science," reveals itself to be history or genealogy of the philosophy of writing rather than (as the title might suggest) an interdisciplinary exploration of the scope of grammatology. That said, the lack of a more explicit and detailed account is inevitable given the irreducibly aporetic circumstance which attaches to Derrida's reworking of the transcendental-empirical difference; we must remember that being neither in philosophy nor outside it (or, conversely, being both philosophy and non-philosophy) the "radically empiricist" incision of the deconstructive act, cannot be justified on either transcendental or empirical grounds; as contextualized as well as contextualizing it makes its inscription in the *general movement* of the field under scrutiny. In short, the Derridean text must take account of the emergence of writing whilst simultaneously attempting to account for it. This, however, is not without consequence. Derrida's interest in the new technologies and their relation to writing contains ambiguities that need to be clarified.

"Monstrous monstrosities"

What is at issue here turns on the decisive question of Derrida's characterization of the context in which his elaboration of grammatology developed—the "new mutation in the history of writing, of history as writing". As Derrida asks "Why is [this situation] today in the process of making itself know *as such* and *after the fact*?" This question is posed but just as quickly dismissed since it "would call forth an interminable analysis."²⁵⁵ Now, since the delimitation of the logocentric epoch finds its opening by tracing the "middle

²⁵⁵ *OG.*, p. 9.

ground” between the transcendental and the empirical, a context that is never absolutely determinable (or rather its determination is never certain or saturated) but is aporetic or undecidable, the Derridean text is it seems unable to fully come to terms with its own situation or offer a positive account of its relation to the new forms of media. This is the point made by Mark Poster who notes that deconstruction both recognizes its attachment to its context and yet is unable to define that attachment, rigorously to problematise it, and to fully acknowledge its implications. As Poster says “I am struck by the difference between the meticulous care with which Derrida treats logocentric texts as opposed to the elliptical, vague statements he often uses to define the current situation. His characterizations of the present are general, contradictory, hesitant and unclear about the relation of deconstruction to new forms of writing. It is as if he cannot decide if deconstruction is the philosopher’s “grey on grey,” depicting the contours of a past age of print writing, or if it is the seer’s dancing star announcing the birth of electronic writing. The present situation is an abyss, and looking into it one sees only monsters.”²⁵⁶

Poster’s reference here to “monsters” in the context of a discussion of writing and technology is important. It recalls Derrida’s characterization of deconstruction as a catachresis, that is, a “violent production of meaning” which is a showing, a monstration of the other (*montrer* means “to show” and is etymologically linked to *monstre*).²⁵⁷ As Derrida says, “I am trying to produce new forms of catachresis, another kind of writing, a violent writing which stakes out the faults (*failles*) and deviations of language; so that the text produces a language of its own, in itself, which while continuing to work through tradition emerges at a given moment as a *monster*, a monstrous mutation without tradition or normative precedent.”²⁵⁸ For Derrida, a monster is not an absolute break with normality but is a graft that cuts heterogeneous bodies together: “This in fact happens in

²⁵⁶ Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context*, (London: Polity Press, 1990), p. 104.

²⁵⁷ For more on the link between *montrer* and *monstre*, see *GII*, pp. 166-69.

²⁵⁸ Interview with Richard Kearney, “Jacques Derrida: Deconstruction and the Other,” in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 123.

certain kinds of writing. At that moment, monstrosity may reveal or make one aware of what normality is". "One must produce," Derrida says, "what in fact looks like a discursive monster so that the analysis will be a *practical* effect, so that people will be forced to become aware of the history of normality".²⁵⁹ In speaking of the monster Derrida is referring here to works such as *Glas* or *The Post Card*, works whose performativity radically puts in question "the book" and all its implications. But the notion of the monster also refers to his earlier texts and to the situation in which these texts emerge. Translated into the language of these texts the notion of the monster refers us to,

a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose *conception, formation, gestation* and *labor* we are only catching a glimpse of today. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operations of childbearing—but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.²⁶⁰

Here, at the end of "Structure Sign and Play," deconstruction is characterized, albeit indirectly, as a kind of monstrous giving birth. Notwithstanding the curious appeal to "the operations of childbearing"²⁶¹ the logic of what is said here is familiar enough when one takes into account the context in which it was written: Derrida has just invoked two kinds of interpretation, one logocentric, the other affirming "play". He urges not a choice between the two but an effort to "conceive of the common ground, and the *différance* of

²⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Passages—from Traumatism to Promise", trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Points...Interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al, ed. Elizabeth Weber, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 372-395. p. 386.

²⁶⁰ *SSP.*, p. 293.

²⁶¹ For an interesting discussion of this see Geoffrey Bennington, "RIP" in *Futures: Of Jacques Derrida*, ed. Richard Rand, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 1-17.

this irreducible difference.” Such an effort—the Derridean gesture—will make of deconstruction “a way of thinking that is faithful and attentive to the ineluctable world of the future which proclaims itself at present, beyond the closure of knowledge. The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented* as a sort of monstrosity.”²⁶²

Now, in both these passages (the second being the famous comments that close the “Exergue” to *Of Grammatology*) the “monster” may be read as the sober image of a time in which unprecedented techno-scientific invention threatens all manner of dangers including nuclear catastrophe, ecological disaster, the productive possibilities afforded by genetic engineering, etc. Equally, the “monstrous” refers us to the “new mutation in the history of writing” that Derrida will take as marking the closure of logocentric-metaphysics and, as the field of its exorbitant method, the justification and point of departure of deconstruction.²⁶³ Indeed, deconstruction shares with writing this status as a monstrosity since both appear as monstrosities from the point of view of logocentrism when thought in terms of radical otherness. In an interview collected in *Points* Derrida says of his use of the figure of the monster when speaking of the future that it indicates something about “that which appears for the first time and, consequently, is not yet recognized. A monster is a species for which we do not have a name, which does not

²⁶² *OG.*, p. 4-5.

²⁶³ In two essays originally delivered at a colloquium at Cornell University in 1984, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives),” and “Psyche: Inventions of the Other,” Derrida gathers around the topic of writing and the future the apparently opposing notions of absolute destruction and absolute invention, two events, we might say, that lie in the future. They are figures of the future that have no referent and so are unanticipatable, surprising and monstrous. In the former essay, Derrida tells us that the bomb continues to be “*fabulously textual*, through and through”. Derrida does not deny the reality of nuclear weapons that are stockpiled everywhere, but he does argue that a nuclear war has not yet taken place—the bombings of 1945, in Derrida’s opinion, ending a “classical” war rather than setting off a nuclear one. And if it has not taken place one can only talk or write about it: “the terrifying reality of the nuclear conflict can only be the signified referent, never the real referent (present or past) of a discourse or “text”. (p. 23.) See “No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives),” trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, in *Diacritics*, 14, (1984), pp. 20-31; and “Psyche: Inventions of the Other,” trans. Catherine Porter, in *Reading de Man Reading*, eds. Lindsey Waters and Wlad Godzich, (Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp. 25–65. I will return to the latter essay in Chapter 5.

mean the species is abnormal, namely, the composition and hybridization of already known species. Simply, it *shows* itself [*elle se montre*] in something that is not yet shown [montré] and that therefore looks like an hallucination, it strikes the eye, it frightens because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure."²⁶⁴ Or, as he puts it elsewhere, "monstrous monstrosities" like deconstruction, "never present themselves *as such*" and are always "unrecognized and misunderstood". One immediately recognizes here a re-figuration of the self-dissimulating logic of arche-writing (in its reference to the other). Accordingly, both "Structure, Sign and Play" and *Of Grammatology* announce a birth in the world, the arrival of the monstrous, an event "for which there is no self-presentation *as such* nor assured destination." The monstrous is a name for what has no name, for what is to come. It is to come precisely because it does not have the status of a present being, nor (insofar as it violates a norm or the order of things) is it an object of knowledge. In short, the monster is the very figure of the formlessness and nonpresentability of the future. If the future (*l'avenir*) is what is to-come (*à-venir*), it is not a repetition of the same but is something surprising, an event for which we are not prepared. As Derrida says in the interview just cited, "A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow."²⁶⁵ In Chapter 5 I will return to this monstrous opening to the future when I consider some of Derrida's more recent texts where deconstruction can be seen to emerge as an "affirmative technology" and as the machinic opening of the future. Let me here however return to what is presently at issue. I was discussing those ambiguities that can be seen to attend Derrida's characterization of the current situation.

Some questions: Derrida's materialism and originary technicity?

Derrida's mobilization of the monster articulates his fascination with invaginated topologies. As David Wood has pointed out, formally speaking what is important about

²⁶⁴ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 256 at p. 385-386.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

such topologies is that their outside, or part of their outside, is also inside, or alternatively, that at certain points the distinction between the outside and the inside becomes problematic, undecidable.²⁶⁶ In terms of the exorbitant method of deconstruction the possibility of the other than metaphysics lies within, the outside inside, the future in the mutation of the present. Here, it should be clear, the use Derrida makes of an invaginated topology, makes any reference to the “beyond” undecidable and renders utterly obscure any sense of the possibility of representing the future.

Given that this topology of invagination puts in question the distinction of the inside and outside, what belongs and what does not, one can understand Poster’s confusion over the the relation between writing and the historical context of Derrida’s works. For Poster the question is “does deconstruction serve as a critique of “phonetic writing” *from the new standpoint* of electronic writing or, does it aspire only to a critique of phonetic writing while witnessing from the outside the “more profound reversal” of electronic writing?”²⁶⁷ Now, in the light what we have just said it will immediately be apparent that this question is not only badly formulated but is predicated upon a fatal misunderstanding of Derrida’s text. That said, the force of Poster’s question stands since the relation between the new media technologies and those that are said to be characteristic of “the book” and phonetic writing necessarily remains ambiguous in Derrida’s work.

Let me make what is at stake here more precise by turning back for a moment to *The Post Card*. As we saw in the previous chapter, the interest of this text derives from its elaborating a set of paradoxes which base themselves on the *différential* structure of the post card—it goes astray, gets lost, is re-routed, and fails to reach its destination. Here Derrida is sensitive to the way the postcard structures messages and to place of the postcard in the history of communications technology. However, like the work I have been discussing above, this text provokes ambivalent conclusions from Derrida. In places he suggests that the postcard is a basic principle of the logocentric era, “an epoch (whose

²⁶⁶ See David Wood, *The Deconstruction of Time*, (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1998), p. 87.

²⁶⁷ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 256 at p. 108.

technology is marked by paper, pen, the envelope, the individual subject, addressee, etc.) and which goes shall we say from Socrates to Freud and Heidegger.” Elsewhere, he suggests that the new electronic forms of transmission are either a continuation of the postal epoch or different from it²⁶⁸ On the one hand, however important technological differences might be, it will be found that technology does not “arrive” or occur with the invention of the pen and paper, photographic reproduction or even computers and “faxing.” It is simply a condition of possibility of the postal, which is a possibility of the event, which is a possibility of technology, and so on, where none of those terms can ascribe to themselves absolute priority. In this case, however obliquely, and in spite of post-war technological innovation, Derrida’s thinking undermines the naïve opposition between those communications that rely on print technology and the contemporary era of *telecommunications*. For Derrida, *all* communication relies upon the logocentric principle of address and destination.²⁶⁹ On the other hand, the electrification of the *gramme* opens up new modalities for the transmission of information that dispense with what is perhaps the most important trait of the postcard, the particular materiality or support of the document—what Derrida will later think in terms of the “subjectile”—upon which the postcard and its attendant industry depend. As Derrida says,

“[t]he procedures of “routing” and of distribution, the paths of transmission, concern the very support of the messages sufficiently not to be without effect on the content, and I

²⁶⁸ *PC.*, p. 104.

²⁶⁹ This is a point made by David Wills. Cf. *op. cit.*, n 161 at pp. 180-181. As Wills notes, for Derrida the postal most obviously refers to systems of communication and more particularly to those delivery systems relying upon the transfer or transport of a material message—a note, letter and so on—systems that are different, at first glance, from oral communication on the one hand and computer and satellite message transfer on the other. But on closer analysis all of these systems depend upon a notion of destination, a concept of sending that assumes the logocentric principle of a closed circuit between sender and receiver. Thus, though there appear to be important and obvious material differences between systems of communication such as the voice, the letter and electronic transfer, those differences cannot be read as oppositional given their common reliance on the idea of destination. Indeed, for Wills, following Derrida, the idea of modern *telecommunication*, far from articulating a radical historical shift in fact reproduces the same model instituted by oral address and phonetic writing and allows for a tightening of the circuit of message transfer.

am not only speaking of the signified content...In everyday language the post, in the strict sense, is distinguished from every other telecommunication (telegraph or telephone, for example, telematics in general) by this characteristic: the transport of the “document,” of its material support. A rather confused idea, but rather useful for constructing a consensus around the banal notion of post—and we do need one. But it suffices to analyze the notion of “document” or of material support a bit for the difficulties to accumulate.”²⁷⁰

The difficulties do indeed accumulate. In *The Post Card* Derrida shifts back and forth, hesitant to make an issue of the “material support” in its relation to the processes of electronic transmission. This only underlines the divisive status of the post and, hence, the divisibility of the message. If the message involves transport or movement, if it can be diverted at any point or at any number of identifiable, material points throughout that movement, and if the fact of some material support, post or card, is the mark of that potential diversion as much as it might be the mark of some monumentality, then there can be no arguing for its indivisibility. The post or card becomes, therefore, the material mark of *différance* in the transmission of the message, of the necessity of differing and deferral which exists at every point along the route. Thus, although Derrida is indeed sensitive to differences in the media, differences that concern the crucial issue of the materiality of the trace, the deconstructive logic of inscription forbids their thematization.

For Derrida “matter” is above all a philosopheme to be read in metaphysical texts, a marker or trace of a “radical alterity,” which is to say writing, that cannot be conceptualized.²⁷¹ This inability to grapple with material production outside of

²⁷⁰ *PC*, pp. 104-105.

²⁷¹ In an interview collected in *Positions* Derrida considers whether or not his text can be considered “materialist”. He writes: “If I have not very often used the word “matter,” it is not, as you know, because of some idealist or spiritualist kind of reservation. It is that in the logic of the phase of overturning this concept has too often been reinvested with “logocentric” values, values associated with those of thing, reality, presence in general, sensible presence, for example, substantial plenitude, content, referent, etc. Realism or sensualism—“empiricism”—are modifications of logocentrism. (I have often insisted on the fact that “writing” or the “text” are not reducible *either* to the sensible or visible presence of the graphic or the

metaphysical conceptuality is part and parcel of Derrida's ambiguous relation to the new technologies. For some, this circumstance limits his engagement in these technologies and thereby limits contemporary interest in his work. Indeed, as John Protevi has remarked, while deconstruction can dismantle the logocentric values in which the concept of matter is inscribed—values associated with those of thing, reality, presence in general, sensible presence, substantial plenitude, content, referent, etc.—and move us into the general text, Derrida's work is unable to articulate the material processes of production upon whose effects it lives: "It can't offer us an empirical research program for exploring that text and the material bodies formed therein."²⁷² Instead of raising the question of the material configuration of each technology, thereby articulating a system of technical differentiation, we are referred instead to an indefinite series of graphic possibilities that still remain to be analyzed, however interminable that operation might be.²⁷³ In this case,

"literal".) In short, the signifier "matter" appears to me problematical only at the moment when its reinscription cannot avoid making of it a new fundamental principle which, by means of theoretical regression, would be reconstituted in to a "transcendental signified". It is not only idealism in the narrow sense that falls back upon the transcendental signified. It can always come to assure a metaphysical materialism. It then becomes an ultimate referent, according to the classical logic implied by the value of referent, or it becomes an "objective reality" absolutely anterior to any work of the mark, the semantic content of a form of presence which guarantees the movement of the text in general from the outside." Earlier in the same interview in reply to questions about the relation of deconstruction to "dialectical material logic" Derrida had stated "Above all they [the consequences of his writings] refer to the general economy whose traits I attempted to outline based on a reading of Bataille. It follows that if, and in the extent to which, *matter* in this general economy designates, as you said, radical alterity (I will specify: in relation to philosophical oppositions), then what I write can be considered "materialist"." See, *P.*, p.64-65.

²⁷² John Protevi, *Political Physics: Deleuze, Derrida and the Body Politic*, (London: The Athlone Press, 2001), p. 4. In contrast to Derrida, Protevi points to the radical materialism proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. The basic difference between Derrida and Deleuze-Guattari relevant in this case is that between a post-phenomenological and a historical libidinal-materialism: the study of the im-possibility of presence as an effect of the general text and the study and positive articulation of material self-ordering of "abstract machines" linked together to form a "machinic phylum". See Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983; and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

²⁷³ For Derrida, the material support is never simple but already from the beginning operates as a multi-medium. In the case of the postcard he points out that it is already formally divided (picture, copyright, message, signature, address, stamp, and postmark) and hence problematic in its relations. This is a point that is developed in an interview given to *Cahiers de Médiologie* in 1998 where the question is one of the multi-media potential of paper. Derrida states that its economy has always been more than that of a medium which would "reduce paper to the function or topos of an inert surface laid *under* marks, a substratum designed to unhold them, to assure their survival or subsistence." (p. 2.) For Derrida the economy of paper "has always been...that of a multi-medium. It has always potentially been that, though not in the currently accepted

Derrida prefers to minimize, at times even to disregard, technological/material difference in favor of a discourse on the emerging and more general economy they attest to. Here the new technologies along with the theoretical frameworks that subtend them may indeed mark or trace the closure of the logocentric-metaphysical epoch. For that very reason, however, their particularity is the already dissimulated effect of the field of generalized inscription. As Derrida puts it in *Of Grammatology*,

If the theory of cybernetics is by itself to oust all metaphysical concepts—including the concepts of soul, of life, of value, of choice, of memory—which until recently served to separate the machine from man, it must conserve the notion of writing, trace, grammé [written mark], or grapheme, until its own metaphysical character is exposed.²⁷⁴

This sentence is exemplary of the complex relation between technics and writing, bringing the logic of the generalized inscription together with its historical exposure. At first glance it suggests Derrida's positing of a quasi-similarity between the two. But this is not the case, indeed it cannot be the case since Derrida forewarns us that a purely technical understanding of writing would be instrumentalist and would reduce writing to a merely empirical supplement, a tool in the service of speech. This would amount, precisely, to the way logocentrism reduces writing, expelling it outside "full" speech and thereby confining it to a secondary function: translator of a full speech that was fully *present*. Said otherwise arche-writing is not reducible to the technical arrival of the gramme; it "does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or

sense of a term which strictly speaking presupposes an electronic support...It is not merely the support of marks, of traces; it is the support of a complex spatial and temporal operation, visible, tangible and often audible, active but also passive...paper can *work in the manner of a multimedium*, at least when it is there to be read or written upon, for there is also wrapping paper, wallpaper, cigarette paper, toilet paper and so forth." (p. 2-3.) This extends all the way to where the paper body is no longer there "in person" so to speak: "[e]ven when you write with a computer, it is still with a *view* to finally printing on paper, whether this actually happens or not. The vocabulary of paper (rather than of parchment) is there on the screen—lines, pages, paragraphs, margins and so on." (p. 5.) See Jacques Derrida, "Paper or Myself, you know...(new speculations on a luxury of the poor)" in *Paragraph*, vol 21, n°1 March 1998, pp. 1-27.

²⁷⁴ *OG.*, p. 9.

graphic. It is on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude.”²⁷⁵ This statement appears to be a somewhat surprising declaration of independence which is problematic because it effaces the radical empiricism that is upheld in the differential movement of inscription in general. It indicates, nevertheless, that if writing is to be distinguished from particular empirical supplements it is primarily because the *différance* between the transcendental and the empirical constitutes the impossibility of approaching the trace in terms of a present mark, the impossibility of folding back arche-writing upon its irreducible empiricity. As the *différential* and thereby undecidable opening of the transcendental and the empirical, arche-writing is always already *materialized*, while never simply being *material*. It is impossible to suspend this aporia since the “constituted” always already affects, but after the event, the “constituting” Thus, one must *both* distinguish and *not* oppose technics and writing. It is a question then of *thinking technics otherwise*, on the basis of inscription in general. And/or, inversely,

a certain sort of question about the meaning and origin of writing precedes, or at least merges with, a certain type of question about the meaning and origin of technics. That is why the notion of technique can never simply clarify the notion of writing.²⁷⁶

As Bernhard Stiegler has noted in commenting on this sentence, “simply” would seem to be the operative term here.²⁷⁷ For as Stiegler says the notion of technics *can* clarify the notion of writing *if* our understanding of the former is heavily revised. For this to be done, the two notions of technics and writing need to be clarified in relation to each other and analyzed in the context of the the closure of metaphysics that they bring about. This closure should be seen, accordingly, as a deconstruction that comes about through a

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁷⁶ *OG.*, p. 8.

²⁷⁷ See Bernhard Stiegler, “Derrida and Technology: Fidelity at the Limits of Deconstruction and the Prosthesis of Faith” in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2001), pp. 238-270. p. 252.

certain technicity. In this connection, we must acknowledge that at the same moment when Derrida deconstructs the historico-metaphysical reduction of writing, opening up in the same movement the thought of arche-writing, such a program is equally organized around the concept and figure of technology itself. Indeed, Derrida's analysis have clearly demonstrated that technology has always shared a common structure with writing provoking similar treatment. As Alan Bass one of Derrida's translators puts it, "Writing is always treated by philosophy as a *technique*, as part of the technology of communication, which always means the communication of truth and meaning. According to the traditional view, technology has no life of its own and is to be kept below and apart from living truth. Like writing. It is no accident, then, that the machine—the dead mechanism that endlessly produces the same thing—should be as unthinkable for philosophy as writing."²⁷⁸ Once writing, condemned throughout the history of philosophy as *techne*—an auxiliary technique, becomes irreducible, so does technology. Hence, the received concept of the technical must transgress itself generating a very different view of technology—as originary with respect to the constitution of the philosophical *episteme* and, more generally, to any attempt to constitute what is proper, authentic or appropriate to the human. That is, insofar as Derrida's radicalization of writing reworks the distinction between the natural and artificial, *physis* and *techne*, between man and machine, between speech and writing, of the thing itself and signs as well as working upon the distinction of the transcendental and empirical constitutive of such oppositions, then we can begin to understand the bold thesis put forward in Derrida's work as articulating an a general grammar of technics and technicity. In this case the Derridean text concerns not any given form of technology, but rather the promotion of an originary differential machine that articulates the general inscription of any entity whatsoever. On this view, as Timothy Clark points out, we should not think of technology as an object of

²⁷⁸ Alan Bass, "The Double Game: An Introduction" in *Taking Chances: Derrida Psychoanalysis and Literature*, ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) pp. 66-85. p. 77.

deconstruction as some method of analysis or critique. Rather, technology is “in deconstruction” as the condition of its being: for writing as an originary technicity both opens, and renders untenable, the metaphysico-logocentric/techno-scientific concepts of technology.²⁷⁹

Where does the economy of arche or originary technicity which is reserved in the exorbitant method of deconstruction lead us? Given that the subordination of writing in and through the logocentric era was (as Derrida insists) a “strategic move in the economy of mastery,”²⁸⁰ the machinic possibilities that issue with the liberation of the graphic, e.g., cybernetics, genetic engineering, the invention of artificial intelligence, etc., are indeed far reaching. Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, such possibilities expose the Derridean text to the shock that it has already been comprehended by Heidegger’s thinking of the technological outcome of metaphysics .

²⁷⁹ Cf. *op.cit.*, n10 at p. 252.

²⁸⁰ *OG.*, p.285-86.

4

Uncanny Intimacy: Writing and *das Ge-stell*

Introduction

The last chapter has shown that since the late 1960's Derrida's response to what he takes to be a "certain total transformation" of our historical situation brings metaphysics and deconstruction into a singular constellation which points to the interaction of his text with an unprecedented development of post-war techno-scientific culture, most strikingly in the domain of that set of tele-technologies termed informational and communicational in the broadest sense. In 1967 the "nonfortuitous conjunction of cybernetics and the human sciences" announces "nothing but a death of speech and a new mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing." A context in which "the future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger...and can only be proclaimed, *presented* as a sort of monstrosity". And a technology that constitutes a "practical deconstruction" of the logocentric-metaphysical era. Understood in this way technology is not simply a "theme" of deconstruction; rather, the techno-scientific development of the contemporary episteme is both the determining and determined context to which Derrida refers, it coincides with deconstruction understood as event, as that which happens to a world in the process of changing.

As we have seen, Derrida's quasi-cybernetic inscriptions in his early texts arose within the context of his negotiations between philosophy and the human sciences under the aegis of the structuralist programme. A context which not only articulates the obligation of the former to entertain an open set of transversal relations with emergent forms of knowledge and their technical elaborations, but also pressures the latter into interrogating their "transcendental contraband". From a certain perspective this context constitutes the most immediate point of reference for any evaluation of deconstruction as

it is elaborated by Derrida in the period. That said, Derrida's text can also be seen as emerging against the background of Heidegger's questioning of cybernetics and information theory as an aspect of his assessment of the techno-scientific completion of metaphysics. Indeed, the massive impact of Heidegger's work on Derrida at this time, a Heidegger re-read and retrieved from the narrowly existentialist and humanist gloss that had dominated the first phase of the French Heidegger reception,²⁸¹ forms an essential element of Derrida's diagnosis of the new philosophical and non-philosophical exigencies.

The challenge posed to philosophy is noted in the mid-sixties by Heidegger in "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" where he further develops his question concerning the essence of modern technology through a confrontation with the then rising power of the human sciences. In particular, Heidegger's thinking appears to be informed by Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics* since his assertion that "[n]o prophecy is necessary to recognize that the sciences now establishing themselves will soon be determined and regulated by the new fundamental science that is called cybernetics"²⁸² directly recalls the latter's thesis. Whether or not he had read Wiener's book, when Heidegger speaks of cybernetics he is once again elaborating the self-regulating feed-back control system of the *Ge-stell* as that into which traditional philosophy is resolved. To be more specific, for Heidegger cybernetics is the fundamental characteristic of the techno-scientific attitude of humanity in the modern age and corresponds to the human sciences of communication, which transform "language" into a positivistic "exchange of news" and information. As such, cybernetics is the emancipation of these sciences from philosophy: "It suffices to refer to the independence of psychology, sociology, anthropology as cultural anthropology, or to the role of logic as symbolic logic and semantics," all of which Husserl had sought to keep under the umbrella of philosophy in the first stage of the

²⁸¹ For a detailed assessment of the French reception of Heidegger's work see Tom Rockmore's *Heidegger and French Philosophy*. Cf. *op. cit.*, n 39.

²⁸² *EP.*, p. 434.

“crisis” of philosophy’s interdisciplinarity.²⁸³ Heidegger continues on the subject of the end of philosophy: “Philosophy turns into the empirical science of man, of all that can become for man the experiential object of his technology.” “The [techno-sciences] are now taking over as their task what philosophy in the course of its history tried to present in certain places, and even the only inadequately, that is, the ontologies of the various regions of beings (nature, history, law, art)...As the technology by which man “establishes himself in the world by working on it in the manifold modes of working and shaping,” these sciences look like the mere dissolution of philosophy but are in truth its completion: “[t]he development of philosophy into the independent sciences that, however, interdependently communicate among themselves ever more markedly, is the legitimate completion of philosophy. [It is a sign that] philosophy is ending in the present age.”²⁸⁴

Derrida’s shock: the incalculability of Heidegger’s text

Heidegger’s essay was first published in France in 1966 at a point when Derrida was deconstructing the human sciences (theoretically renewed by structuralism), and elaborating grammatology. The expected confrontation on the basis of the immediate and seemingly obvious implications that Heidegger’s thinking has for Derrida’s program, does not however materialize. Indeed, although Heidegger’s thinking, and particularly his conception of the history of metaphysics, was central to Derrida’s work at this time there is a conspicuous and peculiar lack of any direct engagement with the claims that Heidegger makes regarding the relations between philosophy and techno-science. To be sure, insofar as Derrida submits Heidegger’s thinking to the question of writing and

²⁸³ I refer to Husserl’s unfinished *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (1934-37). Includes the Vienna lecture, trans. David Carr, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970). In the related Vienna lecture (*Crisis*, pp. 296-99), Husserl traces the blame for this crisis, obviously intensified by Europe’s standing on the threshold of war, back to the abandonment of philosophy’s disciplinary rigor by the post-Kantian idealists, who allowed philosophy to leak into and be modified by other area’s (such as religion, law, history, aesthetics and so on).

²⁸⁴ *EP.*, p. 434-435.

thereby to the closure of metaphysics as logocentrism, the question of technics is brought into play. However, any explicit engagement with or response to Heidegger's provocative and rather uncompromising assertions regarding the techno-scientific "realization" of philosophy remains secreted in Derrida's more overt reinscriptions of the thinking of Being. When the response does come it takes the form of both an anticipation and overturning. As we saw in Chapter 2, by the early 1980's, and specifically in *The Post Card* and its supplements, Derrida poses the objection to himself that his rewriting of Heidegger's text has already been displaced by Heidegger since his deconstructive elaboration of the post invokes the role of a form of technology, a communications technology, which Heidegger has delimited in advance. Yet it is not Derrida but Heidegger who deploys the postal discourse, who speaks in terms of *Geschichte*, *Geschick*, and *Schicken*. By indicating from afar and in a direction not opened by Heidegger's thought a hidden passageway that makes the problem of "sending" communicate with the problem of the written trace, Derrida is able to make an incision in Heidegger's text that opens the latter's thinking of Being to the disseminative effects of a machinic parasite. Thus contaminated and exposed to deconstructive reinscription, Heidegger's thinking of the sending or destining of Being comes to occupy a place which in Derrida's "own" work is occupied by writing or the general text which is the matrix within which all transfers, sendings, correspondences, and telecommunications take place. And Derrida's main point, among other things, against Heidegger's thinking of the history of Being, is that technology does not arrive; it does not as Heidegger claims come to dissimulate or stand as a derivative schema, a final epoch of Being which gathers all others thereby bringing philosophy to an end—an end, that is, as the place of "another beginning". Rather, for Derrida, technology has always already begun—from the most primal traces that launch the process of hominization ("the emergence of a certain *homo sapiens*"), and extending as far as all forms of contemporary tele-technology, technical archiving and computer programming—just as writing has already begun. Both in fact

occur “originarily,” in the same movement, introducing the irreducibility of inscription in general, thus offering Derrida the chance of parallel or joined deconstructive strategies beyond the play of presence, the proper, and appropriation.

That said, the Derridean text is manifestly unable to oversee the entire economy of Heidegger’s “uncircumventable meditation”. In this connection, what strikes one immediately in the type of stakes specific to the method of deconstruction is the *necessity* in which it finds itself from the start, a necessity which, as we have seen, articulates an aporetic and uncontrollable position neither in philosophy nor outside it and which means thinking the inescapability of inscription in general. But what strikes one next, and in connection with this, is a strange *hesitation*—and a hesitation that is one of its most powerful resources—between the recognition of debt in due form with respect to Heidegger on the one hand, and on the other the erasure of this debt through the liberation of writing. Nothing shows the meaning of the “hesitation” more clearly than the ambiguity of the Heideggerian situation with respect to logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence: “It is at once contained in it and transgresses it” Derrida insists, “but it is impossible to separate the two. The very movement of transgression sometimes holds it back short of the limit”²⁸⁵ Here, what I noted in the previous chapter with regard to Derrida’s fascination with invaginated topologies—that their outside, or part of their outside, is also inside with the consequence that at certain points the distinction between the outside and inside becomes problematic, undecidable—is equally pertinent. It is this undecidability with which the Derridean text must contend; it is what makes deconstruction above all an im-possibility. Notice I write im-possible here with a hyphen. The impossibility of deconstruction is not the simple contrary of its possibility. It supposes and also gives itself over to possibility, traverses it, and leaves in it the trace of its removal. There is nothing fortuitous about the fact that this discourse on the conditions of possibility, at the very place where its claims are compounded with impossibility, can

²⁸⁵ *OG.*, p. 22.

spread to all the places of the Derridean text: it is what puts deconstruction in motion. As Derrida says, “from the very heart of the impossible, one would thus hear the pulsing drive of what is called deconstruction. The condition of possibility would thus give one chance as possible but by depriving it of its purity. And the law of this spectral contamination, the impure law of this impurity, is what one must never cease relaborating”²⁸⁶

The recurrent expression of the conditions of possibility and impossibility, of the aporetic law of quasi-transcendentality and contamination, does not fail to signal some major stakes for deconstruction, namely, the shock delivered to hardly foreseeable consequences. Naturally it is a question here of the calculable and the incalculable: deconstruction must calculate with the incalculable. In this connection, Derrida will insist on the question of strategy and wager, that is, the question of decision. In Derrida’s words:

I shall insist on the question of wager and strategy. If a strategy were guaranteed in and of itself, if its calculation were sure, there would be no strategy at all. Strategy always implies a wager—that is, a certain way of giving ourselves over to not-knowing, to the incalculable. We calculate because there is something incalculable. We calculate where we do not know, where we can make no determination. Thus, a strategic wager always consists in making a decision, or rather in giving ourselves over to the decision—paradoxically, in making decisions we cannot justify from start to finish.²⁸⁷

Now, when Derrida comes to calculate with the Heideggerian text; when he takes a decision over the thinking of Being; the incalculability of this thinking, its excess and reserve with respect to metaphysics, is always at work; it leaves its mark on the Derridean

²⁸⁶ For a concise account of the impossibility of deconstruction see Derrida’s “Deconstructions: The Impossible” in *French Theory in America*, trans, Micheal Taormina, eds: Sylvere Lofringer and Sandra Cohen, (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 13-31. p. 25.

²⁸⁷ *TS.*, p. 13.

text in turn. To begin with this allows Derrida to claim to have found the “trace” of some powerful questioning of “metaphysics,” that is, and all at once, freely to take inspiration from the very movement and from the Heideggerian pace of “destruction” as much of the “privilege of presence” as of the “end” of philosophy and in order to find therein the forerunners of writing in general, certainly, but from which this writing must, for its part, always *delimit itself* in order to exceed the closure of metaphysics. There is no question that this writing is strongly at work in the ontological difference, difference (*Unterscheid*) or *Ereignis* that articulates Heidegger’s transgression and containment with respect to metaphysics. Equally however, and for the same reason, Derrida’s text finds itself having to face up to its implication in the technological outcome of metaphysics and in a way it is unable to fully calculate. To say this is neither a contradiction, recantation, nor turnabout from what I have said with regard to Derrida’s assertions over the non-arrival of technics, of its “originality” with respect to the history and thinking of Being. On the contrary, in exposing the Derridean text to the Heideggerian thought of technology I am taking up a thread that is at the center of these assertions; I am following Derrida’s lead and taking up his anticipation, imagination, and calculation (I don’t say position) of Heidegger’s incalculable response to his re-routing of the technological end of metaphysics—that Heidegger would consider his text symptomatic of this outcome. By taking Derrida at his word I am upholding the complex interplay of proximities and distances that I have said characterize Derrida’s relation to Heidegger. I do so, however, with the difference that I let Heidegger’s thought-paths take advantage of their incalculability and of their machinic repetition. In this connection, in this chapter I want to pursue the possibility that Derrida’s own text has gone astray, and that it has got lost within the circuit of the Heideggerian thinking of technology.

Writing and *das Ge-stell*: some textual pointers

Quite apart from Derrida's own anticipation, such a possibility is not without precedent. A number of commentators have noted the conjunction of Derrida's text and the Heideggerian thinking of technology. For example, in his *Applied Grammatology*, Gregory Ulmer takes up the question of Derrida's interest in contemporary media. Affirming that it is central to his articulation of the historical move from language to writing he writes, "[t]he facilitator of Derrida's exploration of this shift, then, will not be Marshall McLuhan, who projected the return of an oral civilization, but Martin Heidegger. Working philologically, Heidegger located the essence of modern technology in the family of terms related to *Ge-stell* (enframing), including thus all the *stellen* words, translated as "to order, to represent, to secure, to entrap, to disguise, to produce, to present, to supply." Derrida took up the question of enframing, as indicated in his exploration of all marginal and paragonal phenomena, in order to prepare the way for the shift away from, or deemphasis of, speech in favour of writing."²⁸⁸ Ulmer's reading here is guided by the conviction that Derrida's elaboration of writing is directly implicated in the Heideggerian mobilization of *Ge-stell* and its cognates, a conviction that causes him to conflate their respective texts. Thus, in close proximity to the above quote he writes "Enframing, in short, concerns not just any given form of technology, but the production and relaying of information by whatever means, which is to say that the *techne* itself cannot "end" or "arrive" at its "completion," since it is what allows anything at all to become present. *Techne* thus overlaps as a question of difference."²⁸⁹

In a similar vein to Ulmer, Michael Roth has also broached the complex implication of the Derridean-Heideggerian text with regard to the problematic of technology and in a manner that conflates the two. Like Ulmer, Roth has been discussing the relation of writing and technology as this is elaborated by Derrida in his early work. In this case he

²⁸⁸ Cf. *op.cit.*, n 252 at p. 15.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

turns to Derrida's "Freud and the Scene of Writing," and to his statement that "[t]he machine—and, consequently, representation,—is death and finitude *within* the psyche". He then states, "[i]t seems that Derrida has embraced the manner of Being of technology as a component in the closure of metaphysics. But Derrida's interest in technology is on a par with Heidegger's. He too thinks that something saving is unconcealed in technology along with its overwhelming threat to all that is. The technological poses the greatest threat [and saving of] the world because in many ways the technological, although still operative within the realm of presence, reveals the structure of the textual."²⁹⁰

Now, in the light of what I have said in this study, both these interpretations should be seen to be problematic and for similar reasons. In Ulmer's case, his collapsing of Heidegger's text onto Derrida's, his assertion that enframing is equal to "the relaying of information by whatever means" and that *techne* "does not arrive," only takes up Derrida's side of the story so to speak and fails to uphold the complex interplay between the his thinking and Heidegger's. The same can be said of Roth. His assertion that for Derrida "something saving is unconcealed in technology" totally misses what is at stake in the latter's reinscription of Heidegger's text. And yet, that said, even while they fail to mark the difference between Heidegger and Derrida, and perhaps because they fail, both Ulmer and Roth indicate the peculiar proximity of Heidegger's thinking of technology to the Derridean program.

What I want to do is bring this proximity into focus and draw out its implications. In order to do so I will turn to two other places where the implication of Derrida's text in Heidegger's thinking of technology is also recognized but with much greater penetration. Recently both Steven Galt Crowell²⁹¹ and Bernhard Radloff²⁹² have opened up certain lines of inquiry into this implication and have drawn out important connections. In both

²⁹⁰ Micheal Roth, *The Poetics of Resistance: Heidegger's Line*, (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996.), p. 196.

²⁹¹ Steven Galt Crowell, "Text and Technology" in *Man and World* 023: pp.419-440, 1990. Kluwer Academic Publishers.

²⁹² Bernhard Radloff, "Das Gestell and L'écriture: The Discourse of Expropriation in Heidegger and Derrida" in *Heidegger Studies*, vol 5. 1989. pp. 23-47.

cases this turns on a series of indications that point up the “uncanny intimacy” (Radloff’s term) that obtains between Derrida’s treatment of writing and the Heideggerian thought of the *Ge-stell*. In this connection, the line of argument I want to pursue here takes up the attempt to locate in the calculus of the Derridean text certain articulations and assumptions that expose it to Heideggerian charge of its belonging to technological end of metaphysics. To this end, and using as a guide Galt Crowell’s and Radloff’s texts, I want to elaborate three points which are interrelated. Firstly, I will mark the Heideggerian implications for the Derridean text insofar as the latter undermines the repetition (*Weiderholung*) and recollection of that which has withdrawn and been forgotten by metaphysics, namely, Being *qua* Being. By actively displacing the thinking of Being via the general economy of writing deconstruction can be seen as a forgetting of the forgetting of withdrawal and of the concomitant thought of the proper. Second, I shall raise the question of what happens to the “subject” in the Derridean text. To ask this question is to encounter the critique of the “onto-theo-logical” subject which is also at issue for Heidegger and which in Derrida is carried to the point where it prepares the space of the *technical constitution* of human being as originary supplementarity. Thirdly, I shall point up the way in which generalized inscription remarks the very terms by which Heidegger defines the way in which all that is given under the sway of technology. By elaborating these three points I aim to show, in particular, how “deconstruction,” and “grammatological strategies” gravitate around the turning of Heidegger’s thought that, to put it another way, they simultaneously arise *from* and come back *to*: the technological outcome of metaphysics—and not the other way round.

The Derridean *retrait*: the withdrawal of withdrawal

With regard to the first point, the Derridean displacement of Heidegger’s retrieval of the “forgotten” of metaphysics, we have already seen how this is played out via Derrida’s deconstruction of Heidegger’s thinking of the *Geschick* and of the epochality of Being. In

exposing Heidegger's text to all the procedures of routing, relaying, and paths of transmission, that is, to all the telecommunicative effects of postality, Derrida insists on the necessary *contamination* of (the thinking of) essence and marks the Heideggerian hypothesis of the withdrawal of Being for reinscription. What I want to do is look at what is involved here in a little more detail. At issue is Heidegger's still provocative matrix statement regarding the dynamic of the concealing of the concealing of Being—its oblivion. For Heidegger the peculiarity of the concealing (*lethe*; *Verborgenheit*) at the heart of the essence or truth (*aletheia*; *Unverborgenheit*), understood as the realm of the un-concealment or disclosure of Being, is that concealing is the preserve of Being and what is proper to it. As Heidegger puts it in "On the Essence of Truth,"

Concealment deprives *aletheia* of disclosure yet does not render it *steresis* (privation); rather, concealment preserves what is most proper to *aletheia* as its own. Considered with respect to truth as disclosedness, concealment is then undislosedness and accordingly the untruth that is most proper to the essence of truth."²⁹³

The *lethe*, concealment, is the movement of withdrawal from unconcealment, from disclosedness. Such withdrawal therefore marks the difference (*Unterscheid*) of Being and beings insofar as Being comes to presence in beings—grants them their presence—by holding itself back, by preserving itself in beings as its shelter. This difference is precisely what has been forgotten by metaphysics. Metaphysics therefore unfolds as the epochality of Being, as the withdrawal and shelter of what is proper to Being. The thinking of Being would attempt to stay with withdrawal and think it *as* withdrawal. To think withdrawal *as* withdrawal, to think it *as such*, is not to think something other than the modes of dissimulation—the various epochs of metaphysics—through which the oblivion of Being traces itself; it is to let withdrawal *be* withdrawal. This letting-be is the

²⁹³ Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth" in *Basic Writings*, ed and trans. David Farrell Krell, (London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 115-138. p. 130.

turn (*Kehre*) of thought into the movement of withdrawal and thereby into the differential movement out of representation into this difference itself. As I have asserted in this study, only at the technological completion of metaphysics and only there does this turn as difference become the “matter” (*Sache*) for thinking. With the gathering of metaphysics into its uttermost possibility Heidegger proposes that the *Ge-stell* opens up the first “flashing” of the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*). For Heidegger technology is the “photographic negative” of the possibility of *Ereignis*; the janus face of *Ge-stell* and *Ereignis* belong in the same of the withdrawal from representation. In this case, thinking turns to withdrawal in response to the provocation of the modern techno-scientific challenge. By tracing the regulative circulation and exchange, the ever shifting event-like network of relations of the *Ge-stell* for signs of the liminal appearance of the event thinking would thereby be drawn into the withdrawal and would, precisely, enter into technology, into its essence, as *die Sache*, the difference between Being and beings, between Being and man and what is proper to them.

Now, the method of deconstruction as the liberation of the graphic broaches withdrawal by allowing this dynamic to be reiterated in the economy of generalized inscription which marks the overwhelming of the metaphysics of representation wherein the text is defined by its reference to the object. But does the withdrawal of the text from representation mean that the text itself is the meaning of withdrawal? The answer, as we might expect, has to be both yes and no. Deconstruction cannot allow the thinking of Being to arise except by way of the calculus which reiterates and repeats the withdrawal from representation. Writing is unthinkable except as the withdrawal of representation and of the proper. But precisely the withdrawal *as* withdrawal escapes writing. In fact, as Radloff remarks, the supposition that the trace occults itself is the motive and nonetheless *unappropriated* force motivating Derrida’s thinking of the closure of metaphysics, the emergence of writing, etc.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 292 at p. 26.

For Derrida the withdrawal is thought as *le retrait*. What, is a trait or *retrait*? In his article “The *Retrait* of Metaphor,” Derrida argues that within a certain context this word is “the most proper to capture the greatest quantity of energy and information in the Heideggerian text.”²⁹⁵ *Retrait*, having a variety of meanings in French, such as retrace, recess, retraction, and retreat, remarks Heidegger’s thinking of the withdrawal of Being. The trait is *retrait*, the trait is withdrawn. It signifies an “essential and in itself double, equivocal movement.”²⁹⁶ writes Derrida. Let me quickly mark this the equivocality of Derrida’s reinscription: first, the word trait (*Zug*) refers to the tracing of a way or a rift (*Riss*) that, as an in-between (*Zwischen*) first opens a first relation. (*Bezug*). Yet the trait is nothing before the tracing it achieves or before what it subsequently brings into relation. Second, the trait withdraws, retreats, in the very act of tracing an in-between for a relation. However, being nothing except what it gives rise to, the trait is not to be mistaken for what it brings forth. Indeed, “the trait is, *a-priori*, withdrawal, unappearance, and effacement of its mark in its incision.” The trait only comes forth in being erased. Third, the trait cannot be simply identified with this seeming alternating dynamic of forthcoming and subsequent erasure, because the retreat of the trait is also what allows the trait to come forward from under its obliteration as *retrait*. Without a retreat of the *retrait*, without a *retrait* of the *retrait*, the trait would not be capable of tracing its self eclipsing way or of opening in the first place. Derrida writes, “The trait is...veiled, withdrawn, but it is the trait which brings together and separates [*ecarte*] at once veiling and the unveiling, the withdrawal and the *withdrawal of the withdrawal*.”²⁹⁷

Now, having said this much it will be apparent that the *retrait* is one of the ever substitutable quasi-transcendental machines that make up the infrastructural chain of the general text. Along with *différance*, trace, iteration, etc., *retrait* can be seen as the medium or “open matrix” of differentiation in general. The re-of *retrait* allows us to think

²⁹⁵ Jacques Derrida, “The *Retrait* of Metaphor,” trans. Frieda Gasdner et al. *Enclitic*, 2, no 2 1978. pp. 5-33. p. 19.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

the withdrawal of the withdrawal of Being; the withdrawal doubles back on itself. Thus the *retrait* sufficiently remarks the withdrawal of Being to take it into account, to re-count it and to integrate it into the general economy of writing. To think the withdrawal of Being (*pour penser l'être en son retrait*) by way of the deconstruction of metaphysics is therefore to follow the turn away from metaphysics—but also from Being—into the *retrait*, the return, the duplication of a discourse charged by the productivity of an extra turn.

What of this extra turn? Integrated into the discourse of generalized writing the withdrawal of Being, its *retrait*, is determined by the withdrawal of *différance*, which organizes it. *Différance* “itself” which neither a classically conceived name, or “word,” nor yet signifier, makes the presentation of being-present possible but never presents itself as such. Indeed, as I pointed out in Chapter 2 the appearance of *différance as such* means the appearance of *différance*, the other, as “self-occultation”. When the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself, that is to say in the dissimulation of its “as such”, which has already begun. The economy of *différance* means that we know it only by its effects, it is characterized by “reserving itself, not exposing itself,” by, precisely, differing and deferring. If this is so it would therefore pertain to attend to the movement of withdrawal from deferred presentation. But the movement of withdrawal *as* withdrawal (as opposed to its “effects,” the nominal system, the economy it organizes) never arises. Inasmuch as Derrida thinks the movement of withdrawal as systemic, as an “infinite reserve of traces,” the trace of writing *exceeds* its own occultation by *pursuing occultation absolutely*. In short, the withdrawal from representation, from meaning, from truth metaphysically conceived, withdrawal *as* withdrawal is nothing.

As these remarks suggest, the movement of *différance* can be qualified as the productive re-cuperation of the withdrawal; it implicates an extra turn which re-traces the withdrawal of Being and reiterates it in the differing-deferring economy of the general

text. Inasmuch as Derrida thinks the movement of this text in terms of the production of the signifier and beyond this as generalized inscription, the truth of the withdrawal from representation as the possibility of the thinking of withdrawal *as such* does not arise. To be sure, as Derrida says “*différance* is certainly but the historical and epochal *unfolding* of Being or of the ontological difference. The *a* of *différance* marks the *movement* of this unfolding.” But “[s]ince Being has never had a “meaning,” has never been thought or said as such, except by dissimulating itself in beings, then *différance*, in a certain and very strange way, (is) “older” than the ontological difference or the truth of Being. When it has this play it can be called the play of the trace.”²⁹⁸ In this case, what comes into play by way of the trace is the field of inscription as the calculated re-iteration of beings. Thus, whereas the issue for Heidegger is the movement of withdrawal intimated by the trace (*Spur*) of Being, the issue for Derrida is the movement of the trace as it traces itself and erases itself *in beings*. This way leads to the trace of the trace as the movement which issues in the inscription of beings in general; it is the condition and calculus of their deferred presence, of their simultaneously being used up and reserved for use. Here, where the entity is lacking, the lack of the entity is simply the deferral of its availability; the entity as such in its “own” objectivity and presence (or absence) cannot arise; the being present of the entity, in Derrida’s terms, “becomes a function in a structure of generalized reference.” This is the point Radloff makes when he writes,

Perhaps *différance* is the calculus of language conceived as the economy of economies—or, rather, language conceived as the meta-technical system of the optimum organization of entities. Hence “to defer” signifies “the action of putting off till later, of taking into account, of taking account of time and of the forces of an operation that implies an economic calculation, a detour, a delay, a relay, a reserve, a representation”. Derrida sums up these characteristics as “temporalizing.” The temporal is thought in terms of

²⁹⁸ *D.*, p. 22.

holding in reserve, of deferring; deferral, in turn, expresses the inherent thrust of the system to optimize its forces. The fundamental move of this system is the reservation of the entity (the signifier) to *assure the availability of the entity*. It belongs to the calculus of the system that it would “account for” both the establishment of pure presence and its absolute loss.²⁹⁹

Where does this movement lead us? What is reserved in the Derridean discourse of writing as that which assures the availability of the entity? As Radloff wonders, doesn't the Derridean program intimate the systematic occultation of the site of disclosure (*Dasein*), the site (*Unverborgenheit*) of questioning-thinking, by actively forgetting the process of the emergence from occultation? Doesn't the abandonment of the *question* of Being signify the abandonment of the being that questions—and therefore all beings—to the excess of metaphysics in the technological?³⁰⁰

The “subject” in bits

By way of a deferral of an answer to these questions and thereby to prepare such an answer let me turn to the second of the points I marked above, the question of the place of the subject in deconstruction. This question has two aspects: how, in general, is the domain of subjectivity treated in deconstruction, and how, specifically, does this treatment impact on Heidegger's thinking of Being? With regard to the first aspect, the “subject” is a dispersed figure in Derrida's text. Neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a sign nor a thing, neither a presence nor an absence, neither a position nor a negation “subject” is the name of a “*generative multiplicity*”. In other words, the subject of deconstruction has been “exploded” or “disseminated”. Indeed, subjectivity is but “an effect of the general economy of the text and of *différance*, an effect inscribed in the system of *différance*”. Among the bits (supposedly *of* the subject) is the humanist subject,

²⁹⁹ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 292 at p.27.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

the subject as gram, the subject as *Dasein*, the subject as *who*, as signature, as person, and so on. Here, the one who speaks is herself “written” before being able to speak, is herself calculated—not behind a text as a governing intention, but by means of the text through “*topical and technical determinations*”. The subject, of course, does not “disappear” in deconstruction. Nevertheless, as regards the subject of writing “it is solely necessary to reconsider the problem of the effect of subjectivity such as it is produced by the structure of the text.”³⁰¹ In this case, writing, in the order of its effects, “enlarges *différance* and the possibility of putting in reserve: it at once and in the same movement constitutes and effaces so-called conscious subjectivity, its logos, and its theological attributes.”³⁰²

“Can there be a clearer indication of the affinity of Derridean thought with the topics of the Heideggerian understanding of technology?”³⁰³ This is in fact Galt Crowell’s question. As he says, the idea that for deconstruction the gram or trace constitutes and effaces subjectivity by enlarging the possibility for “putting in reserve” brings to light the very term by which Heidegger defines the way in which all that is experienced under the sway of technology. Once again the critique of the (Cartesian) subject, the “onto-theological” subject which is also at issue in Heidegger’s text, is here carried to the point where it is seen as “in reserve,” as an effect of that which it does not govern. However, there is no complimentary movement, as there is in Heidegger’s text, back towards the recovery of a subject who would not simply be such an effect but would, precisely, be the differential site of disclosure (*Da-sein*) of Being in its withdrawal. Indeed, it is precisely such a move that in Derrida’s eyes holds Heidegger back short of the margin of metaphysics. Deconstruction then will move in the opposite direction, or, to be more

³⁰¹ *P.*, p. 88.

³⁰² As one might expect Derrida’s inscription of the subject and subjectivity forms a highly complex thread that runs throughout his corpus and in the space I have here my treatment can only appear an oversimplification. If one were to locate an essay in which Derrida explores the subject-in-bits-and-pieces, it would be in the essay published in 1986 entitled “To Unsense the Subjectile” in *The Secret Art of Antonio Artaud*. trans. Mary Ann Caws. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). For a nuanced and extended essay on this matter see Chapter 4 of Herman Rapaport’s *Later Derrida: Reading the Recent Work*, (London:Routledge, 2003).

³⁰³ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 292 at p. 434.

precise, in “the direction of an entirely other text”. This brings me the second aspect of my question: How does the Derridean treatment of the subject impact on Heidegger’s thinking?

Heidegger and “The Ends of Man”

Derrida’s deconstruction of Heidegger’s thinking extends as far as and beyond Heidegger’s retrieval of human existence in the form of *Dasein* and later of “man”. In this respect, “The Ends of Man” is one of the most important works in Derrida’s corpus. This text can be read as a repetition of Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism,” raising the question of thinking the ends of man otherwise than as determined by dialectics or negation. The essay performs a reinscription of Heidegger for the sake of allowing the question posed at the outset to resonate. In doing so Derrida’s text entreats the question of the human and its limits, at once petitioning, as its precursor, a certain Heideggerian authority and the metaphysical closure of the question it announces, while at the same time offering a decision of sorts over the equivocality of the way in which the “Letter” at once lifts itself out of the ontology of the human, setting it in relief, while nevertheless remaining bound to it in its very overcoming. While problematizing the “we men” of humanism Heidegger nevertheless insists on what Derrida calls the “magnetic attraction” of man and Being upon one another. Derrida interrogates this relation by way of a return to Section 2 of *Being and Time* where Heidegger explicates the formal structure of the question of Being as the unity of the questioner (*Dasein*) and what is questioned. He argues that although *Dasein* is not man, it is nevertheless nothing other than a certain repetition of man, such that Heidegger’s destruction of humanism reinscribes itself within an older metaphysics that in fact determines the shape of every humanism. To be specific, according to Derrida, the *Dasein* analytic repeats a certain figure of man and humanism and thereby seeks “the revalorization and dignity of man.”³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ *EM.*, p. 128.

Now, although Heidegger never speaks explicitly of such revalorization the attempt to think the “essence of man” clearly occupies a central place in the thinking of Being. And this is where Derrida develops his deconstruction of the latent value of proximity, gathering, and the proper that I took up in Chapter 2 with regard to Heidegger’s epochal schema of the history of Being. Derrida elaborates this position through a deconstruction of the “proper” of man, of his *Eigenheit* and “authenticity” with respect to Being. For Derrida, “[p]ropriety, the co-propriety of Being and man, is proximity as inseparability”.³⁰⁵ It is proximity that governs the ek-static “belonging-together” of man and Being, the open site (*Da-*) which sustains and carries each to the other and which is opened up by the question of Being. Derrida emphasizes that *Dasein* serves as the privileged being that makes accessible the question of the meaning of Being precisely because of its proximity to both the question and to itself, and that this proximity is determined by the value of self-presence. This value of proximity, which according to Derrida “will not cease to direct all the itineraries of [Heidegger’s]thought” thus articulates a certain revalorization of presence, and it functions only insofar as it fails to fully interrogate the values it conceals. Consequently,

It remains that the thinking of Being, the thinking of the truth of Being, in the name of which Heidegger de-limits humanism and metaphysics, remains a thinking of man. Man and the name of man are not displaced in the question of Being such as it is put to metaphysics. Even less do they disappear. On the contrary, at issue is a kind of reevaluation or revalorization of the essence and dignity of man. What is threatened in the extension of metaphysics and technology—and we know the essential necessity that leads Heidegger to associate one with the other—is the essence of man, which here would have to be thought before and beyond its metaphysical determinations.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.133.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p.128.

The implication of this priority of the proximity (of Being and man) within the metaphysics of presence is traced by Derrida not in order to expose deficiencies that might be corrected—“who could testify against it? and from where?”³⁰⁷—but rather by way of reopening the question of difference and of inscription in general. Here, the function of the notion of proximity within the Derridean text pre-empts the possibility of the question of Being by showing it to suppose inscription in general. It thereby deconstructs the site or opening for the appropriation of Being which discloses itself first and foremost in its withdrawal. By placing “in reserve” “man” and all its modes, whether this be thought as subject or *Dasein*, deconstruction at last shows the way beyond all anthropocentrism and humanism (as that which would hold Heidegger back within metaphysics) and opens a new scene: it prepares the space of the technical constitution of human being as originary supplementarity. As Derrida says in *Of Grammatology*:

Man allows himself to be announced to himself after the fact of supplementarity, which is thus not an attribute—accidental or essential—of man...supplementarity, which is *nothing*, neither a substance nor an essence of man. It is precisely the play of presence and absence, the opening of this play that no metaphysical nor ontological concept can comprehend. Therefore the property[*propre*] of man is not a property of man: it is the very dislocation of the proper in general: it is the dislocation of the characteristic, the proper in general, the impossibility—and therefore the desire—of self-proximity.”³⁰⁸

The supplement, says Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena*, is another name for *différance*. “Supplementarity is in reality *différance*, the operation of differing which at one and the same time both fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and delay,” because the supplementing difference “vicariously stands in for

³⁰⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: dying – awaiting (one another) at the “limits of truth”*, trans. Thomas Dutoit, (Stanford, Calif.:Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 56.

³⁰⁸ *OG.*, p. 244.

presence due to its primordial self-deficiency.”³⁰⁹ But unlike *différance*, supplementarity stresses more explicitly the function of substitutive supplementation in general, which is rooted in the “primordial nonself-presence” of “full” terms.³¹⁰ It places greater emphasis on the structural necessity of the addition of a difference to a “full” entity by showing it to be a consequence of the fact that “full” terms compensate for their lack of another origin. Understood in this way, supplementarity could also be said to be a variation of the trace, but again, instead of *referring* to other, supplementarity attributes the structural need of *adding* an other to the vicarious nature of presence itself.

Now, with regard to what is at issue here, such supplementarity, in its play of presence and absence, “precedes what one calls man and extends outside of him”.³¹¹ It precedes the distinction between man and machine, between the human and the non-human, between human being and other living organisms. Consequently, “Instead of having recourse to all the concepts that habitually serve to distinguish man from other living beings (instinct and intelligence, absence or presence of speech, of society, of economy, etc., etc.) the notion of the program is evoked. It must of course be understood in the cybernetic sense, but cybernetics is itself intelligible only in terms of a history of the possibility of the trace.”³¹²

The technical supplement: Derrida, Leroi-Gourhan, and Freud.

Supplementarity defines deconstructed life as a structure of deferred availability, deferred being-present; it thereby presupposes human life to be the kind of *entity* which *can be supplemented*. In this context the Derrida’s elaboration of writing can be taken as an innovative engagement with the originary technicity of the human. We can understand

³⁰⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 88; hereafter cited as *SP*.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

³¹¹ *OG.*, p. 244.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

this in terms of the work of the French paleoanthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan who exercises a not often remarked upon influence on Derrida. A central theme of Leroi-Gourhan's work is the importance, from the evolutionary point of view, of manual technology in the development of human intelligence and symbolic representation. Such development is only possible thinks Leroi-Gourhan, through the close interaction of the hand (its use of tools) and brain over the millennia, their mutual conditioning in a circuit of positive feedback whereby the "program" is evoked. In this regard he shows (1) that it is impossible to dissociate anthropogenesis from technogenesis, (2) that technogenesis pursues the conquest of mobility, that is, of life, by means other than life, (3) that accordingly the relation between the human and the non human has to be rethought, (4) that the technical exteriorization of the living marks the origin of humanity, (5) that the technical object constitutes as such a memory support (as well as the condition of what Plato calls "hypomnesis"), (5) that for these reasons, language and instrumentality are two aspects of the same phenomenon.³¹³

This idea of a positive feedback between tool and agent, their reciprocal determination, clearly inform Derrida's thinking since in *Of Grammatology* Derrida refers directly to these theses. The "logic of the supplement"—as a logic of prosthesis that shows the "truth" of the "inside" to be (in) the outside in which it exteriorizes itself—makes the opposition inside/outside redundant. Leroi-Gourhan can only speak of "exteriorization" to the extent that what exteriorizes itself (the "interior," "life becoming conscious of itself") is *constituted* by its very exteriorization. This is something that Derrida's reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*³¹⁴ also elaborates in terms of the logic of hypomnesis and is already made explicit in "Freud and the Scene of Writing".³¹⁵ In the latter essay we recall that Derrida discusses Freud's use of a child's toy—the "Mystic Writing Pad". The Mystic Pad is a machine that represents the workings of the psyche.

³¹³ Andre Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Ann Bostock Berger (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1993).

³¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy." in *DIS* pp. 63-171.

³¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (London: Routledge, 1978) pp. 196-231.

The problem for Freud is how the psyche has new experiences, understood as new, while having memories with an ongoing role in the psyche. What must the mind be like if it can perform both of these operations? His answer is that it is like a mystic writing pad where there is a slab of wax covered by a thin sheet which is attached to the slab at one end and loose at the other. Actually there are two sheets, a transparent one on top of a translucent piece of waxed paper. Any inscription makes a mark that can be erased by lifting the two sheets. The mark disappears at the surface but the wax slab beneath the sheets retains the inscription. It is easy to understand Derrida's interest in Freud's model. The system of retention and erasure articulates Freud's use of scriptural metaphors; perception is always by way of writing. Writing opens up the possibility of perception as a repetition of what was erased in the perceptual system and traced in the memory system. Therefore, it supplements perception even in the "present" of the "initial" impression. The metaphor of writing becomes a working model when it is combined with the machine in the model of the Mystic Pad.

Typically, however, Derrida is not content to indicate the heuristic advantages of Freud's model and this is where he exceeds Freud. Freud's use of the analogy of the Mystic Pad is in the end a purely instrumental one; he concedes that this model fails to imitate the actual workings of the human memory to the extent that it does not possess the autonomy or spontaneity of the human psychological apparatus. It is at this point that Derrida questions the limits of Freud's model. Despite the sophistication of Freud's model, his final distinction between the living human psyche and the dead technology of the Mystic Pad remarks the traditional philosophical conception of technology as external support, an auxiliary but not essential part of the human. In exceeding Freud, Derrida proposes that the "resemblance," the very possibility of passage between psyche and model, would indicate a more fundamental relationship between the two. The very possibility of the supplementation of consciousness is grounded in a necessary externalization. This *necessity* structures the psyche as such (in its "interior"). The psyche as such is

externalization, is machine writing. The resemblance of memory to its “mechanical representation” defines memory. The “machine”—“and, consequently, representation—is death and finitude *within* the psyche.”³¹⁶ Therefore, death (the “machine”: representation) is already interior to “life”. Writing inscribes the “technics” of the “relation between life and death, between present and representation”.³¹⁷ As in a cybernetic circuit, the externalization of the human would also be the internalization of the non-human, a reciprocal process of affection and modification.

Stiegler’s prosthesis

The implications of what is at issue here are brought out by Bernard Stiegler who in the first volume of his *Technics and Time* argues that the history of the human is nothing other than the process of “exteriorization” ground upon an absolute default of origin, a thought “which thus opens the ultimate possibility of a pursuit of technological differentiation—pursuit of life by means other than those of life—by the renunciation of humanity itself.”³¹⁸ As Stiegler sees it the problem arising here

is that the evolution of this essentially technical being that the human is exceeds the biological, although this dimension is an essential part of the technical phenomenon itself, something like its enigma. The evolution of the “prosthesis,” not itself living, by which the human is nonetheless defined as a living being, constitutes the reality of the human’s evolution, as if, with it, the history of life were to continue by means other than life: this is the paradox of the living being characterized in its forms of life by the non living—or by the traces that its life leaves in the non living.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 114.

³¹⁷ Ibid., p. 116.

³¹⁸ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins, (Stanford, Calif.:Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 144.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 50. Stiegler’s own work is deeply indebted to Derrida even if he will want to mark his distance. Like Derrida, Stiegler is concerned to show that the concept of technics, though a metaphysical concept through and through, reserves resources for thinking that allow a displacement of metaphysics in general, and the possibility of an opening of it to the thought of an originary technicity. And, like Derrida, Stiegler’s

For Stiegler the paradox of human being leads to recognition that, “[i]n the process and in its evolution, the human undoubtedly remains the agent of differentiation, even though it is guided by the very thing it differentiates, even though it discovers itself and becomes differentiated in that process, in short, is invented or finds its image there, its *imago*, being here neither a phantasm nor a simulacrum—as it always is when describing technics. Yet can one then measure what is therefore said of the human, of (the absence of) its unity and essence?”³²⁰ “From the absence of unity in the human, it would be better to conclude that the human can only be defined negatively, by the trait of this technical inhumanity that allows it to be differentiated without, however, permitting its identification.”³²¹

Stiegler’s narrative of the technical differentiation of the human, of the impossibility of anything but a phantasmatic identification of the human in its inhumanity, shows us through antithesis how everything of the order of what is usually considered specifically human is immediately and irremediably linked to an absence of property (*impropriété*), to

method shows the necessity today of a negotiation between philosophy and the sciences for technics to be thought in its undetermined “specificity”. In this connection, Stiegler has an apparently straightforward answer to what metaphysics has failed to think in failing to think technics: *organized inorganic entities*. These are, he says, situated between the inorganic beings described by the physical sciences, and the organised (organic) beings studied by biology, and they have a dynamic proper to them (so that technical objects are in a sense *self-organising* inorganic matter). p. 85. The major moves in Stiegler’s argumentation are as follows: 1. establish an ontic specificity of technical objects; 2. establish that such objects form a *system* with a quasi-intentional dynamic proper to it; 3. Show that this dynamic is inseparable from the process of “hominization” as such. Technicity, metaphysically thought of as mere supplement or prosthesis of what is properly human turns out to be the “origin” of the humanity, which is thus marked by an originary “defect” or “lack” that technics makes good. Man is in this sense “essentially” technical.

It is tempting to find in Stiegler’s genealogy of “matter” a solution to the problems that I considered in Chapter 3 with regard to Derrida’s inability to offer a non metaphysical materialism. It is also in Stiegler that one can find another turn on Derrida’s attempt to deconstruct Heidegger. That said, as Geoffrey Bennington points out, Stiegler’s at times brilliant account of originary technicity is presented in tandem with a set of claims about technics and even techno-science as though all these claims happened on the same level. For Bennington, “[t]his mechanism makes of Stiegler’s book perhaps the most refined example to date of the confusion of the *quasi-transcendental* (originary technicity) and *transcendental contraband* (technics), whereby Stiegler constantly reinstates all the oppositions (summarized here in the *physis/techne* opposition) his analysis is also acute enough to criticize and deconstruct.” See Geoffrey Bennington, “Emergencies,” in *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 18., 1998. For a strong defense of Stiegler see Richard Beardsworth, “From a Genealogy of Matter to a Politics of Memory: Stiegler’s Thinking of Technics” in *Technema* at <http://www.gold.ac.uk/tekhnama/2/beardsworth/beardsworth.html>

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 158.

³²¹ Ibid., p. 157.

a process of “supplementation,” of prosthetization or exteriorization, in which nothing is no longer immediately at hand, where everything is found mediated and technicized, unbalanced. Human being is characterized by an exteriorization which is not preceded by an interiority, but which determines it. This is indeed Derrida’s position. As he says in an interview collected in *Points*, “There is no natural, originary body: technology has not simply added itself, from the outside or after the fact, as a foreign body. Or at least this foreign or dangerous supplement is “originarily” at work and in place in the supposedly ideal interiority of the “body and soul.” It is indeed at the heart of the heart.”³²² What is said here is repeated in an interview with Richard Beardsworth where Derrida notes that the living being undoes the traditional relation between *physis* and *techne* (whereby the latter has always been subordinated to the former) and should rather be thought in the context of an originary technicity:

As a self-relation , as activity and reactivity, as differential force and repetition, life is always already inhabited by technicization. The relation between *physis* and technics is not an opposition; from the very first there is instrumentalization [*dés l’origine il y a de l’instrumentalisation*]. The term *instrument* is inappropriate in the context of originary technicity. Whatever, a prosthetic strategy of repetition inhabits the very moment of life: life is a process of self-replacement, the handing down of life is a *mechanike*, a form of technics. Not only, then, is technics not in opposition to life, it also haunts it from the very beginning.³²³

The idea that inscription in general both constitutes and effaces human being and beings in general according to supplementarity and the possibility of “putting in reserve,” defines

³²² Jacques Derrida, “The Rhetoric of Drugs.” trans. Micheal Isreal, in *Points...Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elizabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992) pp. 228-254. p. 244-245.

³²³ Jacques Derrida, “Nietzsche and the Machine.” trans. Richard Beardsworth, in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001*, trans and ed. Elizabeth Rottenberg. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 215-256. p. 244.

deconstructed life as a structure of deferred availability, deferred being-present: it thereby presupposes human life to be the kind of *entity* which *can be supplemented*. (Heidegger calls this the “technicized animal”) The graphics of supplementarity integrate technics into the human being conceived differentially.

Generalized inscription and the “standing reserve”

It is telling that within the exorbitant method of deconstruction, in its approach to the subject and to beings in general—that they suppose the necessity of inscription in general—that supplementarity should come to replace human being conceived as *Dasein*. It is equally telling that within the deconstructive gesture there remains room for a “structural science” but not for phenomenology though both were the original sources for Derrida’s project. For it is precisely in the trace of specifically phenomenological motifs, in the disclosive event of the unconcealment of beings, that the movement of Heidegger’s thinking opens onto the non-representative and incalculable actuality of metaphysics where this is equal to the surpassing or thinking beyond of contemporary techno-scientific accomplishment and reign. The authority which Derrida grants to writing on the other hand implicates an extra turn which re-traces the completion of metaphysics to re-iterate it. Given that the disavowal of writing in and through the logocentric era was, as Derrida insists, equally the disavowal of *techné* conceived as mere instrument and tool, the “productive possibilities” that issue with the liberation of the graphic, e.g., the creation of technology in the guise of programmes of “research and development,” in the guise of cybernetics, artificial intelligence, the manipulation of genetic codes including our own (the production of “bio-machines”: clones, chimera’s, hybrids, shape shifters, mosaics), are the repressed empirical re-iterations of what was always the case: writing was always already the originary condition of the world-wide technicization of all relations among beings.

As the above suggests, it seems that the program of the dissimulation of the withdrawal (the forgetting of forgetting) of (the thinking of) Being and of the deconstruction of *Dasein* indeed forgets itself as the condition of the systematic manipulation of entities. It should not therefore be surprising to find in the Derridean text those features which Heidegger takes to be characteristic of the *Ge-stell*. Indeed, if as opening onto a space that extends beyond the purview of representation the significance of the latter lies primarily and decisively in the elision of that definiteness, of those “proper” boundaries, which were the hallmark of the “subject-object” relation, and in the infinite ordering, storing up, switching-around, re-channeling, and calculating of “energy”—i.e., of that impalpable non-object which is known only by its “effects”—then the very emergence of the notion of the field of generalized inscription as determined by the appeal to *différance*, trace, supplement, *retrait*, etc., can be thought in terms of the Heideggerian standing reserve. This is Galt Crowell’s view. He points out that insofar as it authorizes the erasure of boundaries the Derridean text can be seen to be symptomatic of thinking in the age of technology. As he says, this has been implicit in the agenda of the structuralist inquiry into differential or diacritical characteristics of signs and sign systems as a counter thrust to phenomenology, and it becomes explicit in the shift from language to the more general notion of writing: “For in the concept of a writing which would be cut loose from the logocentric priority of “full” presence there lies an originary “framing” by way of certain structuralist views of the sign and the system of signs as a setting up of the field of endless “deferrals.”³²⁴ “Writing, as the doubling of the sign is the condition for all technology, for all “programming” as Derrida claims. But then since all signs reveal this doubling structure according to the deconstruction of structuralism the concept of arche-writing which emerges can be seen as the essence of technology, or better, as that which replaces “essence” in the technological age, viz., the “frame” or

³²⁴ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 291 at p. 435.

weave of *différance*.”³²⁵ With the liberation of the graphic Being and beings are seen to be an “effect of *différance*,” an effect of the general text. The very determinateness contained in the concept of an “entity” is said to be the “occulted movement of the trace” achieved in metaphysics. “In the end it is the concept of the trace, which “neither meaning nor presence can pin down” in the field of writing that bears the closest resemblance to the Heideggerian notion of the “standing reserve”. ”³²⁶

This assessment that Derrida’s notion of generalized inscription can be thought in terms of the Heideggerian thinking of the standing reserve is one that is shared by Radloff who asserts that “*l’écriture* is the metatechnology of the discourse of expropriation: it belongs in the same as what Heidegger calls *das Ge-stell*.”³²⁷ Taking into account its usual translation as “Enframing” or Framework” Radloff states that that which Heidegger attempts to think under the term *Ge-stell* is “more properly thought as Exposition: the discourse of expropriation.” Translated as Exposition, *Ge-stell* names “the system of discourse which expropriates the identity of the entity in favor of its availability for show (play) within the functional system of writing.”³²⁸ Noting that the scope of Derridean generalized writing is such that it cuts across and cuts together (grafts) all manner of entities thereby erasing the distinction between man and machine and between human being and other living organisms, Radloff states that inscription in general functions as the “interface” which constitutes, nature and mankind as mutual expropriation. Thus “[w]riting, or let us say, “programmatics,” would be—to use the shorthand of metaphysics—the condition of the possibility of the manipulation and production of entities. Writing, then, is entirely at the service, as it were—is the empowering thought—of a more efficient technicity.”³²⁹

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 435.

³²⁶ Ibid., p. 436.

³²⁷ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 292 at p. 27.

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 27-28.

Now, having cited the arguments of both Galt Crowell and Radloff I should say that although they open up for inspection the link Derrida draws between writing and technology nowhere do they take up Derrida on his own terms; that is, they do not make anything of Derrida's assertions regarding the co-implication of writing and technics where this issues in the thinking of generalized inscription as originary technicity. Nor do they make anything of Derrida's attestation that before it is anything deconstruction is a response to, is itself, a certain historical event, a happening that is linked to a mutation within Western techno-scientific culture. Nor again do they make their way to any of those texts where Derrida's deconstruction of the Heideggerian thinking of technology is played out in explicit fashion. On the contrary, everything turns on locating Derrida in Heidegger's text and there is no attempt to spoil the demonstration by rehearsing Derrida's powerful challenge to such a move. Consequently, nothing is made of the at once infinitesimal but decisive *différance* that Derrida wants to mark between his own text and Heidegger's.

That said, although they do not say as much both Galt Crowell and Radloff do highlight the links between writing and technology as it is found in Derrida. They do therefore mark, without saying so and without recognizing its deconstructive implications, the *différance* that articulates Derrida's closure of Heidegger's text where this turns on the affirmation of originary technicity. Now, if we subscribe to the view that Derridean writing can be seen as belonging to the "standing reserve" of *das Ge-stell*, then this originality must be seen as already at work in Heidegger's assertion of the technological completion of philosophy. That is, the Heideggerian text already contains within its weave the thought of technics as it is found in and subsequently elaborated by Derrida as that which will decisively open the proximity and distance between the thinking of Being and deconstruction. The Derridean text therefore finds itself inscribed within the thinking of Being at that very moment, and precisely, when it subjects this thinking to deconstructive re-inscription. To say this is not only to affirm the

incalculability of Heidegger's thinking with respect to the Derridean calculation, it is equally to mark deconstruction's own subjection to its articulation of the logic of closure.

A strategic mis-reading

The incalculable shock that is delivered to the Derridean text becomes intelligible when we consider the strategic wager or calculation that Derrida has taken with respect to Heidegger's aporetic status vis-à-vis metaphysics. As David Wood has remarked, the real contribution of Derrida's reinscription of Heidegger's thinking is to have drawn our attention to the double movement at work in his text ("It is at once contained in [metaphysics] and transgresses it. But it is impossible to separate the two"), to have drawn together the strands of each movement, and then to have presented these two movements as intimately conjoined. What Derrida then does is to inscribe in a most delicate way his own thought of *différance* ("not within but on the horizon of the Heideggerian paths, and yet in them") as a way (a) of coming to see Being always as a (historically) determined trace, (b) of grasping that "all is not to be thought of at one go," and (c) of giving a radical integration to Heidegger's various moves.³³⁰

The lesson we are to learn from this exemplary reading is that not only can everything not be thought of "at one go" but that it is essential to deconstructive reinscription that it take certain routes. This itinerary is an assumed paradox: *on the one hand*, by showing that Heidegger's various reinscriptions of metaphysics were always for him and still are for us open to deconstructive redraftings pursuing the matter for thinking in different contexts, Derrida remarks the thinking of Being and opens up another Heidegger, one who is continually on the way beyond metaphysics (and its privilege of presence); *on the other hand*, such an opening of Heidegger's text which addresses itself via the detour of a strategic telecommunication, sets in play a relay that requires a switch point, a halt, stasis or moment of determination (a decision or calculation over the incalculability of

³³⁰ See David Wood, *Thinking After Heidegger*, (London: Polity Press, 2002), p. 97.

Heidegger's thought) that short circuits any possible move out of (the technological completion of) the history of Western philosophy by locating Heidegger's thinking in its belonging to metaphysics.

Now, as Wood asks, is there not a danger or risk that by following this itinerary, in articulating the closure of Heidegger's thinking, the Derridean strategy reduces its dynamic to a structure in tension, and that the real movement of Heidegger's text—its immanent transformation—merely supplies evidence of both sides of this tension?³³¹ Surely it is not only we and Derrida who pass through deconstructive writing (in relation to Heidegger)—it is Heidegger's own practice. In this case, Heidegger's text does not wait upon Derrida to send it elsewhere, it is itself already on the way. Indeed, as I emphasized in Chapter 1 even as they return to the same matter (*Sache*) again and again, Heidegger's own writings are themselves pluralized and differentiated into various "Heidegger's," *topoi*, and thought-paths. Here, Heidegger's thought is articulated across a re-elaborative gathering that is equally an irreducible dispersion of the "unique central question". To point up such plurality is not to deny Heidegger's text its unity and continuity; on the contrary, it is to recognize this unity across and from out of its performative enactment, the enactment that is of that which is to be thought ever anew, i.e., the self-differentiating of *die Sache*. The issue then would be: how distinctively productive is Derrida's rewriting of Heidegger's text given that this text, clearly, is already differentiated and is continually reiterated and reinscribed in different and clashing ways? Is Derridean deconstruction able to bear the thought of the *trans* (enactment, movement, opening,) that belongs to Heidegger's thinking? If, as Wood says, Derrida stresses the "structure in tension" of Heidegger's thought rather than its own movement of differentiation might not this suggest perhaps that Derridean reinscription functions by way of a motivated calculus that reduces the immanent dynamic of Heidegger's thinking to a thesis the better to release its own brand of textual difference?

³³¹ Ibid., p. 97.

This is a scenario suggested by Thomas Sheehan as a way of making sense of what, in his opinion, is the gross misreading of Heidegger found in Derrida's early work. As Sheehan says, "[i]f we study Derrida's early interpretations of Heidegger in *Marges de la Philosophie* and *De la Grammatologie* we find him attributing to Heidegger positions that simply cannot be found on Heidegger's page."³³² More strongly, Sheehan contends that Derrida proposes readings which are so obviously wrong that "quite frankly, we would not accept them from our own graduate students."³³³

What Sheehan finds extraordinary are Derrida's most obvious arguments for Heidegger's continued commitment to the philosophical tradition and for his privileging of unity over dispersal; his claim that Heidegger's mobilization of the family of words relating to the adjective *eigen* marking the movement from authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) through to appropriation (*Ereignis*), articulates "perhaps the most continuous thread in Heidegger's thought," and demonstrates more than any other his revaluation of the thought of presence and desire for the proper. Briefly stated, Sheehan thinks that by linking *Eigentlichkeit* and *Ereignis* Derrida has indeed zeroed in on the center of Heidegger's thought. However, he contends that Derrida has completely missed the movement he seeks to affirm. Whereas Derrida claims to have shown by deconstruction that Heidegger's is a text marked by the metaphysical desire for unity and "the same" whereby Being means immediate presence to *Dasein* which is in turn defined as presence or nearness to itself, what Heidegger's thinking does in fact perform is the undermining of any such immediacy and self-presence. Just to take the example of *Eigentlichkeit*, authenticity, as Sheehan points out, taken at their word Heidegger's texts clearly say that to be authentic means to live in one's thrownness and self-absence and that what is proper to *Dasein* lies precisely in its condition of being "*Fort-Sein*," self-transcendent in the direction of the finite delimitation of any self-presence.³³⁴ There is of course no doubt

³³² Thomas Sheehan, "Derrida and Heidegger" in *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and Don Ihde, (Albany: State University of New York, 1985), pp. 201-217. p. 203.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

that there are moments in Heidegger's thinking where a certain drive to presence manifests itself. However, for Sheehan, in his attempt to retrieve the problem of Being from its metaphysical instance what Heidegger's text provides above all is an abyssal thinking of dis-ownment, withdrawal, exposure, openness, and even dissolution. Indeed, Heidegger is so much aware of this abyssal dimension that were it not an essential dimension of the proper, the proper would have to be abandoned.

Derrida's arguments over Heidegger's use of the etymological chain *Eigentlichkeit*, *Eigen*, *Ereignis* are also questioned by Wood who remarks that it would be hard to overestimate the power and persuasiveness of the moves by which Heidegger persistently distances himself from affirming the value of presence and all its cognates. To begin with, for Wood it does not seem sufficient to treat the movement from *Eigentlichkeit* to *Ereignis*, say, as one of displacement, in which a univocal sense can be attributed to these terms such that "the same" concern is being handed on from word to word. That does not seem to account for the radical dropping of the term *Eigentlichkeit* after *Being and Time*, nor for Heidegger's own account of the provisionality of his formulation in *Being and Time*.³³⁵ Moreover, like Sheehan, Wood notes that Heidegger's thinking of the notion of authenticity has such an abyssal dimension in *Being and Time* as to disturb rather than confirm or sustain any sort of secure self-identity. Similarly, if we turn to the thinking of *Ereignis* even the most cursory examination of Heidegger's text will recognize the verbality and transitivity at stake, and will note above all that the thinking of *Ereignis* can only arise necessarily and on condition that thinking has opened up and built a way of questioning into the essence of technology. As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, questioning into the essence of technology means to enter into the transitivity of Being where this is equal to the the oscillating-vibrating edifice of the *Ge-stell* as the opening of *Ereignis*. Taking into account the constellation of *Ge-stell-Ereignis* as one that involves above all movement and transition we see that what is at issue in Heidegger's text is articulated

³³⁵ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 330 at p. 98.

primarily in terms of withholding, withdrawal, denial, temporal extension, and expropriation. Insofar as it implicates the peculiar quality of a space withdrawn from representation *Ereignis* cannot be “placed in front of us,” or “opposite us,” or “as something all encompassing”. One only comes into one’s own by enduring transcendence, by being radically outside oneself, as the opening of “time,” as much as of “space”. Thus when Heidegger speaks of *Ereignis* as “the extending and sending which opens and preserves,” we must resist the supposition that something like a simple reinscription of the value of the proper or property is being reasserted.

I let citations stand in place of arguments here because any straightforward “critique” of the “Who’s-more-metaphysical?” type is, as I have said, very problematic, perhaps impossible, and almost certainly beside the point since it remains (rather overtly) within the bounds of representation and exhausts itself in merely comparing texts, securing landmarks, and in making decisions between themes or positions. This is a circumstance to which both Wood and Sheehan are sensitive. Instead of fashioning a thesis it is more productive to see Derrida’s reinscription of Heidegger’s text as structured by a pattern of return, of recognition of misrecognition, and of constant reworking, which is the way Wood sees it, or, as a calculated misreading, which is Sheehan’s view. To be more precise, Sheehan contends that Derrida has strategically misunderstood the difference that rules in the inseparable structure of *Dasein* and *Ereignis* and that he has misrepresented the irreducible movement of Heidegger’s thinking the better to release it as his own *différance*. Thus he can find in the Heideggerian thematics of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) and *Ereignis*—that is, at the very place where Derrida traces Heidegger’s commitment to the metaphysics of presence—a movement that is “the undecidable itself, neither presence nor absence, neither inside nor outside,” a movement which turns out to be “the dislocation that never arrives at a new locus, the effacement of entities by reducing them to traces which in turn are not reducible to any *telos*.”³³⁶

³³⁶ Cf. *op. cit.*, n 332 at p. 216.

Derrida's thesis

Following these remarks let me consider the possibility that once the deconstructive incision is made in Heidegger's text everything happens as if the problematic of closure compels Derrida to strategically avoid, obfuscate, overlook, ignore, or restrict what, in Heideggerian thought, would disrupt his textual understanding of (the history of) philosophy, of writing and *différance* etc. Here, Heidegger's text yields to a violent yet almost internal necessity and, although not actually undone, is nonetheless opened up by a certain machinic intervention. It is thus forced to open onto still another reading that refuses to let itself be contained there. Furthermore, let me suggest that at the same time as he marks the undecidability of Heidegger's text, its simultaneous belonging to and transgression with respect to metaphysics, Derrida's deconstructive method articulates a calculus that checks the differential constitution of Heidegger's text and puts in play a program that paves the way for a restricted economization of the sheer plurality of the many "ways," "paths," or way-traces that make up the incalculable and nonmasterable *Sache* of his thought. In this case, in presuming to penetrate to the most intimate reaches of Heidegger's thinking Derrida reduces it to a schema that effectively re-marks its irreducible movement to take it into account, to re-count it, and to integrate it into the general economy of writing as a way of opening up its textuality (as his own).

Now, if Derrida's insistence on "subtle, hidden, stubborn privilege" of the general concept of proximity, the desire for that which is gathered and unified, presents us with perhaps the most obvious instance of the Derridean strategic misreading of Heidegger, then this ought to be readable in his deconstruction of Heidegger's thinking of the end of metaphysics and its technological outcome. This is indeed what we find. In this regard Derrida's reinscription of Heidegger's text can be seen to exhibit a revealing swerve from the decisive formulations of those texts composed in the 1950s and 1960s which think the essence of technology as *Ge-stell* and as cybernetics towards the more restricted issues of

those of the 1930s and 1940s. As was shown in Chapter 1, in the economy of Heidegger's thought the latter set of texts open onto the emergence of technology via the rethinking of the history of nihilism as found in Nietzsche and by way of its reflection on representation as the condition for the transformation of science into research via the projection of object-domains and the demand for exactness. Here, the most important development in Heidegger's thinking lies in the way it effectively elaborates the way in which the technological apprehension of the modern world is experienced as "representation" (*Vorstellung*) as "view" and as "object for a subject". As I said, although Heidegger's later thinking of the essence of technology as *Ge-stell* retains a semiological connection with the thinking of representation such thinking is transformed and is not applicable, without further ado, to the later texts. To be more precise, in the pervasive dominance and increasing prevalence of *Ge-stell* considerably more is at stake than what is said to be the case in those essays in which representation is at issue since, as Heidegger explicitly states, what is revealed within modern technology is no longer uniquely articulated within the horizon of representation and so is foreign to traditional thinking (with its emphasis on a static conception of Being). The chain of cognates built around *Stelle*, "place," emphasizes the centrality of a conception of placing: setting things in place, holding them in place, ordering them into place, securing their place within a system of placement where everything is posited and has its place. But with the advent of full blown technology in the manner of *Ge-stell* this placing, positing, and structuring of everything within the system entails precisely a *displacement* from the immediate field of what is brought to stand. The transitivity, inconstancy, violent vibrating and oscillating that such a system entails is precisely what enables Heidegger to think beyond a static conception of Being which is determinative of metaphysics. In short, technology is the field and decisive condition which opens thinking to a possibility in excess of traditional metaphysics as actualized in the representationalist project. To say it again: it is

technology and only technology that opens thinking to the event (*Ereignis*) and to the difference (*Unter-Schied*) that is the matter (*Sache*) for thinking.

That it is the earlier work that primarily informs the Derridean reinscription of Heidegger can be seen if we turn back to those texts—*The Post Card* and its supplements—that were the primary focus of Chapter 2, texts which contain what remains Derrida’s most explicit and sustained engagement with the Heidegger’s thinking of technology. As we have seen, in *The Post Card* Derrida poses the objection to himself that Heidegger would have considered his entire insistence on the posts and everything that it governs as a technology belonging within metaphysics: “he would accuse me, you can see it from here, of constructing a metaphysics of the posts or postality; and above all an imposition of *position* precisely, of determining the *envoi* of Being as *position*, posture, thesis or theme (*Setzung*, thesis, etc.), a gesture that he alleges to *situate*, as well as technology, within the history of metaphysics”.

“Position,” “posture,” “theme,” or “thesis”; these are the key words that guide Derrida’s strategic circumvention of the expected Heideggerian charge. What such words show above all is that Derrida’s reading of the Heideggerian thinking of technology takes the problematic of representation, the positional initiative and the subjective setting-up and rendering-present of “objects,” to be decisive. Indeed, in “Sendings” an essay which tackles the question of representation via an extended reading of “The Age of the World Picture,” Derrida writes, “I must content myself with situating here the precise place of the necessity of the whole Heideggerian meditation on the *Ge-stell* and the modern essence of technique.”³³⁷

The consequences of Derrida’s strategic misreading are immediately apparent. By contenting himself with situating the necessity of Heidegger’s thinking of the essence of technology in the place where the problematic of representation is elaborated, that is, by making of Heidegger’s text a thesis, Derrida strips it of the verblat and transitivity that

³³⁷ *S.*, p. 309.

such thinking emphasizes. Such a move, which coincides with the closure of Heidegger's thought, has the effect of restricting the movement—immanent transformation—of Heidegger's text as it traverses the epochal shift out beyond the metaphysics of representation into the thinking of difference. In this case, the Derridean strategy calculates with the incalculability and ambiguity of Heidegger's text by organizing it according to a structure in tension that would favor the explicit elaboration of a writing and thereby a *techne* that would take their leave from Heidegger's thinking of the end of philosophy. In this case, deconstruction hopes that the entire "topology of Being" will be at the mercy of the "literality of the trace" and not the reverse.³³⁸ It hopes that Heidegger's text will submit to a writing and a *techne* which are in fact already at work there, already at work at the limit or border where representation, and thereby technology, opens onto its other, onto *Ereignis*, and so grants to the incalculable its proper determination. Hence Derrida's point of departure is inadequate to his own appreciation of technicity as originary. Perhaps there is nothing accidental or fortuitous about this. Perhaps this inadequacy is necessitated by the failure of deconstruction to think technics radically enough, which is to say, to *think* it in its essence as the epochal event of the disclosure of beings. Notice I said perhaps; this matter is of course undecidable. If it remains the case that even as it articulates the necessity of originary technicity Derrida's text finds itself having to contend with the fact that such an elaboration is symptomatic of the ongoing actualization of completed metaphysics, that it marks another turn of "the release of Being into machination," (such that Derrida finds himself alongside all those other technicians who, beginning with the Greeks, were subject to a "destiny" that determined their thought with respect to what remains unthought) it is equally the case that Derrida finds in this circumstance a source of affirmation and the promise of a future. It is to this affirmation that I now want to turn.

³³⁸ For an interesting discussion of this reversal see Gérard Guest "The Turning of *Ereignis*; Situating "Deconstruction" in the Topology of Being" in *Heidegger Studies*, vol 15. pp. 19-35.

5

Later Derrida: Deconstruction as Affirmative Technology

Introduction

In the last chapter I considered the possibility that Derrida's reinscription of Heidegger's text finds itself having to face up to the incalculable shock that it is symptomatic of technological thinking as Heidegger sees it, that it belongs to the same as what Heidegger calls *das Ge-stell*. Such a possibility attests to the fact that between Derrida's text and Heidegger's thinking there is, together with a radical displacement, a much closer proximity. Indeed, given his restriction of Heidegger's thinking to the concern with representation, a proximity much closer than Derrida is able to show. And yet, that said, the "uncanny intimacy" of the Derridean text and Heidegger's thinking of technology is marked by a limitation which makes all the difference, if not the "infinitesimal and decisive *différance*" of which Derrida speaks. This limitation turns on the circumstance that although Heidegger is one of the first philosophers to be very attentive to the question of technology, to the question of the relation of technology and philosophy, technology and metaphysics, technology and the West, he nonetheless remains, at a certain moment, tempted by a characteristic relegation of technology (where this would include science) to a secondary position in relation to the pretechnical originariness of what is taken up as the matter of thinking. As Derrida asks:

Doesn't he suggest that there is a thinking pure of all technics? And in his eyes, that *technicity* is not technical, that the thinking of technics is not technical, this is the condition of thinking. He would not say that the thinking of essence is neither thinking nor essence. This gesture by which he incessantly reminds us that the scientificity of science is not scientific, this gesture in which one hopes to think [*pense penser*] the

ontological difference, that is to say, the fact that the essence of this is not this, and that this is the condition of thinking, ensures that between thinking and technics, as between thinking and science, there is the abyss of which Heidegger wants to remind us.³³⁹

What Derrida says here remarks his disquiet and hesitation over the Heideggerian desire for rigorous non-contamination that I noted in Chapter 2. As I said, it seems to Derrida that the attempt to make of thinking or of the thinkable something that is pure of all philosophical, scientific, or technical contamination is not self evident. In Derrida's words, "[t]his is, for me in any case and if I understand it correctly, the title of an immense question—and of an immense reserve with respect to the ensemble not only of what Heidegger thinks, but of what he thinks of thinking."³⁴⁰ One may want to claim, of course, that this difference between technics and thinking cannot be ascribed to Heidegger without a certain violence, a certain (strategic) misreading. As I have argued in this study, it is technology and only technology that opens Heidegger to what is the task and matter of thinking, to the difference which by remaining unthought has always dominated metaphysics. In opening up a space withdrawn from representation, in exceeding the calculable and becoming, precisely, incalculable, technology is the liminal appearance of the event of appropriation and as such the anticipatory incidence of a contemporary potential that marks the opening of the future. Indeed, if the immanent dynamic of his thinking is taken seriously, it is clear that for Heidegger there is no questioning retrieval of Being, no "turn" out of metaphysics, no thinking entry into *Ereignis* as the possibility of the "other beginning," without the "first beginning" entering into its technological end. Moreover, insofar as his response to the provocation of modern technology opens up a retrieval of the original Greek sense of *techne* as poietic, as that

³³⁹ Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek. (London: Polity Press, 2002. pp. 133-134 hereafter cited as *EOT*.)

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

which belongs to a “bringing-forth” understood as a mode of disclosure where disclosure is precisely what is to be thought, then for Heidegger technics does indeed belong to thinking just as thinking belongs to technics. The question, however, still remains: Is Heidegger thereby a thinker of originary technicity? Derrida’s answer to this question, which reinforces his recognition that the thought of technology for Heidegger is at least double, that it cannot be reduced to this or that proposition or thesis, would have to be both yes and no: yes insofar as technology is thought by Heidegger in a way that moves beyond its instrumental-anthropological determination; no insofar as Heidegger’s thinking of the nontechnical essence of technology constitutes a certain subtraction or exclusion of technics from the field of what is to be thought, that is, appropriated at the end of metaphysics. This foreclosure of technology answers the question of technology itself. In the final analysis it is the subtle maintenance of the border between an actual or ontic technics and its essence forged out of the desire for non-contamination and which manifests itself in the thinking of epochality, in authentic or proper thinking, that will hold Heidegger back within metaphysics and will stop him from making his way to the “older” thought of generalized inscription and originary technicity.

Derrida’s deconstruction of Heidegger’s assertion of the ontological difference between technics and its essence remarks in a sure way his arguments regarding the traditional treatment of writing as *techne*, as a mere technical artifice and auxiliary instrument that has no constitutive meaning or proper dynamic of its own. It forms part of a program that calls into question a history that has associated technics and logocentric metaphysics for nearly three millennia. A history in which technics and all technical knowledge is foreclosed as a matter of thought on the basis of a determined devaluation. For Derrida this constitutes something like the major decision of philosophical thought. From this perspective, and despite everything that works against it, Heidegger’s thinking can be seen to perpetuate the traditional philosophical anxiety over technics and technicization whereby it is seen as a perversion, a corruption, an externality and a

constant threat of contamination. Thus, despite having raised technology to the status of a the question that is put to philosophy as the question to which it must respond, as the question about its history and its end, for Derrida, Heidegger's thinking " despite so many denials on the subject, remains antitechnological, originaristic, even ecologicistic."³⁴¹

Deconstruction on the other hand emerges as that which opens up an affirmative technology. Indeed, as the thought of the inescapability of inscription in general and thereby of originary technicity, deconstruction *is* an affirmative technology. This is not simply because deconstruction articulates the release or liberation of technics from its philosophical repression. Nor is it merely because there is, as Derrida's work shows, no thinking or questioning, no philosophy, outside of some process of technicization. Rather, and also, it is because this same technology becomes the site of that which happens, of a world in the process of changing and thus of deconstructing, becomes that is, the site of the event. In this regard deconstruction takes place where both the event and technology no longer appear as antinomic or thought from out of an ontological difference. On the contrary, they appear as two compatible or even indissociable concepts. In this case, the event would be what, this time, no longer happens without technology. Rather, it would happen by technology.

Perhaps. This event-machine is to-come; it is of the future as its machinic opening.³⁴²

Indeed, as Derrida told David Wills in a seminar held in Sydney in 1999:

We have to affirm the to-come in the form of technology. If there is a future, if there is a to-come, it will happen indissociably with a transformation of the world by, through

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 133.

³⁴² As we shall see below, the logic of the "perhaps" goes to the very heart of deconstruction. As Derrida says, "There is no future and no relation to the coming of the event without experience of the "perhaps." What takes place does not have to announce itself as possible or necessary; if it did, its irruption as event would in advance be neutralized. The event belongs to a perhaps that is in keeping not with the possible but with the impossible." See Jacques Derrida, "*The Future of the Profession or the University without condition (thanks to the "Humanities," what could take place tomorrow)*" in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen, (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 24-57. p. 54; cited hereafter as *FP*.

or within technology, and we know this more than ever today. It has always been true, but today we know that the to-come will come to us in the form of a new technology. So the technology is not simply a set of instruments external to our life, our temporality, our decision, and so on and so forth. So from that point of view I cannot dissociate the problematic of technology from affirmation.³⁴³

Now, while this study has laid the groundwork for what is involved here it remains a complexity to be developed. To this end, in this final chapter I want to re-explicate what I have in fact been attempting all along which is to render explicit, if I can put it like that, what is often called an “affirmative deconstruction” or deconstruction in its affirmative phase. In its affirmative phase it is more widely understood that deconstruction is not, and never was, a purely negative enterprise intent on destroying foundations, conventions, structures, institutions, philosophies, etc. Rather, as I have been keen to emphasize, deconstruction is thought in terms of the event itself, it is one of the many possible metonymic names for what is happening today, not only within philosophical texts but to the world in general in its techno-scientific transformation. In this connection, I want to turn to some of Derrida’s more recent texts where deconstruction emerges as a question of the indissociability of technics and the event and, thereby, as an affirmative technology. The matters that I want to discuss derive from a context that is established, in particular, in a number of Derrida’s texts from the 1990s. If I can summarise that context by quoting Derrida in a lecture given in 1998 and published as “Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2) (“within such limits”)”. Derrida opens this lecture—which sets in play a textual machine that weaves together a complex network around certain unfinished business with Paul de Man and whose elements consist of, among others, the themes of pardon, forgiveness, excuse, betrayal, perjury—by looking to the machinic future. He

³⁴³ See Jacques Derrida, “Affirmative Deconstruction, Inheritance, Technology” in *Deconstruction Engaged: The Sydney Seminars*, eds. Paul Patton and Terry Smith, (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001). pp. 71-79. p.78; cited hereafter as *DE*.

begins by raising the question of whether it will one day be possible (and he tells us there will be no future except on this condition) to think both the event and the machine as two compatible and even indissociable concepts even though at present they appear to us to be antinomic. Antinomic because it is commonly thought that the event ought to keep some incalculable and nonprogrammable singularity, that it must not give in or be reduced to the programs or calculations of a machine. Having raised this question Derrida then says, "If one day, and with one and the same concept, these two incompatible concepts, the event and the machine, were to be thought together, you can bet that *not only* (and I insist on *not only*) will one have produced a new logic, an unheard-of conceptual form; against the background and at the horizon of our present possibilities this new figure would resemble a monster."³⁴⁴ Moreover,

it is already necessary to correct this formulation: the new figure of an event-machine would no longer be even be a figure and it would not resemble, it would resemble nothing, not even what we call, in a still-familiar way, a monster. But it would therefore be, by virtue of this very novelty, an event, the only and the first possible event, because im-possible. That is why I ventured to say that this thinking could belong only to the future—and even that it makes the future possible. An event does not come about unless its irruption interrupts the course of the possible, and, as the im-possible itself, surprises any foreseeability. But such a supermonster of eventness would be, this time, for the first time, *also* be produced by the machine.³⁴⁵

Now, if what is said here means to mark an opening for the future it equally remarks the past. Indeed, in close proximity to the above Derrida writes, "To give up neither the event nor the machine, to subordinate neither one to the other, never to reduce one to the other:

³⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2) ("within such Limits")," in *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, ed. Andrzej Warminsky et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 278-359. p. 278.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

this is perhaps a concern that has kept a certain number of “us” working for the past few decades. But who is this “us”? Who would this “us” whom I dare speak of so carelessly? “Perhaps,” Derrida adds, “it designates at bottom, and first of all, those who find themselves in the improbable place or in the unihabitable habitat of this monster.”³⁴⁶ As this testimony indicates, while developing over four decades through an astonishing array of performative experiments Derrida’s work has been entirely consistent with this movement of thought which pays the greatest attention to the event, to what is happening, as, precisely, that which is to-come and which is *also* produced by technology. From the thinking of writing and *différance*, through the postal, and the gift to the more recent ethico-political themes of spectrality, the promise, the messianic, justice, faith, hospitality, friendship, etc., what Derrida has managed to write in this time has been guided by a certain “logic” that gets reinscribed again and again and which articulates what happens or comes (*advient*) as the event, an event that is always singular, impossible to anticipate (a future *necessarily* monstrous since unprogrammed), and which is affirmed through the structural opening of technics.

Now you can see that a very wide context is drawn in this summary I have made here. What I want to concentrate on in this chapter is the possibility of bringing together, let us say, three elements of this complex network: the idea of spectrality, the idea of how this relates to technology, and then relate that to questions concerning deconstruction as event, as the opening of up of an unprecedented future. What isn’t mentioned here is the question of invention and of the invention of the other which are central to Derrida’s elaboration of deconstruction as an affirmative technology. But we will get to that.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 279.

Deconstructing Marx: specters of the media

Let me proceed by calling up the monstrous of Derrida's text. Let me invoke the specter or, more precisely, the *Specters of Marx*. As is well known this remains one of Derrida's most complex texts. Like many of his other writings, it is perhaps impossible to reduce it to a central, essential argument. It is hard to unravel the whole network of traces that lead not only to Marx but also Valery, Stirner, Heidegger, Fukuyama, and many others. Rather than summarising at least some of these digressions, I will limit myself here to indicating what I take to be at issue in Derrida's response to the Marxist legacy as this concerns the affirmation of the event-machine to-come.

Derrida takes deconstruction as a way to continue the revolutionary scare of Marxism, not least in its recognition of the irreducibility of technics and the media in their relation to the globalization of national economies—but always by another means. Marx remains “one of the first thinkers of technics.”³⁴⁷ “Marx understood, lets call it, so as to move quickly, the essence of technics or, in any case, the irreducibility of the technical in science, language, politics, even the irreducibility of the media.”³⁴⁸ He sees technics and means of production as changing according to laws other than those determined by human use. He is also “one of those rare thinkers of the past to have taken seriously, at least in principle, the originary indissociability of technics and language, and thus of tele-technics (for every language is tele-technics).”³⁴⁹ And yet, that said, for Derrida, the Marxist text—“this thought which divides itself into a philosophy and something other than philosophy”³⁵⁰—seems tormented by contradictory movements which cut short its own radicality. On the one hand, insofar as he espouses the view that it is real social and material conditions that structure human consciousness and beliefs, not vice versa, and is alert to the social, political and conceptual consequences of technological innovation and

³⁴⁷ *SM.*, p. 170.

³⁴⁸ *EOT.*, p. 126.

³⁴⁹ *SM.*, p. 53.

³⁵⁰ *EOT.*, p. 126.

market directed forces, Marx would seem to endorse, in its first principles, a rejection of the traditional view of technology as a mere instrument. On the other hand, the narrative of revolution to which Marx remained committed envisages the realization or actualization of a certain end, a messianic promise of liberation of some collective human subject from the disappropriating effects of servitude by what ought to be its instruments, a view of the untrammelled human essence and a hoped for materialization of an idea (communism) which still falls within the traditional conception.

If deconstruction moves beyond Marx and Marxism, it does so only by moving through it. In what is by now a familiar move it proceeds by shaking the assured distinctions of the ontology upon which Marxist critique rests: between the real and the ideal; between the effective actuality of economico-material forces and the unreal or fantastic; between being and appearance; between between full presence and absence; and between the fullness of the living present and the void of death. This movement is developed in the context of what Derrida calls the schema of the ghost or *revenant*. With typical flare, Derrida describes his reading as a movement from Marxist “ontology” to a postcritical “hauntology,” to a logic of spectrality. In continuity with Derrida’s most famous work this logic is irreducible, it belongs amongst the most recurrent of Derridean schema’s and ought to be understood as part of a long line of marks and graphemes—like writing, trace, *differance*, iteration—meant to disturb our dreams of presence and signal the closure of metaphysical thinking. As Derrida says “We will take this category to be irreducible, and first of all to everything it makes possible: ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology”³⁵¹

As Derrida shows, the specter is that “figure” which massively and under the most disparate names haunts Marx’s texts—whether as phantasmagoria or enigma, as fetish or ideology, as theological whim or objective veil—and which is the phenomenon, or phenomenon of phenomenality that is at work on Marx, in Marx, and behind his back.

³⁵¹ *SM.*, p. 51.

Marx is both for and against ghosts. He both exorcises them and believes in them, but without quite being able to monitor these operations. Indeed, as John Caputo points out, Marx is in a double bind. On the one hand, he exorcises the ghost of the commodity. For example, in “The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret” in *Capital*, Marx describes the famous magical, mystical wooden table that stands up on its feet, and then on its head and discourses with other commodities. He reduces the specter back to the artifactual, technical body that is constituted by labor. But, on the other hand, he founds this exorcism of the ghost on a pre-deconstructive “critique,” on an “ontology” of the presence of what is really real that aims at dissipating the phantom into thin air, conjuring it away inasmuch as the real forces of production and work have no more to do with these fantastic beings than does an engine with Heidegger’s thinking. Derrida’s deconstruction of this critique does not jettison it but opens it up to questions that the critique tends to close off, questions that are actually more “radical” than critique or ontology.³⁵² For Derrida, Marx’s hostility towards ghosts will be what he will have always had in common with his adversaries: “He to will have tried to *conjour* (away) the ghosts and everything that was neither life nor death, namely, the re-appearance of an apparition that will never be either the appearing or the disappeared, the phenomenon or its contrary. He will have tried to *conjour* (away) the ghosts *like* the conspirators [*conjurés*] of old Europe on whom the Manifesto declares war.”³⁵³ In *Echographies* Derrida tells us:

All of this proceeds from a point where Marx reminds us that the ultimate foundation remains *living* experience, *living* production, which must efface every trace of spectrality. In the final analysis, one must refer to a zone where spectrality is nothing. This is why Marx seemed to me to contradict or to limit the movement that ought to have prompted

³⁵² See John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 121.

³⁵³ *SM.*, p. 47.

him to take technicity, iterability, everything that makes spectrality irreducible, more seriously.”³⁵⁴

Derrida’s remarks here suggest that if deconstruction is in line with Marxism insofar as the latter consists in a recognition of the irreducibility of technics (at least in principle), then it turns against Marxism insofar as the latter, rooted as it is in a metaphysics of the effectivity of the living present, wants to disavow all spectrality. In short, the deconstruction of Marx opens up the possibility of thinking originary technicization as spectralization. Now as we might expect, and as Derrida argues throughout *Specters of Marx*, this process is unthinkable outside of the technicization of the contemporary world and the human. Indeed, “spectrality” is nothing other than a way of describing effects of technicization. Given that this process is originary, it is to be understood both philosophically and historically. Marx is obviously crucial in this reflection, but a deconstructed Marx, one subject to those “seismic events” affecting the contemporary episteme. Indeed, although “the century of Marxism will have been that of the techno-scientific and effective decentering of the earth, of geo-politics, of the *anthropos* in its onto-theological identity or its genetic properties,”³⁵⁵ Marx himself could never have imagined the contemporary scope of what Derrida calls “spectrality” a circumstance wherein the logic of the effectivity or actuality of the living present seems to be of limited pertinence. For Derrida, “this limit is nothing new, it has always been leaving its mark on anti-Marxist idealism as well as on “dialectical materialism”. However, “it seems to be demonstrated today better than ever in the ghostly, “synthetic,” “prosthetic” virtual happenings of the scientific domain and therefore the domain of techno-media and therefore the public or political domain.”³⁵⁶ “A set of transformations of all sorts (in particular, techno-scientifico-economico-media) exceeds both the traditional givens of the

³⁵⁴ *EOT.*, p. 127.

³⁵⁵ *SM.*, p. 98.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Marxist discourse and those of the liberal discourse opposed to it. Even if we have inherited some essential resources for projecting their analysis, we must first recognize that these mutations perturb the onto-theological schemas or the philosophies of technics as such.”³⁵⁷ In *Specters* Derrida sums up the consequences of all this:

The *différential* deployment of *techne*, of techno-science or teletechnology...obliges us more than ever to think the virtualization of space and time, the possibility of virtual events whose movement and speed prohibit us more than ever (more and otherwise than ever, for this is not absolutely and thoroughly new) from opposing presence to its representation, “real time” to “deferred time,” effectivity to its simulacrum, the living to the non-living, in short, the living to the living dead of its ghosts.³⁵⁸

The scene of deconstruction, the present scene, is a scene that is utterly transfixed by the spectral phenomenon of technicity, by a world in which the processes of spectralization articulate the political “givens” of today and tomorrow. As Derrida says, “I believe that this technical transformation—of the telephone, of the fax machine, of television, e-mail and the internet—will have done more for what is called “democratization,” even in countries in the East, than all the discourses on behalf of human rights, more than all the presentations of models in whose name this democratization was able to get started.”³⁵⁹ That said, if democracy is indissociable from the development of technicization this same technology is radically transforming the political co-ordinates of today. Older notions of the public sphere are being profoundly disrupted “by techno-tele-media apparatuses and by new rhythms of information and communication, by the devices and the speed of forces represented by the latter.”³⁶⁰ Media power renders traditional politicians redundant—contemporary politics is

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p.169.

³⁵⁹ *EOT.*, p. 71.

³⁶⁰ *SM.*, p.79.

calculated and constrained, “formatted” and “initialized” by the organizations of the media—and effectively supplants the competencies granted politicians by institutions such as parliaments.³⁶¹ Today, more than ever before, it is apparent that what is commonly thought to be “actual” is in fact an *artifact*, it is not given but actively produced, sifted, invested, performatively interpreted by many hierarchizing and selective procedures—artificial or prosthetic supplements for which Derrida coins the terms *artificiality* and *actuvirtuality*.³⁶² Here the widespread dissemination of tele-machines takes the form of a generalized virtuality a concept which can no longer be opposed with philosophical equanimity to actual reality in the way one used to distinguish between power and act, *dynamis* and *energeia*, the potentiality of matter and the defining form of a *telos*, and hence of *progress*, etc. Contemporary tele-technologies put to work

new modes of appropriation...by the structure of the event and of its spectrality that they *produce* (both invent *and* bring up to date, inaugurate *and* reveal, cause to come about *and* bring to light *at the same time, there where they were already there without being there*: it is the relation of the concept of *production* to the ghost that is in question here).

This transformation does not affect only facts but the concept of such “facts”.³⁶³

This general virtuality, which is another way of thinking spectralization, is not just the monopoly of the richer industrialized countries. Spectralization is coincident with what in French Derrida calls the *mondialisation du monde*, the worldwide-ization of the world and what in English is called globalization. Any country, any locality determines its understanding of time, place and community in relation to this process. This situation is not absolutely novel in its structure. “for as soon as there is a trace, there is some

³⁶¹ Ibid., p. 80.

³⁶² See Jacques Derrida, “The Deconstruction of Actuality” in *Negotiations*, ed and trans. Elizabeth Rottenburg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 85-116. p. 86.

³⁶³ *SM.*, p. 79.

virtualization; this is the “abc” of deconstruction.”³⁶⁴ What is new, quantitatively, is the acceleration of the rhythm, the extent and powers of capitalization of such virtuality which is taking place today at a historically unprecedented speed. Even if they can at times produce the opposite effect (an illusion of proximity, of immediacy, of presence and the proper), the global and dominant effect of television, the telephone, the fax machine, satellites, the accelerated circulation of images, discourse, etc., is that the *here-and-now* becomes uncertain, without guarantee. Not only do they produce a dissociation of the political and the local, of the national, of the nation-state and the local, more than previously tele-technologies are creating a general form of expropriation, dislocation or deterritorialization of all the cultures of the world by severing the relation between identity of self and a certain integrity of place, a circumstance which will become all the more acute, at the level of human reception and negotiation of the “inhuman,” with the exponentially accelerating developments in machine intelligence and in the biotechnical recombination and supplementation of “human” and “non-human” DNA. Here it is clear that future genetic “ingredients” of the human will accelerate processes of evolution at such a speed that present conceptions of history, inheritance, memory and the body will need to be dramatically reorganized. Hence the hypothesis Derrida ventures with regard to the reaction and “regression” which accompanies the acceleration of the technological process, which is always also a process of delocalization, and which is happening in the world today in the form of what is currently called a “return of nationalisms,” a

³⁶⁴ *FP.*, p. 31. Derrida’s assertion here finds strong resonance with the work of Gille Deleuze who, following his reinvention of Henri Bergson, has also developed new tools for thinking the virtual as a productive power of difference. Indeed, in the commemorative essay written on the occasion of Deleuze’s death, Derrida spoke of a “nearly total affinity” between his own work and that of Deleuze. See Jacques Derrida, “I’m Going to Have to Walk all Alone,” trans. Leonard Lawler, in *Philosophy Today*, Spring, 1998, pp. 3-5. At the time of writing what Derrida speaks of here remains to be demonstrated in all its complexity. For an initial attempt see Leonard Lawler, “A Nearly Total Affinity: The Deleuzian Virtual Image versus the Derridean Trace,” in *Angelaki*, vol. 8 no. 2, 2000, pp. 59-70. For discussions of the virtual in Deleuze see Keith Ansell Pearson’s *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze*, (London: Routledge, 1999) and *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life*, (London: Routledge, 2002).

“reappearance of fundamentalisms,” twitchings around the phantasms of blood and soil, racisms, xenophobia’s, holy wars, ethnic wars or ethnic cleansings.

Now, in this context of increasing spectralization what purchase does “affirmative deconstruction” have? Put more succinctly, in the context of deconstruction’s approach to the contemporary world, can we envisage deconstruction as an affirmative technology—is it possible and if so how? This is a question David Wills raises in the Sydney seminar I cited above.³⁶⁵ Like Wills, the reason I pose this question, the reason I ask how, or whether, the technology can function as something affirmative, as an opening for the future to-come, is that most of the discussion Derrida has concerning technology in his latest writings, most of his references to the spectralizing of the world, seem to mitigate against the possibility of any such affirmation. Indeed, whereas he is careful to distance himself from the anti-technological side of Heidegger, so to speak, when he talks about spectrality, the references Derrida makes to such things as the effect of tele-techno-media apparatuses on public space, on the transformation of governments including legislation and law, on decision making, on the topological structure of the university (including the “work” done there), the reactive rise of nationalisms and fundamentalisms (the attempt to re-assert identity in the circumstance of increased dis-location), the valorizations of the body (even if those function by means of a violation of the body), which is therefore supposed to be immune from technological effect, all that, as well as the problems of the time, or lack of time, given to intellectual debate, the media’s (and its consumers) naïve presumption of immediateness, and then Derrida’s own uneasiness in front of a camera or microphone, all these things seem to leave very little room for an affirmative technology.

The hesitation I have marked here once again calls us to the ambiguities inherent in Derrida’s response to contemporary technology that I explored in Chapter 3. As I argued, on the one hand, the massive disruptions that attend contemporary techno-scientific

³⁶⁵ *DE.*, p. 75.

innovation, are taken by Derrida to be exorbitant with respect to metaphysics, that is, they produce a “practical deconstruction” that marks the closure of the logocentric era. On the other hand, and at the same time, however, this same technology is said to represent a continuation of this history, it inscribes, carries, and preserves the traditional and dominant determination of technics as an instrument. Derrida’s articulation of this circumstance opens him to the charge that his characterisation of the present is contradictory, hesitant and vague. This is inevitable. Although Derrida is indeed sensitive to technological difference, the method of deconstruction, its aporetic logic of inscription, forecloses the possibility of any systematic thematization or thesis. Instead of raising the question of the material configuration of each technology, thereby offering an empirical research programme which would articulate a system of technical differentiation, the deconstructive method articulates the necessity of “an an-oppositional *différance*” between metaphysics and its other, between the transcendental and the empirical, between generalised inscription and its particular supplements. Thus, just as Derrida’s arguments on contemporary techno-science and the media point up the affirm the co-implication of generalised inscription and originary technicity as transgressing any metaphysical determination of technics, we read: “[D]econstruction is inseparable from a general questioning of *techné* and technicist reasoning...deconstruction is nothing without this interrogation.”³⁶⁶ Deconstruction, in other words, works both to reveal and undo the contemporary accomplishments of metaphysics, both opens and prevents the effectivity or actualization (arrival) of technics. Put otherwise, for Derrida, the question pertaining to technics concerns *the possibility of sustaining its non-actualization*, of maintaining a virtual opening there where technics happens or takes place, an opening in which its possibility is implicated in the possibility of the impossibility of (finally) succeeding. As I now want to show this calls for marking the excess of technics. This excess constitutes the very condition of deconstruction’s intervention into the field of techno-science and so

³⁶⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. C. Lindsey, J. Culler, and E. Cadaver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 16.

cannot be reduced to this field. Here, as we shall see, Derrida will elaborate *both* deconstruction and technics from out of a thinking of invention that cannot be absolutely reduced to contingent determination and calculation. Rather, such invention is “to-come” as the opening of the future. The excess of technics is the absolute future of technical determination, the event that irrupts from every technical invention.

The machinic invention of the other (to come)

Attempting to maintain an opening to what is to-come deconstruction becomes the site of a non-formalizable resistance to the totalizing ambitions of contemporary technoscience, to those multiple forces of appropriation and control at work in those projects which integrate the technical into a rational calculus thereby idealising it as a correlate of an autonomous and automatic system of formal elements whose syntax or mechanics can be calculated—the notion of a technics that can be completely subordinated to logic becoming a resource controlled by industrial “finalities”. For Derrida, such *techné* in the guise of “research” and “development” is technology “constructed on the basis of that instrumental determination of a calculable language.”³⁶⁷ The concept of information or informatization is the most general operator here. It integrates basic research to oriented research, the purely rational to the technical, thus bearing witness to the intermingling of the metaphysical and the technical. Drawing upon Heidegger’s 1955-56 lecture course *Der Satz Vom Grund (The Principle of Reason)* Derrida affirms his assertion that “Information does not inform merely by delivering an informational content, it gives form, “*in-formiert,*” *formiert zugleich.*” It installs man in a form that permits him to ensure his mastery on earth and beyond.”³⁶⁸ For Derrida

³⁶⁷ Jacques Derrida, “The Principle of the University in the Eyes of its Pupils,” trans. C. Porter and E. P. Morris in *Diacritics*, Fall 1983. pp. 3-20. p. 14.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

This is all too obvious in areas such as physics, biology, medicine, biotechnology, bio-programming, data processing and telecommunications. We have only to mention telecommunications and data processing to assess the extent of the phenomenon: the “orientation” of research is limitless, everything in these areas proceeds in “view” of technical and instrumental security. At the service of war, of national and international security, research programs have to encompass the entire field of information, the stockpiling of knowledge, the workings and thus also the essence of language and of all semiotic systems, structural and generative linguistics, pragmatics, rhetoric.³⁶⁹

The contemporary world sees the massive planning and programming of invention along with the capitalization and appropriation of techno-scientific change by multi-international corporations and nation-states especially under the rubrics of “development and defense”. The speed of change produces a continual disjunction or anachrony of the present whose future already besets it: “The time is out of joint,” says Derrida (after Hamlet). Yet this neutralizing and appropriative inventiveness gives rise to unforeseen effects. The greater the speed of appropriating inventiveness and the stronger the “economy of the same,” the more the future becomes incalculable, an incalculability whose symptom is the proliferation of forecasters and science fiction narratives that try to anticipate it. In this connection, it is worth briefly turning to Derrida’s *Archive Fever*. This text, a transcript of a lecture delivered in 1994, contains what is becoming one of the most frequently cited passages in Derrida’s work, that in which he speculates on how far the field of psychoanalysis may have been determined by particular technologies of communication and archivization (print media, traditional postal services), and the “geo-technological shocks” that would have ensued if Freud and his contemporaries instead of writing thousands of letters by hand had had access to contemporary technologies such as telephonic credit cards, portable tape recorders, computers, printers, faxes, televisions,

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

teleconferences and E-mail. Derrida says that he would have liked to have devoted his entire lecture to this retrospective science fiction and that he would have liked to have imagined the scene of the other archive after the “*apres-coups*” of its aftershocks, a scene which is indeed where we are today. “This earthquake” he writes,

would not have limited its effects to the *secondary recording*, to the printing and to the conservation of the history of psychoanalysis. It would have transformed this history from top to bottom and in the most initial inside of its production, in its very *events*. This is another way of saying that the archive as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypomnesic technique in general is not the only place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content *of the past* which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.³⁷⁰

What Derrida says here is that in the past, psychoanalysis would not have been what it was (no more than so many other things) if E-mail, for example, had existed. It would have been different in its very content if Freud had had access to the type of technologies that are so commonplace today. Moreover, “*in the future* it will no longer be what Freud and so many psychoanalysts had anticipated, from the moment, E-mail, for example, became possible.”³⁷¹ Such technologies have the consequence, among others, of radically transforming the relationship of such a science to its own archive. What is at issue then is nothing less than the future, of techno-scientific invention as an irreducible experience of the future. As techno-science, invention, in its very movement, consists not merely in

³⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 17.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

conservational recording which puts into reserve (“stores”), accumulates and capitalizes the past, but, rather, in instituting and constituting whatever there was as anticipation of the future, of its incalculable possibilities.

To conceive technical invention as the acceleration, intensification, multiplication, and, as it were, expansion of incalculable possibilities for the future is to be reminded how technical systems do not belong, by definition, by virtue of their topological structure, to the field of what they make possible. Always *différential* and thereby in excess of their concepts technical inventions are productive of unpredictable, unforeseeable, unprogrammable “effects”. This circumstance enables technical invention to be seen as the irruption or incoming of the other, as that which disrupts the very criteria in which it would have been captured. What Derrida says in his essays “Psyche: Inventions of the Other” and “Deconstructions: The Im-possible” about invention as allowing and making to come will enable us to understand better what is at issue here. Attending to these will also return me to my claim that deconstruction is an affirmative technology. In these essays Derrida distinguishes between two forms of invention, the “modern politics of invention” which he calls an invention of the same and the invention that responds to the wholly other. With regard to the former, let us suppose the historical analysis of a “paradigm induced gestalt-shift” in the sense of Kuhn or an episteme in the sense of Foucault, some “themata,” or as they say, an historical analysis of givens, a configuration that explains that at a certain moment an invention was possible, that it became practicable under certain conditions, technical, economic, social, psychological, scientific, etc. According to this analysis, which Derrida holds to be necessary and legitimate, invention, paradoxically, invents nothing, since “it will have done nothing but make explicit, reveal, deploy that which was already there, potentially, programmatically in reserve.”³⁷² Such invention is what Derrida calls the invention of the same, which means an invention entirely knowable and technically executable in advance. In this

³⁷² *DI.*, p. 23.

conventional invention, invention is domesticated, monitored by existing institutions, kept in check within a restricted economy, and “inventive” human subjects are given limited rein or latitude within a fixed or mobile horizon. The “invention of the same” is a discovery—*invention* also means “discovery,” to “come upon”—of a possibility already lying already embedded in the system. In this invention, the assemblage of existing institutions is strengthened and consolidated by appropriating every novelty. The existing order lies “ready and waiting to reduce it [invention] to the same,” to give it status and a patent within the current configuration, tending thus to “integrate the aleatory into its programmatic calculations”.

That is the prevailing concept and practice of “invention”. The other invention, the one that interests Derrida, is a deconstruction of this concept, a re-invention of invention that articulates a logic of the im-possible, of the unforeseeable, of what cannot be calculated or programmed:

Letting the other come is not inertia open to anything whatever. No doubt the coming of the other, if it has to remain incalculable and in a certain way aleatory (one happens onto the other in the encounter), escapes from all programming. But this aleatory aspect of the other has to be heterogeneous in relation to the integrable aleatory factor of a calculus, and likewise to the form of undecidable that theories of formal systems have to cope with. The invention of the entirely other is beyond any possible status.³⁷³

Because the concept of invention must itself be re-invented, Derrida is not happy with the argument simply that any invention must, by disrupting the possible status available to it, open up a state of undecidability of the type that much contemporary science has to work with. The invention Derrida dreams of is in excess of such a formal calculus: it the knots

³⁷³ Jacques Derrida, “Psyché: Inventions of the Other” in *Reading de Man Reading*, eds. Lindsey Waters and Wlad Godzich, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 25–65. p. 55-56; hereafter cited as *PIO*.

together, in a single conjuncture, the aleatory, alterity and calculative rationality. In this connection, as Timothy Clark has pointed out, deconstruction represents a rejection of the view, powerful since the seventeenth century, that humanity necessarily understands what it has made better than what it has not. The irruption of the other, disrupting reason and the possibility of calculation, both complicates and calls for a decision precisely to the extent that its status is incalculable. Such a decision involves a necessary and unavoidable negotiation with what one can't or doesn't know and puts into crisis the concepts and grounds whereby knowledge would have secured itself.³⁷⁴ In other words, one cannot rationally distribute the part [*part*] that is calculable and the part that is incalculable. One has to calculate as far as possible, but the incalculable happens; it is singularity, and chance, without one being able to do one's part [*part*]; the parting [*partage*: distribution] between reason and its other, the calculable and the incalculable. The necessary and the aleatory, is without example; it does not obey a logic of distinction, it is not a parting of two parts. For this reason, there is no question here of "opposing" the invention of the same to the invention of the other, since such opposition succumbs to dialectical or representationalist assimilation and remarks the logic of the same. Rather, as we might expect, one must conceive the *différance* between the two. In this connection, as J. Hillis Miller rightly remarks, here is one sequence in Derrida's writings where a return to the original French is necessary, since the logic Derrida wants to mark here plays on the resources of double meaning and nuance in the French language.³⁷⁵ Invention is taken here in the double sense that is justified by its etymology from *inventio*. "Invention" means both to make up and find there. Derrida's distinction between two forms of invention turns on that double meaning, and he plays on the associated French words *avenir*, "future," *venir*, "come," *renvir*, "return, come back to," *aventure*, "adventure," *événement*, "event," and so on. By playing on such terms Derrida points up a notion of

³⁷⁴ Cf. *op. cit.*, n. 10 at p. 251.

³⁷⁵ See J. Hillis Miller, "Derrida and Literature" in in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen, (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 58-81. p. 68.

invention that will again invoke the aporia in which deconstruction finds itself—that it is both possible and impossible at the same time, that is, is im-possible. On the one hand, there is the invention of the possible, an extrapolation from what already exists and is institutionalized. On the other hand, an invention must announce itself as what would not appear possible, it must be impossible:

nothing comes to the other from the other. For the other is not the possible. So it would be necessary to say that the only possible invention is the invention of the impossible...[A]n invention has to declare itself to be the invention of that which did not appear to be possible; otherwise it only makes explicit a program of possibilities within the economy of the same.³⁷⁶

Derrida asserts that the impossible invention (in both senses at once and in neither) must always be invention *of* the other, of the irreducibly other; a double genitive. When the other does not appear in invention, when nothing comes to the other and from the other, there is no invention, for the other is not possible, it cannot be built, calculated or programmed.

There is nothing fortuitous about this discourse on the im-possibility of invention as a letting come of the other. The interest of deconstruction, its force and desire, if it possesses any, turns on the constellation of *venir* and *à venir*, *viens* and *invention*, *l'avenir* and *événement*. “Deconstruction is inventive, or it does not exist,”³⁷⁷ Derrida says. Its *process* (*démarche*) is engaged in and by the *in-venire*, the incoming, the arrival (*venue*), of what is coming, what is to-come (*à-venir*), in and by the future (*l'avenir*) and the adventure of the future. Deconstruction is “eventive” (*événement*, *é-venir*) or it is nothing, the virtual emerging from the very heart of the actual.

³⁷⁶ *PIO.*, p. 60.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

In plain English, if there is such a thing—and that remains a question and a hypothesis—deconstruction lies in the anticipation of the other, something unique and idiomatic, which is the only possible invention: “To prepare oneself for this coming (*venue*) of the other is what can be called deconstruction”.³⁷⁸ The preparation for what is to “come,” (*viens*) is what the deconstruction of the present, and of the values of presence, is all about. Deconstruction deprives the present of its privilege and exposes it to something *tout autre*, wholly other. Accordingly, everything in deconstruction is organized around what Derrida calls *l’invention de l’autre*, the invention of the other as the in-coming of the other, the promise of an event to come, the event of the promise of something coming. For Derrida, the invention of the other is the invention of the absolutely undeconstructable and such invention is, he says, “the only invention in the world, the only invention of the world.” It is the invention of the world because it allows for an unanticipated opening, an origin, still to be invented. This must certainly be linked up with what I said in Chapter 3 about the deconstructive method, with a movement that necessarily begins “wherever we are,” that inscribes itself in the general movement of a field in the process of deconstruction, that thereby inscribes itself in a context—and from this point of view there is nothing but context—but also produces a context, opens it up and brings about a new contextual given. From this point of view, deconstruction as the invention of the im-possible, will open up the production of a new context, wherever it may happen (*arrive*). In short, it will be the site of the event, a first event that is also a last event, an event in which the future is to-come and comes to us: “The future is *not present*, but *there is* an opening onto it; and because *there is* a future; [*il y a de l’avenir*], a context is always open. What we call opening of the context is another name for what is still to come”.³⁷⁹

In dealing with what-is-to-come (*l’avenir*), with the opening to the to-come (*l’à-venir*), that is, not only to the future, but to what happens (*ce qui arrive*), comes (*vient*),

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

³⁷⁹ *TS.*, p. 20.

has the form of an event, Derrida makes his claim for deconstruction as affirmative, as a “yes,” to the opening of the future. More precisely, deconstruction is a “yes, yes” since if the future is the opening up of what-is-to-come, to the other, it is already the possibility of its repetition.³⁸⁰ Indeed: *Viens, oui, oui*. That is deconstruction in a word, in three words, in a nutshell.³⁸¹ Not an automatism of the perpetually selfsame, but repetition in the sense of deconstructive iteration whereby something absolutely surprising, an event for which we are not prepared is announced. Here the most basic feature of affirmation is disjunction. Affirmation is disjointed because it is based in the structure of *différance*. We know what “*différance*” means: it implies constant repetition and redeployment. The event is not merely something that happens in the order of presence, in the most usual and commonplace taking place of the familiar and ordinary time, but the *é-venir*, the coming out, that breaks out. *Viens* calls for a break, for breaking out into the open, for something that, to reiterate a point already made, is not the actualization of a possible, a simple acting out, a realization, an effectuation, the teleological accomplishment of a power, the process of a dynamic that depends on a “condition of possibility”. For there to be an event, the event has to be possible, of course, it cannot take place without a system of marks that prepares, or invites, its place, but there must also be an exceptional, absolutely singular interruption in the regime of possibility. The event, to be worthy of its name, takes place without expectation, without an horizon of expectation, when a certain knowledge still anticipates and amortises in advance. Put otherwise, the event, as what is to-come, punctuates the horizon, defies anticipation, appropriation, or any form of pre-determination. Indeed, as exceeding any calculation it is, precisely, incalculable: it is the opening to a radical (non-human) alterity.

³⁸⁰ See: Jacques Derrida, “A Number of Yes (Nombre Du Oui)” in *Deconstructions: A User's Guide*, ed. Nicholas Royle, (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 97-105.

³⁸¹ See: *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, edited with a commentary by John D. Caputo, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), especially p. 27 and Chapter 6.

A messianic without messianism

Now, having said this much it would perhaps seem to be the case that Derrida's discourse on the invention and in-coming of the other is not restricted or even chiefly concerned with the tele-techno-scientific determination of deconstruction as I have been asserting. It would seem Derrida is not primarily thinking in terms of those sites of invention that are the machine, technics, techno-science, and above all tele-technology, but of a more Jewish, more Levinasian ethico-political alterity that shatters the frame of such technical invention, that underlines the saliency of the incomprehensible, something we confess we do not understand —*Je ne sais pas. Il faut croire*—before which we can only say *viens, oui, oui*. The wholly other is not some new invention where this is equal to some new technology, but a blindness, a promising or confessing that we are up against something, *sans savoir, sans avoir*, to which we can only bear witness. In this case “*l'invention de l'autre*” is more attuned to the anomaly of Abraham on Moriah than the techno-scientific anomaly, more a faith or promise, a prophetic call for a justice to come, than a discourse on techno-scientific transformation.

Of course. It is well known that Derrida has made an ethical turn in the 1980s that has focused on the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and that during the 1990s Derrida has increasingly emphasised ethical themes like hospitality, donation, friendship, testimony, secrecy, responsibility, pardon and forgiveness, ideas that we would more traditionally perhaps relate to religion. Indeed, as John Caputo says, “[w]hat we will not have understood about deconstruction, and this causes us to read it less and less well, is that deconstruction is set in motion by an overarching aspiration, which on a certain analysis can be called a religious or prophetic aspiration.”³⁸² Deconstruction turns out to have a very prophetic-apocalyptic-messianic ring, albeit with a deconstructed tone. His work is apocalyptic (we should perhaps here recall the etymology of the word “apocalypse,” from the ancient Greek for “unveiling” or “revelation”), but it is an apocalypticism that is wary

³⁸² Cf. *op. cit.*, n 352 at p.xix.

of any final revelation.³⁸³ Correspondingly, Derrida's work is messianic, but this is a "messianic without messianism"³⁸⁴ This messianic motif appears alongside alongside his recent "circumfession" (*circonfession*) of his "alliance" ("covenant") with Judaism, never broken but never kept, his revelation of "my religion about which nobody understands anything,"³⁸⁵

None of this means to say that Derrida is simply a religious person or a simple believer, that he is a pious Jew, liberal, orthodox, or conservative, or "believing" Jew, or religious in the conventional sense. The advent of the other, its incoming, is to be thought *différamtly*, Derrida says, from a "theological order" where theology means onto-theology. The messianic tone that deconstruction has adopted is the turn of faith it takes towards the irreducible and rebellious force of affirmation and promise of the future, the unforeseeable future to-come, absolutely to come, the undeconstructable justice, the democracy, the gift, the hospitality to come. Such is the future I have been discussing, a future without horizon of possibility, without the anticipation and arrival of some actual state of affairs, an impossible future: "This critique belongs to the movement of an experience open to the absolute future of what is coming, that is to say, a necessarily indeterminate, abstract, desert-like experience that is confided, exposed, given up to waiting for the other and for the event."³⁸⁶ This why Derrida distinguishes the *universal structure* of atheological messianic, the "quasi-atheistic dryness of the messianic" from the various concrete "messianisms". By the concrete messianisms he means the specific religious beliefs, the historical doctrines and dogmas, of the "religions of the Book," all three of them, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Moreover, Derrida extends the term to include the teleologies and eschatologies of Hegel, Marx, and Heidegger. Deconstruction is the thought of an other, messianic historicity, beyond the "philosophical messianisms,"

³⁸³ See Jacques Derrida, "On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy." trans. John. P. Leavey, Jr. in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy*, ed. P. Fenves. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

³⁸⁴ *SM.*, p. 59.

³⁸⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession" in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida. *Jacques Derrida*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 154.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

the archeo-teleo-logical concepts of history in Hegel, Marx, and even as we saw in Chapter 2, Heidegger's epochal eschatology, a historicity that represents as Derrida says

another opening of event-ness as historicity that permitted one not to renounce, but on the contrary to open up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise: as *promise* and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design.³⁸⁷

Deconstruction regularly, rhythmically repeats this religiousness, without the concrete, historical religions; it repeats nondogmatically the religious structure of experience, the category of the religious. It repeats the passion for the messianic promise—one could say: the structure of the *promessianic*—and messianic expectation, it repeats the movements of faith, of expecting what we cannot know but only believe. Such is the affirmation of deconstruction, its invention of the other.

The future: other machines as *other*

But what of technics in all this? Without horizon and radically open to what is to-come, Derrida's "religion" refers us back to his assertion that if there is an affirmation, if there is the promise of a future, a to-come, it has to do with some technology, with the deconstruction of the world by, through or within technology. In this case, Derrida's text yields a conception of religion along with an ethics and a politics haunted by technicity.³⁸⁸ The issue continues to be that of a method devoted to originary technicity, of a method that at one and the same time articulates *both* what is happening—the event—*and* technology. A method, then, devoted to the generalised inscription, that is, virtualization, of the event by the machine, to a writing, spectral, or event-machine that

³⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

³⁸⁸ The relation between the promise, the messianic, religion, and technology is elaborated in detail in Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone" in Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds.), *Religion* (London: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 1-78.

exceeds the philosophical determination of the possibility of the possible, the classical opposition of the possible and the impossible. For Derrida, such a machine answers the question of the future. As he says, “[t]echnology is not simply technique, it is not simply a set of instruments that simply repeats. We experience what we call *techne* or technology in art and in industry or in all kinds of technology as something which comes from the future”.³⁸⁹ The future can only be for such machines because these come closest to answering the question of how the sheer im-possibility of the future, its virtuality (under whose aspect actuality exists at all), appears not as a void of the actual but rather as the way of its arrival—as a path of actualization remaining open to other arrivals. Originary technicity, the event-machine, is also the answer to the “messianic extremity” which Derrida gives the name “eschaton”. “Is there not a messianic extremity, an *eschaton*, whose ultimate event (immediate rupture, unheard-of interruption, untimeliness of the infinite surprise, heterogeneity without accomplishment) can exceed, at each moment, the final term of a *phusis*, such as work, the production, and the *telos* of any history?”³⁹⁰ This messianic extremity, which goes beyond every *telos* and every labor; this extremity without which no future can be thought because thinking itself is indebted to it; this extremity which is divested of all determined and determinable religious, metaphysical, or technical figures of expectation, can, as Werner Hamacher has pointed out, only attest to itself in the sheerest abstraction beyond form or, if related to forms, only in their irreparable disintegration. Derrida seems to insist precisely on the *différance* between a form determined by a *telos* as its border and the extremity that, in the border or at it, traverses the border and, being external and exformal, can no longer fall under the category of form, of categorial thought-form or perception form.³⁹¹ But if the future is an allocatagory of the transformative and exformative, if it “a-priori” diverges from the

³⁸⁹ *DE.*, p. 77.

³⁹⁰ *SM.*, p. 37.

³⁹¹ See, Werner Hamacher “Lingua Amissa: The Messianism of Commodity–Language and Derrida’s Specters of Marx” in *Futures of Jacques Derrida*, ed. R. Rand. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001) pp. 130-178. p. 146.

categorial framework of forms of thought, perception, and intuition, then it must be without appearance, *a*phenomenal, and can only attest to itself in the disappearance of all phenomenal figures, in the continued dissociation of its phantasmagorias. The future “is” if it is at all, if it shows itself beyond everything posited in any way, it transpires as a spectral monster of *différance* at the limit of appearance, of visibility and representability.

Whatever arrives in this way first takes the form of the unacceptable, of even of the intolerable, of the incomprehensible, that is, of a certain monstrosity. Indeed, as was shown in Chapter 3, in his writings of the late 1960s Derrida characterises the present age, and indeed, deconstruction, as monstrosities. Deconstruction has this status because it is clearly aligned with the law of *différance*, a movement of deferral and delay that articulates a certain dislocation or disjointedness of the present, that announces a birth in the world, the arrival of that which breaks with absolutely with constituted normality. As Derrida says, “[t]exts and discourses that provoke at the outset reactions of rejection, that are denounced precisely as anomalies or monstrosities are often texts that, before being in turn appropriated, assimilated acculturated, transform the nature of the field of reception.”³⁹² This event is the new mutation in the history of writing that articulates the closure of the logocentric-metaphysical era as exemplified by an unprecedented development in technology. A context in which “the future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger[...]and can only be proclaimed, *presented* as a sort of monstrosity”. And a technology that constitutes a “practical deconstruction”. Deconstruction shares with technology this status as a monstrosity insofar as both announce themselves as that name for “for which there is no self-presentation nor assured destination.” “A monstrosity never presents itself,” Derrida stresses, for “as soon as one perceives a monster in the monster, one begins to domesticate it,” one makes it part of an economy of “the same”.³⁹³ To think both technology and the event together remains a monstrosity to come, an impossible event, and therefore the only possible event.

³⁹² Cf. *op. cit.*, n 259 at p. 387.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

Understood in this way technology is exorbitant with respect to its present actuality and is the originary medium—the “medium of all possible media”—of futurity. Whatever enters into it, or simply comes into contact with it, which as by now is clear means everything, is already pulled into a space where the characters of reality can only take place on the disjointed terrain of the not-yet-real of actualization. Technology is deconstruction insofar as it opens the place—the atopic place—of arrival, opens the gate to what is to-come, the entrance of an unpredictable and topologically indeterminate other. If, like Derrida, one thinks of technology from its relation to the future, if one thinks it as to come—as opposed to Heidegger for whom it is to be over-come—then the futurity of technics, its spectralization, must transform all its figures in advance, transform them by shifting into the virtuality of every form. Neither what is to-come “as such” nor the purely present, and yet both “at once,” the event-machine cannot be reduced to any techno-scientific, religious, or philosophical programs that might have anticipated it. Rather, it is the very field of deconstruction which, from its inception, is the machinic affirmation of the invention of machines to-come, other machines *as other*.

Conclusion

In “The Time of the Thesis: Punctuations” Derrida recalls Jean Hyppolite’s response to a paper that he had presented in the 1960s during a colloquium in the United States. After offering a few friendly remarks on the paper, Hyppolite had added: “That said, I really do not see where you are going.” Derrida’s reply to this comment was, he says, more or less as follows: “If I clearly saw ahead of time where I was going, I really don’t believe that I should take another step to get there.” Reflecting on this remark Derrida says,

Perhaps I then thought that knowing where one is going may doubtless help in orienting one’s thought, but that it never helped anyone take a single step, quite the opposite in fact. What is the good of going where one knows oneself to be going and where one knows that one is destined to arrive?” Recalling this reply today, I am not sure I really understand it very well, but it surely did not mean that I *never* see or *never* know where I am going and that to this extent, to the extent that I do know, it is not certain that I have ever taken any step or said anything at all. This also means, perhaps, that concerning this place where I am going, I in fact know enough about it to think, with a certain terror, that things are not going very well and that, all things considered, it would be better not to go there at all. But there’s always Necessity, the figure I wanted recently to call Necessity with the initial capital of a proper noun, and Necessity says that one must always yield, that one has always to go where it calls. At the risk of never arriving. At the risk, it says, of never arriving. Calling it even, prepared for the fact that you won’t make it. (*Quitte à ne pass arriver. Quitte, dit-elle, à ne pas arrive. Quitte pour ce que tu n’ arrives pas.*)

This passage resumes in the most concise manner the methodological orientation of deconstruction and its consequent relation the meaningful frames, institutional structures,

and pedagogical norms that tie philosophical production to the ontological and logocentric encyclopaedic system of the *universitas*. In this case, Derrida's remarks relate to his hesitation over having to defend his thesis at the Sorbonne many years after he has established himself as a major philosopher. More precisely, they relate to Derrida's resistance to an academic presentation in the form of results, conclusions or of theses. As I noted in the introduction to this study, it was clear to Derrida from early on that he did not think his work fit very well with the laws regulating scholarly discourse. His "research" not only called for a different mode of writing but also for a work of transformation applied to the rhetoric, the staging and the particular discursive procedures, which historically determined as they are, dominate university discourse, in particular the type of text called the "thesis." Indeed, the very idea of thetic presentation, of the position (*Setzung* or *Stellung*), of positional logic, of a theoretical approach that allows for a fixation on particular contents to become possible and which is recoverable as object, thing, or work, was one of the essential parts of the system subject to deconstructive questioning. What was then put forth under the heading of writing, trace, *différance*, dissemination, etc., explicitly dealt, in ways that were neither thetic nor thematic, with the value of the thesis, of positional logic and its history, and of its limits and rights, its authority and legitimacy. This was not, of course, to substitute for what existed some type of non-thesis, non-legitimacy or incompetence. Derrida's point is not that there is or can be no thesis. Rather, he is asking us to consider a thesis that is relayed or sent, a thesis which comes about through a work in which the thesis is constituted even as it is differed or deferred from itself. In short, if there is a thesis it presupposes that "as soon as there is there is *différance*...and there is postal maneuvering, relays, delay, anticipation, destination, telecommunicating network, the possibility and therefore the fatal necessity of going astray, etc."³⁹⁴ Given that this network is irreducible one must

³⁹⁴ PC., p. 66.

always yield to Necessity, to the Necessity of going where there is always the risk that one may not arrive at ones destination (what a monstrous situation).

Now I am once again recalling the Necessity and risk of the deconstructive situation with regard to the thesis because the impossibility of summing up or presenting thetic conclusions is a circumstance that the project I have undertaken here must come to terms with. Indeed, the one who comes here looking for results will quickly grow morose—and for essential reasons. As we have seen, the problems and questions in play here are integral to the attempt to evaluate the relationship between Heidegger and Derrida where this turns on the issue of what happens with regard to the transmission and inheritance of the related problematics of technology and philosophy, technology and metaphysics, technology and the West. In Chapter 1 an opening was made onto this via a reading of Heidegger's text that took into account its material conditions of presentation. As I said, Heidegger's question concerning technology is equally the question of how Heidegger's text becomes present for us today as a "philosophy". The production and transmission—techno-media-(tiz)ation—of Heidegger's thinking, its manifestation as an object of academic scrutiny and resource of scholarship, is not subsidiary to this thought. Quite the contrary, it affects it in its most intimate inside and accessible outside. As I argued, this is most evident in the way in which the immanent dynamic or pathway-character of Heidegger's thought has been obscured by way of an interpretive thrust or attitude that is overly fascinated with exposing and making-present *what* Heidegger says, with fashioning an exposition of the contents and themes of his text. This attitude can be discerned in the way Heidegger's meditation on the essence of technology has been said to be primarily a thesis "about" technology, a thesis which takes the representationalist outcome of philosophy as decisive and which articulates a static determination of Being. In this case, Heidegger's questioning-thinking into the essence of technology is understood as organizing itself according to the privilege and function granted to a constellation or chain of some of the major concepts of metaphysics, all of which can be

derived from *Ge-stell* and all of which emphasize the gathering, unifying, collecting, installing, setting-up or positing of “what is”. This assessment, which is correct up to a point, fails to fully come to terms with the performative difficulty of Heidegger’s thinking which corresponds to the transitivity of technology where this is equal to the liminological field or differential opening of thinking to the event (*Ereignis*). It thereby amounts to a letting fail of Heidegger’s surpassing of metaphysics. In this case, even as it projects itself into a space withdrawn from the representational-calculative attitude of conceptual thought, Heidegger’s thinking has been drawn back into the realm of metaphysical actuality. It may therefore be advantageous, no doubt timely, for scholarship to reflect on itself, to recognize the difficulties and hazards involved in following Heidegger’s text (and not just his). Following Heidegger’s question of technology demands much more than discerning and elucidating what is said on this matter. Philosophical thinking on philosophy, according to Heidegger’s elaboration of Being-historical thinking, belongs to the “turn” of thought, its own immanent transformation as it traces the self-differentiating movement of *die Sache*. This is not to be confused with a “philosophy” nor with the progress of an intelligible argument. Rather, to follow Heidegger means to allow a shaking or trembling of that very intelligibility to take place, it is to follow the movement of thought in its becoming other, which, precisely as *becoming*, requires that thought be carried into a movement that exceeds it and carries it beyond itself. In this case it is imperative that the philosopher (the “professional,” “expert,” or technician) become more perceptive to the future of Heidegger’s thought, to its differential movement or opening and not its accomplishments or results.

The movement of Heidegger’s thinking is provocative. It is provocative, first, because it calls into question the normally secure position of the thinking subject, the position defined by the metaphysics of subjectivity in its elaboration of the structure of representation. Here, the various philosophical machines or assemblages that are traditionally at work deciphering or calculating with thought either break down

completely or, at those times when they are seen to work efficiently, function by way of a restricted economy that is too slow (too slow even for Heidegger's slow path). Only a most attentive reading of Heidegger's texts—one that traces and situates the disclosure of any particular theme, figure or statement across the various strata of a larger and more general textual disposition or configuration—leads to an experience of the dynamic quality of his thinking and to an apprehension of the paradoxical nature of the matter (*Sache*) that claims his thought and gives it its identity and difference. Such a reading points to the necessary "tracing" or "inscription" of Heidegger's thought. It also points to the complex entanglement of his text with Derrida's. Indeed, as this study has shown, Derrida's text encompasses a second-order entanglement of two already immense networks, his own and Heidegger's. This entanglement manifests Derrida's somewhat Heideggerian attitude to the history of Western philosophy and his mode of relating to that history where this concerns the joint thematics of the closure of presence and the closure of philosophy as the metaphysics of presence. It also manifests Derrida's concern to release a thought of general writing or inscription that has been repressed or forgotten by Western thought. In this case, the trace or *différance* is seen by Derrida "as the strategic note or connection—relatively and provisionally privileged—which indicated the closure of presence, together with the closure of the conceptual order and denomination, a closure that is effected in the functioning of traces"³⁹⁵ This statement is made overtly in conjunction with "the ontic-ontological difference in Heidegger," and the question of closure indicates the uncircumventable necessity of Heidegger's analysis of the history of metaphysics. This is not say, however, that Derrida is simply Heideggerian, anymore than he is, say, Nietzschean or Levinasian. First of all, at stake here is a difference between Derrida and Heidegger where such difference is understood as the *différance* of a dynamic that acknowledges a multiplicity of relationships running between complex formations of knowledge that cannot be reduced to the "differences" of

³⁹⁵ *SP.*, p. 131.

theses with impunity. In this regard the overriding point I have made in this study is that in all these relations, one needs to acknowledge that Derrida's reinscription of Heidegger has, from the beginning, articulated a complex interplay of proximities and distances, rather than a simple demarcation along any given set of lines or positions, even if such lines, within a network, can be drawn and can be very effective.

Derrida articulates this complex economy perhaps most explicitly in *The Post Card* and related texts where he puts into play or sets off a gigantic and interminable network or open matrix of telecommunications comprised of transmissions, relays, delays, dispatches, deferrals, translations and transferences that bring his own text into conjunction with Heidegger's even as by means of a "switch point" this thinking is strategically subjected to various reinscriptions that re-route it and send it elsewhere. Following the movement of Chapter 2 we were able to catch a glimpse of this program, and in such a way that it became apparent that the complex network between Derrida and Heidegger involves and revolves around the transmission of the question of technology. In this regard, as with so many other matters, between Derrida's text and Heidegger's, there is, *together with a radical displacement*, a much closer, even uncanny proximity. To begin with, it would appear that Derrida's deconstruction of Heidegger's text lands a decisive blow against his thinking of Being as well his claims about the technological completion of Western metaphysics. As Derrida wants to show, these claims, along with the more subtle, hidden, stubborn privilege in Heidegger of the values of gathering, nearness, presence, and the proper, will not only articulate Heidegger's belonging to metaphysics, they are symptomatic of the traditional philosophical anxiety about technology, about the threat of artificial, mediate, technical and prosthetic corruption and contamination. Here, as in all other cases, the proximity of thinking to Being is at issue: the anxiety over technology leads Heidegger to subtract the thinkable or thinking from the field of technics, a move which will relegate technology to a secondary position in relation to its more original essence where this is, precisely, the matter (*Sache*) for

thought. For Heidegger, technology remains a *question*, and *as* a question asked by thinking, thinking is not “technical”. Hence arise the famous pronouncements to the effect that “the essence of technology is nothing technological,” the essence of science has nothing to do with science,” and other propositions to that effect.

It is this attitude that must be deconstructed. In connection with the deconstruction of the traditional treatment accorded to writing as a *techne* subordinated to speech and exterior to the *logos* (where this includes his consequent elaboration of the quasi-transcendental graphics of writing, *différance*, the trace, the supplement, etc.), Derrida effectively demonstrates that even as it puts to Western philosophy the question of technology as the question about its history and its end, Heidegger’s thinking constitutes itself through a disavowal or expulsion of technology, a move which amounts to the desire to purify thinking of an originary technicity. In elaborating the *différance* between his own text and Heidegger’s, such technicity is precisely what Derrida’s writings affirm. As I have shown, since the late 1960s Derrida has elaborated deconstruction within the context of an unprecedented technicization of the world and the human, the context, that is, of the massive programming, capitalization, and appropriation of techno-scientific invention by multinational corporations and nation states. A context in which the future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger and can only be proclaimed as a “monstrosity”. And a technology which constitutes a “practical deconstruction” of the contemporary world. Most strikingly, for Derrida it is the accelerating development of information and communications technology, of the “media,” and tele-technologies of all types, that points to something singular that is happening or taking place in the world today, an event which Derrida first articulates in terms of the closure of metaphysics as manifest in a “new mutation in the history of writing in history as writing” and later in terms of generalized virtuality or “spectralization”. For Derrida, we can no longer speak of the event within the coordinates of gathering and sending, of arrival and appropriation (*Ereignis*), in the manner of

Heidegger. Nor, importantly, can we speak of the event in contradistinction to the processes of contemporary technics which both opens and prevents the realization of the metaphysical and techno-scientific concepts of technology: “*techne*, this is the entire—infinitesimal and decisive—*différance*, does not arrive. No more than metaphysics, therefore, and than positionality; always already it parasitizes that to which [Heidegger] says it happens, arrives, or succeeds in happening to [*arrive à arriver*]. This infinitesimal nuance changes everything in the relation between metaphysics and its doubles or others.”³⁹⁶ Perhaps there is nothing more important in Derrida’s work than the quasi-transcendental logic of this parasite, of the *différance* or trace of this event which happens to place [*qui arrive au lieu*—which happens to take place, and to taking-place [*qui arrive à (l’) avoir-lieu*], and which in happening presupposes some process of technicization. In this regard Derrida’s work resists the widespread denigration of technology in Western thought and takes on the radical consequences of conceiving technics as an irreducible or originary condition that affects all thinking and all beings in their very interior and in all their relations to the other. Here, Derrida’s main point, among other things, against Heidegger is that the technological is not a mode of disclosure, it is not something which is destined, which arrives, and which becomes actual at the end of a series of epochs in which its essence has been concealed from thinking as the “oblivion” of Being. On the contrary, for Derrida, technics has always already begun just as writing has already begun. Both in fact occur in the same movement, introducing the necessity and irreducibility of generalized inscription. This irreducibility of inscription enables Derrida to maintain that *thinking* is already—always already—writing, let alone speech, whose value as opposed to writing, is determined by philosophy in its immediate proximity to thinking. But by virtue of this irreducibility of inscription and within the same general economy, Derrida shows the irreducibility of *techne* in the thinking of Being, shows, that is, that technics is “older” and more “originary” than the un-thought difference (*Unter-Schied*) between

³⁹⁶ PC., p. 192.

Being and beings or between an actual technics and its essence. No deconstruction, then, without technicization, without an originary technicity and without the indissociability of the event and technics.

The question remains, of course, where this movement of Derrida's thought lead us? What is reserved in the general text? As I argued in Chapter 4, Derrida's text finds itself having to face up to the barely calculable shock that its belongs within the horizon of the topics of the Heideggerian understanding of technology, that it signals an extra turn that simultaneously dissimulates and entrenches the "end" of metaphysics. Regarding this end, Heidegger proposes that the *Ge-stell* as the optimization of calculation, implicates a "peculiar quality" wherein the modern world projects itself into "a space withdrawn from representation and so grants to the incalculable its proper determination and its historical uniqueness."³⁹⁷ In this case, the essence of technology lies primarily in the setting-up of a network of endless deferrals, in the elision of that definiteness, of those "proper" boundaries, which were the hallmark of the "object," and in the ongoing storing-up, switching, rechanneling, and calculating of "what is". Here the restricted economy of the so-called subject-object schema loses its significance since both are seen to be mere "effects" of a generalized machinism that reserves priority over both. Through such cybernetic key-words as information, regulation, feed-back, the basic ontological categories that had hitherto served the productionist orientation of the "rational animal" so well are transformed in an uncanny manner such that traditional philosophical thought is divested of its ground. This is not simply a reversal of classical priorities; rather, as it moves into its technological stage thinking must respond to the provocative circumstance that it is carried to the point where it is dispossessed of its representational capacities and must negotiate a space where it determined solely by the "surface fluctuations" of global technics and its operations.

³⁹⁷ AWP., p. 135-136.

If deconstruction is indeed symptomatic of technological thinking, it should be possible to locate in its affirmation of originary technicity the decisive features of Heidegger's own notion of *Ge-stell*. This would seem to be the case. As I argued, the idea that for deconstruction generalized inscription suborns the distinction between human beings and other living organisms and between Being and beings by enlarging the possibilities of differing and deferring and of "putting in reserve" reiterates the very terms by which Heidegger defines the way in which metaphysics completes itself in the permeation of the world by technical relations. In this case, the Derridean text finds itself inscribed back within the thinking of Being even as it re-inscribes it. Here, *everything happens as if* the yet-to-come elaboration of writing and originary technicity was written or pre-scribed in advance, *in advance and reproduced and reflected* in the thinking of the *Ge-stell*. This dual movement of writing, moreover, is necessitated by Derrida's failure to follow Heidegger's thinking as it is carried beyond the metaphysics of representation. Hence, Derrida's point of departure, his strategic wager or calculation with respect to Heidegger's thinking of technology, is inadequate to his own attempt to mark the closure of metaphysics through the structural opening of technics. Deconstruction articulates what is most metaphysical about thought in the technological epoch: it is the system of discourse which authorizes the Ex appropriation of the identity of the entity in favour of its availability for "play" with the functional system of writing. What Derrida calls originary technicity signals the consummation of metaphysics in technology and defines its "essence" by way of the erasure of essence. Of course, as Derrida insists, deconstruction is not merely a technical operation used to dismantle systems, nor that it is a constructor of systems in the manner of, for example, cybernetics. On the contrary, the metaphysical operation of cybernetics is the dissimulating shadow of the originary technicity of writing and of the trace etc which is inseparable from a general questioning of *techne* and technicist reasoning. This is not to say, however, that deconstruction thinks something other than the metaphysics of cybernetics; rather, it thinks cybernetics more

radically that it can think itself by thinking the *gramme* as “an element without simplicity”.

From a Heideggerian perspective, the evolution of Derrida’s thinking from *Of Grammatology* to his latest texts, does nothing, perhaps, but register and confirm the productive possibilities and powers of late twentieth-early twenty first century capitalism, if it is true that the ever accelerating pace of techno-scientific programming and invention and the massive capitalization and appropriation of technical change by multinational corporations is the accomplishment of metaphysics and the oblivion of Being. In this case, the aporetic logic of the deconstructive method—that it works both to reveal and undo the contemporary accomplishments of metaphysics, both opens and prevents the effectivity or actualization (arrival) of techno-scientific invention—is complicit with capitalism in this respect: that the capitalist situation (there where capital plays an essential role between the actual and the virtual) is nothing other than a “practical deconstruction,” “writing,” “spectralization,” “globalization” or “worldwide-ization” (*mondialisation du monde*) of the world. This is not to say, however, that deconstruction and capitalism coincide anymore than it is to say metaphysics and deconstruction coincide or that metaphysics and capitalism coincide. If Derrida’s work tells us anything, it is that “all is not to be thought of at one go,” that the “time is out of joint,” and that “this situation has always already been announced” and calls for an “interminable analysis”.

Is the point of departure of the Derridean text inadequate to its own point of departure? Does this text *as text* amount to a failure to think technics radically enough, which is to say, to think technicity as an epochal event of the unconcealment of beings? For Heidegger, to pose the question concerning technology is to continually re-pose this question, it is to maintain an “*openness to the mystery*”.³⁹⁸ This opening, maintains the

³⁹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John E. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, (New York: Harper & Row, 1966). p. 55.

incalculable distance between Heidegger and Derrida even in their closest proximity, in the *différance* (where this would include Heidegger's *Unter-Scheid*) of disclosure and inscription. And this because the mystery remains irreducible whether technicity is thought in an originary fashion as generalized inscription or on the basis of Being-historical thinking. To raise the question concerning technology is to affirm the mystery as the opening of the future. Strangely enough, the Derridean text replicates but reverses the Heideggerian thought that this affirmation means to enter into the essence of technology as event of appropriation (*Ereignis*). That is, since Heidegger's thought articulates a metaphysical disavowal of the originary technicity of the event, it cannot be open to a future "to-come," it cannot be *l'invention de l'autre*, an invention of the other. Is Heidegger's text thereby a closed book? By no means. However, this text has its afterlife in the excess of technics, in a machinic repetition (can there be any other kind?) in which we affirm the future as what is to-come in the form of technology. Here, Heidegger's text, like Derrida's, is always other, is always to-come. For this there can be no thesis.

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