

SITE

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Tris Vonna-Michell
5x7: verbal transcription notes, 2009
From the work, *Wasteful Illuminations*,
2008–ongoing

Throughout the pages of SITE Tris Vonna-Michell has presented textual excerpts from an ongoing work, *Wasteful Illuminations*, combined with verbal articulation notes made by the gallery staff at the Baltic in Newcastle earlier in January 2009. The excerpts are taken from a prose-piece which is devised as a chronicle and script for Vonna-Michell's performances and installations, while the verbal transcription notes have been constructed by the Baltic staff after listening to selected short verbal-audio-poems composed by Vonna-Michell and translators in Japan, which correlate to the excerpt's written narration... both the excerpts and verbal-audio-poems were verbalized live in the gallery space; for SITE magazine they have returned to a printed form.

Derrida's Last Paths

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The publication of Jacques Derrida's seminar from 2001–2002, *La bête et le souverain*, will no doubt initiate a new phase in the reception of the philosopher's work. These seminars, from the first one given at the Sorbonne in 1960, to the last one at the École des Hautes Études in 2002–2003, will fill 44 volumes, and the publication effort will probably take us into the second half of this century.

This issue of SITE is dedicated to the memory of Jacques Derrida, and attempts to look at his work from the vantage point of its final phase. In fact, as early as the mid-1970s Derrida's work started to address questions of ethics and politics, the nature of philosophical teaching, the problem of human and animal life, philosophy's relation to religion, and many other issues that would seem to transcend the initial program of deconstruction. Whether this amounts to a turn in his work has been much debated; there are undoubtedly as many versions of "Derrida" as there are readers of his work.

Alexandre Costanzo's and Sven-Olov Wallenstein's contributions take a closer look at the text of the seminar from 2001–2002, with respect both to the context, style, and impact of Der-

rida's teaching, as well to how he here weaves together motifs from his previous work into a profound questioning of the idea of sovereignty, which leads him into a complex and critical debate not only with classical philosophy, but also with contemporary thinkers like Lacan, Deleuze, Foucault, and Agamben.

Josh Schwebel takes up the idea of event and singularity, and develops it in the context of recent discussions in performance theory. Drawing on Peggy Phelan's account of the "ontology of performance" as something based on a necessary disappearance, Schwebel argues that Derrida may allow for an understanding of the relation between event

and document in terms of translation.

Derrida's reading of Plato's *pharmakon* is undoubtedly a tour de force in modern philosophy, but strangely enough he rarely developed this theme in relation to Greek tragedy. This is the topic of Anders Lindström's essay, which investigates the presence of the *pharmakon* in Euripides, and how the conflict between mythos and logos was worked out in texts that in some respects can be read as counterstatements to Plato.

One of the more recent debates, especially in French phenomenology, has focused on whether there is such a thing as a "theological turn" in the work of Derrida. In a review of Martin Hägglund's *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (2008), a book that strongly opposes any such interpretation, Jonna Bornemark discusses a possible reading of Derrida as a philosopher of religion that would steer clear of any theological credo and dogma.

Karl Lydén picks up the idea of "archive," which Derrida develops in his reading of Freud, and applies it to our current versions of information storage, especially in the artworld. Similar questions about the impact of technology are addressed in Staffan Lundgren's essay, which deals with the collaborative work of Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, the "place" of politics and the idea of a "technological singularity" that would take us beyond the limits of the human.

In the final text, an interview with Swedish philosopher Fredrika Spindler, whose recently published book on Spinoza is the first volume of a trilogy, the subsequent volumes of which will deal with Nietzsche and Deleuze, we encounter an idea of philosophy as becoming and transformation, a reading of history that opposes the interpretation proposed by Heidegger, and an idea of thought as a corporeal and affective event, that may or may not contradict the phenomenological claim to capture the very presence of thought, from Husserl and Heidegger to Derrida and beyond. Whether these two ideas of philosophy are finally at odds with each other remains a decisive question for the future. •

THE EDITORS

The Caress of the Event

Alexandre Costanzo

From 1984 onwards Jacques Derrida's seminar took place at the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales on Boulevard Raspail in Paris. It had begun at the Sorbonne in 1960 and then for twenty years was held at the École Normale Supérieure, on the invitation of Louis Althusser. A first volume of Derrida's manuscripts for these seminars has just been published, containing his final lectures: *La bête et le souverain*.¹ The preceding forty years of teaching are expected to result in a corresponding number of volumes. Of course, Derrida's seminar was a crowded public ceremony, where one would recognize many of the same faces year after year. Present were faithful friends, such as Hélène Cixous and the filmmaker Hugo Santiago, a few regular students from abroad, and even some peculiar characters who had earlier, one could reasonably suspect, also haunted the classes of Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze. The lectures took place between 5pm and 7pm on Wednesday afternoons, but quite often Derrida would go over time and graciously ask for "another fifteen minutes" where he, according to his habit, would pick up an underdeveloped thread—fifteen minutes that also challenged our own schedules because at 8pm Alain Badiou's seminar began, which many of us also followed. This was a time when we were busy listening and passionately discussing the lessons of the masters for entire weeks, a joyful time when one could hear Jean-Luc Nancy and sometimes Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Giorgio Agamben and of course Jacques Rancière. For our generation this was the time of incessant movement between these philosophies, a movement that continues to find its proper paths today.

The volumes containing Derrida's seminars will, of course, not include the sessions he kept open for presentations by his students or other invited participants, or those he dedicated to discussions, where everyone prepared questions or remarks, to which he always listened with the same patience and generosity. Nor will they include the peculiarities of certain individuals, such as the elderly lady who was always knitting on some sweater or scarf and who would sometimes utter an aggressive remark. They will not include the vivid emotion that grew among us throughout the weeks, the friendships that were created, and above all they will not include the singular atmosphere that arose, the atmosphere that emerged through the charm, the kindness and the thinking of Jacques Derrida.

In fact, what I would like to discuss is precisely Derrida's philosophical "charm", the one that can be discovered, for example, in "Plato's Pharmacy", with reference to a very peculiar drug—the *pharmakon*—whose function glides elusively between that of poison and that of remedy.² A drug, a narcotic torpedo which is identified with Socrates, which petrifies and awakens, anaesthetizes and sensibilizes, tranquilizes and causes anguish...³ What is at stake in this groundbreaking essay is the mobilization and dissemination of a chain of signifiers that work on the corpus of the Platonic text by testing the structure of language. From the torpor which is induced in the dialogues by Socrates' word to its elusive "gliding" or to the process of "différance" itself, where one and the same term simultaneously signifies its opposite, where the

poison becomes the remedy. This is Derrida's preferred figure of style, or more precisely his sense of touch.⁴ It is in fact a curious method, whose aim is to touch something that escapes or rather something that takes flight in language, in discourse, and in the flesh or in the sex. The aim is to touch that which cannot be touched, or rather, to follow in the footsteps of someone who has already escaped, in the place of a *différance*, something which is outlined as a supplement, a surplus, almost nothing, ashes...

Naturally one finds what is invariable in this method in his last seminar, between the animal and the sovereign. The seminar begins with a reading of a fable by Jean de La Fontaine, "The Wolf and the Lamb." The moral of this fable is that "The reason of the strongest is always the best." What Derrida proposes is in essence an archeology of reason and power, of law, right and justice, by testing the structure of the "onto-theologico-political" edifice. During the course of this project Derrida will make an inventory of beasts, of the animal figures of politics which lay bare, on the one hand, those logics that organize the submission of the living under the system of sovereignty, and on the other hand those that reveal the troubling analogies between the animal, the sovereign and God. Which is to say that "man"

struggles in the contradictory space of a dispute between, on the one side, "the animal" and on the other "God." Doing this, something breaks out, something like lines of flight or rather the space of a floating exteriority, the "outside of the

law", between the points of flight of the "divine" and that of "animality", in elusive slidings that refer us back to the structural logic of the *pharmakon*. It is within this contradictory space that Derrida's tries to follow lines of flight or traces: the trace of something that emancipates itself or that escapes, a paradoxical, fleeing structure, a burning and ungraspable "object." It is always this precarious region of contradiction that he approaches, a region where he aims to lay bare a rift, where the meaning, the concepts, and its edifices tremble and threaten to collapse, where the movement of an escape is outlined. His aim is not to arrest the escape, but to catch its movement.

Therefore, from the very beginning of the first session, in a strange digression that introduces his proposition, Derrida dwells upon an expression that he will turn around and rephrase in every possible sense, until the limits of exhaustion. He says, almost for nothing:

Imagine a seminar which would begin in this way, *à pas de loup* ["stealthily", literally: "with wolf's steps"—*tr*]: [...] It advances *à pas de loup*. I quote it with reference to this proverbial expression, "*à pas de loup*", which generally signifies a sort of introduction,

a discrete intrusion, even an unapparent breaking and entering, without spectacle, almost secretly, clandestinely, an entry which does everything in order to go unnoticed, to escape arrest, interception, interruption. To advance "*à pas de loup*" is to walk without noise, arrive without notice, proceed discretely, silently, invisibly, almost inaudibly and imperceptible, as if to surprise prey, as if to take that which is in view by surprise, that which is in view but does not see that which sees it coming, the other which prepares to take it by surprise, to understand it by surprise.⁵

That which advances "*à pas de loup*", what is this, exactly? Beyond the sexual relations and the subterranean links which are constructed between the animal and the sovereign, beyond the fable by La Fontaine and a phrase by Hobbes, which one might guess will complicate the relationships of identity at the point where "man is a wolf to man." Beyond the wolfman of Freud and other hounds and chimeras set in motion by Derrida, he also talks about something else. I would say that, *that*, which advances *à pas de loup* is above all his own philosophical style, his own

particular movement as a thinker. In fact, it is Derrida himself who is trying to seize a burning object or a fleeing place, to approach his prey gently without scaring it away. So he must advance slowly, *à pas de loup*, to follow in the footsteps of that which also slips away *à pas de loup*, in the bodies and in souls, in

discourses and in the world. This something escapes, as we have said, literally towards the "divine", the "stupid" [*la "bêtise"*, "stupidity", from "bête", "animal"—*tr*], the "animal." It escapes, therefore, beyond or on this side of the "law" and of "right", and it is this that the wolves wanted to seize: that which creates a rift in the "law" and certainly within "life." However, this "rift" cannot be caught, but one can approach this region in order to caress it and to unite it with the movement of its flight and the possibility of the world that it contains. I believe that Derrida never spoke about anything other than "this." Although it would assume many different names and guises in his work: gift, forgiveness, hospitality, *pharmakon*, ashes... So many figures which establish the topology of a relationship with the Other, or, if you prefer, which leave something like the faded traces of a possibility, a possibility which he would have preferred to call an "impossible possible."

Deconstruction is thus the strategy of an approach whose aim is to destroy or fissure the oppositions that direct the organization of the world or languages, in order to redirect them transversally: man and animal, law and outside-of-the-law, democracy and totalitarianism, but

also life and death, being and nothingness, body and soul, finite and infinite, etc. This approach—*à pas de loup*—gestures towards the region of the "impossible possible", the almost nothing which his language deconstructs by bending and by stunning the sense of its words, through the poetics of an elusive sliding, by means of oscillation, detour, reversal, and contamination. The almost imperceptible nothing about which these words speak, words which call upon and identify with an expression, *à pas de loup*, whose sense branches off in different directions. An almost nothing that one finds within the trace or within ashes.

However this almost nothing is *not* nothing. In order to touch and disturb the world, to make it unstable, one must also touch language, "his" language, the structure of language. This is what Derrida tries to do through his singular style, one that stuns signification by focusing upon the elusive, sliding terrain that it marks or references. What this language does is of course that which he has conceptualized as "différance" or "trace", to precisely follow *à pas de loup* this something that eludes us both in the world and in language. But what is this "something", this "thing"? What we here call an "almost nothing" or an "impossible possible"? All the thinkers that I mentioned earlier have forged their own particular concepts to grasp this idea. It is the "open", an "idleness" or a "means without end" in the lexicon of Giorgio Agamben. It is the "truth" in Alain Badiou or a "distribution of the sensible" in Jacques Rancière. It is the Real for Jacques Lacan, the Real as impossible. Each time it is the same thing. In Derrida it is also called an "event as impossible", or to quote: "That which happens as event must only happen where it is impossible."⁶ And this is the reason he must advance *à pas de loup* in order to be able to approach this clearing of the impossible, as a caress of the event, the "there" which does not yet exist and whose path he still shows us. The in-existent place of a vanished and coming event, an impossible possible that floats and contaminates, this will be the fleeing treasure for whose security he has assumed the responsibility. •

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Séminaire: La bête et le souverain. Volume 1, 2001–2002* (Paris: Galilée, 2008).
2. Cf Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy", in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981). The Greek *pharmakon* means several things, color but above all both poison and remedy. It is through this concept that Derrida will read Plato's texts.
3. *Ibid.*
4. I am here referring to an expression by Alain Badiou, who gave homage to and made a luminous reading of Derrida's thought in his public seminar, which through and through nourishes this text. Cf Badiou, *Logique des mondes* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).
5. Derrida, *La bête et le souverain*, "Première séance, le 12 décembre 2001", 20f.
6. Cf Derrida, "une certaine possibilité impossible de dire l'événement", in *Dire l'événement est-ce possible? Séminaire de Montréal pour Jacques Derrida* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

Alexandre Costanzo is a philosopher, based in Paris and one of the founding editors of the magazine *Faillies*.

The Beast and the Sovereign: Derrida's Last Seminar

Sven-Olov Wallenstein

With the recently published magnificent volume *Séminaire: La bête et le souverain*,¹ Editions Galilée has initiated the project of a complete edition of Jacques Derrida's seminars, from the very first, given at the Sorbonne in 1960, to the final, incomplete sessions at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales from 2002 to 2003, just before the philosopher's death. The edition will contain 44 volumes, each comprising some 500 pages, and will, according to the editors, not be finished until half-way through this century (facts which give the present reviewer an almost uncanny sense of time, or, perhaps, of what Derrida himself understood as the idea of "survival": if I manage to stay alive, I might, at the age of 90, be able to read and review the final volume, which takes us all the way back to the beginning of deconstruction, which would indeed be one very good reason for not checking out too soon...).

Beginning almost at the end—the present text is the last seminar that was given in its entirety—this edition gives us the opportunity to look at Derrida's work from the vantage point of its conclusion. But this is not at all a philosophical testament, instead, as is always the case with Derrida—and, perhaps even more relevantly, as is the case here in particular, because of the particularities of the seminar situation—we are presented with a thought that is underway, hesitant, constantly turning back on itself and retracing its own steps. Some of the mannerisms that occasionally weighed down Derrida's later writings (the necessity of constantly rephrasing the question, leaving it suspended, creating chains of associations that often were simply confusing, and opening never-ending parentheses), in fact make perfect sense in the rhythm of the informal spoken lecture, and most of the time he displays an admirable clarity of style and pedagogical zeal.

What the text of the seminar provides us with is in fact a glimpse into the laboratory where Derrida's ideas were forged, and most of the topics addressed are present in his published works. Unlike the other massive publications of this sort—most recently Foucault's lectures from the Collège de France, and, more distantly, Heidegger's Marburg and Freiburg courses from '20s and '30s, to cite two great predecessors—this one will probably not drastically alter the image that can be garnered from the philosopher's (more than eighty!) published books, but is more likely to provide us with layers of underpinnings and preparatory work. The sheer volume of texts remaining to be published however indicates that the task of piecing together a complete picture of Derrida's trajectory, if such a notion makes any sense given the very idea of deconstruction, may take us, as noted, well into the next century.

The two organizing themes, the question of power and sovereignty, and the status of animality, have in fact been a constant presence in his work since the 1980s, but here they are brought into direct contact, which is what gives this text its particular dynamic, and also makes it into a very timely intervention into many current debates in political philosophy. Drawing on the heritage of classical political philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau), but also on authors such as Valéry and Celan, and engaging in detailed and sometimes highly

critical dialogs with contemporary thinkers, from Schmitt and Heidegger to Lacan, Deleuze, and Agamben, this volume above all gives the sense of an immense generosity and openness, of thinking as a process that must remain attentive to the proposals of others (although this attitude too has certain unfortunate limits, to which I will return). All of this was surely always a trademark of deconstruction—which is what separates it from the tedious game of finding flaws in other writers, the academic pursuit of one-upmanship that occasionally turns philosophy into the most repressive and depressive of games. Derrida's path, from its inception to its final meanderings, was to a large extent about lending a different tenor to philosophy, and engaging in a kind of writing that surely, as with the notes in his analysis of Rousseau in 1967, on one level needs to accept all the rigors of academic discourse and can never simply become some kind of free play (of which Derrida has been frequently accused by non-readers of his work), but on the other hand must, at some calculated moment, be ready to deviate from this path, to "open" the process of reading to something that escapes the classical protocols, although without ever claiming this new territory as its own possession. Thinking, as Derrida says in 1967, in one of his many gestures that can be read both with and against Heidegger, is that which we always already know we have not yet begun to do.

La bête et le souverain gives ample evidence of what this way of (un)doing philosophy amounts to, and as any reader of Der-

rida will know, God lives in the details, in the painstaking attention to turns of phrase and twists of concepts that escape the reader who has set out to locate a "thesis." Summarizing is thus always a profound betrayal, and yet this is what we normally do, and what I will do here—fully acknowledging that any attempt to survey the entirety of the path traversed in this text, or even to pinpoint its fundamental points of articulation in a more rigorous fashion, is out of the question, and that what follows can only be a few preliminary notes de lecture.

1. The two limits of the polis

The beast and/is (*et, est*) the sovereign—what is the significance of this odd couple, copula, or coupling? In the eleventh session, Derrida presents us with a marvelous scene, where Louis XIV in 1639 assists at the autopsy of an elephant in his menagerie in Versailles. The body of the beast is meticulously dismembered, analyzed, and laid out in front of the sovereign gaze, which for Derrida also indicates that both of them are joined together at the limit of *death*, in a "necropsy of sovereignty" (393). This tantalizing and, Derrida says, "vaguely totemistic" scene projects its light on the entirety of his investigation, and it is in

the space opened up here that a whole series of couplings of man, animal, beast, sovereign and God will occur.

The first animal to appear in this bestiary is the wolf, who has haunted, and perhaps even petrified or rendered speechless the political imaginary of the Occidental world, ever since the violent and wolf-like irruption of Trasymachus in the first book of Plato's *Republic*.² Tracing the image of the wolf through a series of complex figures that run through political thought—the Germanic figure of Wotan, Machiavelli's strategic advice to the prince not to fear a degradation to animality, but rather to choose between the model of the lion (bravery) and the fox (cunning) as two complimentary defenses against the sheer violence of the wolf (*The Prince*, chap. 17), La Fontaine's fables that include both wolves and lions, Hobbes famous use of proverb "man is the wolf of man" in *Leviathan*, which Derrida traces back to Plautus, and up to Freud's wolf-man—Derrida sets the scene, or even a "genecology" (142) for the question that will occupy him through the text: What is the status of the *zoon*, the living being, in Aristotle's famous definition of man in the *Politics* as a "political animal" (*politikon zoon*), and how should we correlate the *politikon* to

reason, as in the other and equally famous formula, man as an animal endowed with reason, *zoon logon echon*? When we speak of the beast and the sovereign, Derrida suggests, we tend to do so in terms of an analogy that holds them together, but the point can not be to reduce the one to the other, for

instance by integrating the political order into a natural, and biological life, but to unearth the logic that makes the analogy possible.

First of all, Derrida notes at the beginning of the seminar, both animal and sovereign indicate a certain limit of the law, one being situated below the space of legality, the other beyond it, and in their interplay, they also give space for the *human*, as the one who is neither above nor below. The sovereign could perhaps in this sense be taken as a case of that which is "beyond the polis and deprived of polis," the *hypsipolis apolis* of Sophocles's *Antigone* (v. 356) that is crucial for Heidegger's interpretation in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, whereas the animal, as the figure of a life that seems to escapes political determination, would be its counterpart, repressed in philosophical discourse and for this very reason always returning to haunt it.

The analogy in fact unfolds on the basis of the most radical difference, but a difference that contains just as profound an identity, since beast and sovereign relate to each other as inverted mirror images of the outside: neither of them respects the law—the beast since it does not know it or has no relation to it, the sovereign because he transcends it, can be taken as its very origin

and condition of possibility (as for instance Carl Schmitt would argue, and to which Derrida devoted a long analysis in *The Politics of Friendship*). An animal or a God, such would indeed be the condition of the one who resides outside of the *polis*, as Aristotle said (cf. *Pol.* 1253a 4), and Derrida's question will first be how we should understand the human as located in-between these "apolitical" entities (49), and then how we should locate a sovereignty that seems to accrue to both of them, on the one hand as that which elevates itself absolutely beyond natural life, on the other hand as a absolute immanence in nature, as a "manifestation of human bestiality and animality" (50)—an ambiguity than can undoubtedly be traced back to the oscillation in the Greek idea of *physis*, strategically manipulated by Plato as well as by the Sophists. Should we understand the space of right and legality as emanating from the law, as a system that relates only back to itself and has no ulterior ground, or as a space opened by a primordial force, and "archi-violence"—a theme that was opened up in the analysis in 1967 of Lévi-Strauss's "writing lesson," in *Of Grammatology*, or in the first discussion of Lévinas in 1963—that would precede and condition between fact and norm, *de facto* and *de jure*?

These initial questions—the answers to which obviously could, and indeed do, fill entire libraries—are then developed in a reading of Hobbes. *Leviathan*, Derrida proposes, can be understood as an "animal-machine" designed to awaken fear, but it is also an idea of the *state* as *prosthesis*, or a "prothétatique" (68), he says in his usual playful mood. This prosthetic state first implies that political sovereignty is the "proper" of man, that by which he transcends nature and attains to the level of conventions, and that this prosthetic is a protection; second, that this protective prosthetic poses sovereignty as essentially indivisible (as had already been Bodin's proposal in *Les Six Livres de la République* some seventy years before the *Leviathan*), and third, that this conventional prosthesis, the contract out of which sovereignty flows, excludes God and the beast. No treaty can be signed with a god or a beast, first and foremost because they are not endowed with *logos* (reason, word, speech) the way we are, they are not able to respond in acts of language that would create a community of understanding, and in this they can also be understood as irresponsible, in two ways: the beast does not *know the difference*, we could say, whereas the sovereign is *indifferent* to it.

In this sense, Hobbes remains a Cartesian, and neither beast nor gods can form part of society. But at the same time, Derrida notes, this non-responsiveness is also part of the definition of the absoluteness of the sovereign: he has no need to "respond" to anyone, to explain the motives for actions—his is an "absoluteness that absolves, releases him from any obligation to reciprocity," he is the one "who always has the right not to respond" (90), and he suddenly appears as another figure of the god-beast structure.

This is why, Derrida notes, a certain modernity will question sovereignty, as the proper of man, his very achieving of his essence as a *zoon politikon* and *logikon*, in the name of humanity and the rights of man. This is what Hobbes rejects more than anything else: the claim that one has

LINE 3

With one leg inverted and the other projected,
I reached for my camera. The projected leg edged its
way towards my sought-after-image, balancing the
corners of the frame against my unfolded
coffee table... Focused. Composed.

Verbal transcription Note: Bus Ticket Tears (whispered, fast)

"TT... RipRip-UnravellingUnravelling
UnravellingLaughter- RipRip YesThat'sRight
RipRip BusBus-NowTogetherTogether"

signed a personal pact with God (or any value or instance that would transcend the confines of the commonwealth) can be nothing but the most despicable fraud, and it is what threatens to tear the state apart. On the one hand, the political is what is most proper to man, his universal essence as political animal; on the other hand he must be able to transcend the political in the direction of another essence and another universality—an antinomy which resonates strongly in current debates on the possibility of universal citizenship in the age of globalization, and on which Derrida provides a thoughtful take whose inconclusiveness testifies to the complexity of the issue at hand.

II. Humanity and animality

The second theme that runs through the seminar is the problem of the relation between man and animal. This had actually begun to emerge in the early 1980s, with the first text on the theme of “Geschlecht” in Heidegger, and has been a constant presence in Derrida ever since, leading up to the volume, *L’animal que donc je suis* (2006), which is also an unfinished work, assembled posthumously on the basis of recordings and lecture notes.

In the seminar Derrida covers much of the same ground, but this time in connection with the issue of sovereignty (although the link admittedly sometimes appears a bit tenuous, and Derrida occasionally has to warn his listeners, “in spite of what you think, I have not lost track of our topic”...). The main protagonist lurking in the background is here of course Descartes, for whom the animal was a simple other, a mechanical assemblage devoid of soul, mind, reason, etc. Derrida however enters the problem via Lacan and the status of animality in psychoanalysis, which in this reading inscribes itself firmly in a Cartesian trajectory. For Lacan, the animal has no access to the symbolic and the signifier, it remains sealed in the domain of the imaginary, and the humanist subject still has all the priorities accorded to it since the Classical age. Consequently, for Lacan, the animal can have no unconscious, and it is outside the “fraternity” that can only be based on a community of “equals.”

This reading of Lacan’s decentering and subversion of the subject as caught up in, even one of the ultimate foundations for, an anthropocentric or phallogocentric discourse has a long precedence in Derrida, and we can see it germinating already in the reading of Lacan’s seminar on *The Purloined Letter* presented in *La Carte postale* (1980). More surprising is the inclusion of Deleuze—the thinker of becoming-animal, the “zone of indiscernability,” and the idea of a radical responsibility for everything, even beyond the domain of the living—in such a humanist legacy. Derrida’s textual evidence is mainly drawn from the chapter on the “image of thought” in *Difference and Repetition* and the passages on “stupidity” (*bêtise*), which he understands as a particular privilege of man. Deleuze wants to raise the question of stupidity to a “transcendental” level, but in performing such a Kantian gesture, no matter how bent he is on transforming the very idea of the a priori into a transcendental empiricism, he in a certain way excludes the animal once more, Derrida suggests. For Deleuze, the *bête* cannot be *bête*,

it has no access to stupidity,³ precisely because stupidity is first and foremost not in the *other*, but in *me*, in an ego determined on the basis of a *zoon* that first and foremost has *logos*, and thus also the capacity to renounce it, and in this he in fact remains close to Lacan. What both of them finally understand as proper to man, Derrida concludes, is ultimately aligned with a traditional humanist gesture that points to a “sovereignty of the self, capable of responding freely and not only of reacting, which preserves a relation to freedom, to the indetermination of the ground” (247).

En passant it must be noted that the passages in Deleuze analyzed by Derrida indeed have a great rhetorical force, and their attack on a certain “rectitude” of thought reaches a high level of polemics, or *polemos*—it is almost as if we could hear the voice of the Sophists once more behind the Platonic smokescreen, viciously attacking Socrates and his feigned Ideas with weapons drawn from the everyday language of passions, affects, and shifts of perspective, all of which Deleuze would later call a “pragmatics of the multiple.” But colorful as they may be in their aggressive energy, to my mind they remain an impasse in Deleuze, particularly in the way they oppose all of philosophy as if it were based on “one single image,” as he says, against which one could pit the idea of an “imageless thought.” Later (in fact, I would argue, already from *Logic of Sense* and onwards) Deleuze would acknowledge a necessary multiplicity of such images, and the

task will rather be to allow for the production of divergent images; the two volumes on cinema are an obvious case of this, but also a book like *What is philosophy?*, where the idea of a “noology” is developed in a fashion that runs contrary to and by far transcends the rather negative, occasionally even simplistic, conception in *Difference and Repetition*.

Derrida then pursues this theme in a reading of Flaubert, and in an analysis of Valéry’s *Monsieur Teste* and the author’s political writings—both of which pick up the thread from earlier publications, most importantly the analysis of the geo-politics of philosophy in *L’autre cap*—and also returns to the question of political authority by suggesting that every *decision*—and sovereignty can indeed be defined (if we, for instance, would follow Schmitt) as the capacity to decide—essentially must be seen an act of madness, and contains the risk of relapsing into stupidity.

In the eighth session Derrida return to La Fontaine’s fable and situates it in the context of the theory of sovereignty: the wolf needs no excuses, it justifies its own actions in a tautological fashion, and in this sense he is like one of those “Rogue States,” this highly contested and overdetermined concept to which Derrida

would dedicate an entire book (*Voyous*, 2003). The rogue, wolf, or lion (the subject of another of La Fontaine’s texts) operates on the model of the theological *causa sui*, and also indicates the extent to which the theory of sovereignty implies a moment of fiction, of which Montaigne and Pascal had reminded us much earlier: “In the fable, within a narrative that is itself fable-like, it is shown that power itself is an effect of a fable, of fiction and a fictive word, of a simulacrum” (291)—a theme that Derrida then continues in a reading of Paul Celan’s *Meridian Speech*, which claims an analogous sovereignty for the power of poetic speech, which should however not be confounded with some egological narcissism, as Derrida points out in the tenth session, in contrasting Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* to Celan and the possibility of “letting the most proper of the time of the other appear” (362), and in D. H. Lawrence’s poem *Snake*, where the entanglement of beast and sovereign attains a particularly complex form, and the idea of a possible ethics that would include non-human lie once more comes to the fore.

In the twelfth and next-to-last session Derrida enters into a debate with Heidegger, Foucault, and Agamben, and here one may note something

of a cantankerous attitude that mars the text, particularly with respect to Agamben. As early as the third session we were referred by Derrida to Agamben’s *Homo Sacer I* and its discussion of the motif of the werewolf, but we get no substantial discussions of Agamben’s claims, only a series of unappreciative re-

marks that bear on certain aspects of his literary style, which seem out of place, given the fact that there are indeed many points of direct contact between Agamben’s and Derrida’s respective projects. In the twelfth session, this debate is pursued further, most substantially in relating to the interpretation of certain passages in Aristotle’s *Politics*. Derrida disputes the claim that the distinction between *politikon* as an attribute to the living as such, and as “specific difference,” can be systematically upheld.

This seems indeed to be a case of a “fetishism of small differences,” where Derrida perceives the proximity of another thinker as somehow threatening, and responds with a violent expulsion—all of which shows, alas, that deconstruction is by no means itself exempt from the kind of blindness that it often locates in other perspectives.

Foucault is treated with much more caution and respect, but here the differences between Derrida’s and Foucault’s projects, both on the level of method and the texts they treat, are so vast that very little productive exchange seems possible. As the recent publications of Foucault’s lectures from the late 1970s—*Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*—show, both

the reading proposed by Agamben in *Homo Sacer I*, and by Derrida here, miss the point, albeit in different ways, of Foucault’s work, which has to do with the emergence of the idea of freedom and agency that we find in liberalism, connected to the “apparatuses of security” that displace mechanisms of power based on discipline in a historically specific phase of the development of the modern state. Both Agamben and Derrida are pursuing the question of the *ontology* of sovereignty, which is precisely what the “nominalist” methodology proposed by Foucault wants to circumvent. Derrida’s response to this would probably be that such a nominalism always contains a moment of philosophical naiveté (“empiricism,” as Derrida sometimes calls it) that itself thrives on hidden metaphysical commitments, and that Foucault’s historical genealogy always must assume some *core of sense* in the concepts whose transformations it charts; it is however far from clear that the deconstructive gesture always escapes the danger of an inverted “transcendentalism”, which establishes links and continuities that lack historical specificity.

As Derrida becomes more absorbed in his own reading of the *Politics* and forgets about polemics, we return once more to the heart of the matter, which is to find the link that connects the beast and the sovereign, which also was the initial question: man is this living being, the *zoon*, who is caught up in politics, in a zoopolitics (which Derrida prefers over “biopolitics”). This does not mean, he adds as a final caution on the last page, that Aristotle would have formulated everything that was to come, which would be absurd—“but as far as the biopolitical or zoopolitical structure goes, it is named by Aristotle, it is already there and the debate begins here” (462). •

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Seminaire: La bête et le souverain. Volume 1 (2001–2002)*. Édition établie par Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet et Ginette Michaud (Paris: Galilée, 2008). Henceforth cited in the text with pagination.
2. In *The Republic* (336b) Trasymachus enters the debate on the nature of justice “like a wild beast” (*hōstēr thērion*), and Socrates’ response in 336c makes an allusion to the Greek popular belief in comparing him to *wolf*, whose sight was believed to deprive humans of their speech: “And I, when I heard him, was dismayed, and looking upon him was filled with fear, and I believe that if I had not looked at him before he did at me I should have lost my voice (*aphonos an genesthai*).” The rest of *The Republic* could then in a certain way be seen as the gradual recovery of the power of *phone* and *logos* in the face of this threatening animality and aponia. Curiously enough, this wolf does not appear in Derrida’s otherwise so ambitious and far-reaching *lycology*.
3. “La bêtise n’est pas l’animal,” Deleuze writes, since “l’animal est garanti par des formes spécifiques qui l’empêchent d’être bête.” *Différence et répétition* (Paris: PUF, 1968), 197.

Untranslatable Remnants: the Performance and its Document

Josh Schwebel

How can we recall the unrepeatable? Singular, solitary, “one time alone,” (Derrida, *Shibboleth*, 3) the singular resists, forbids even, its reproduction. The event occurs but once. Each attempt at re-presentation encompasses too much, generalizes with too much facility the innumerable and banal details that gave existence to the event once and only once. The event is singular and therefore unrepeatable.

However, this hope for singularity also suggests preservation and isolation of the singular as original. This desire to preserve the original untouched and unchanged perpetuates a privileging of the present that Derrida has famously contested. Born out of a respect for the singularity of the event—out of respect for the unrepeatable of time and place, and the unrepeatable and dignity of life—the preciousness of the singular has the potential to form a hermetic seal around the past.

How can the singular event be recalled without relinquishing that which rendered it singular? How can we relate to what Derrida calls, “a singularity which might otherwise remain undecipherable, mute, and immured ... in the unrepeatable” (Derrida, *Shibboleth*, 10–11)? How can we encounter the event that happened once—again?

To this end I would like to focus on ongoing debates in performance art. Performance brings a certain concentration to the encounter with singularity in the present moment. As an artform that often involves the body of the performer in the presence of an audience, performance is a field of production that is particularly situated to imply unrepeatable. Indeed, Peggy Phelan locates the *essence* of the performance event to be its occurrence one time only. In *The Ontology of Performance*, Phelan writes, “performance’s being [...] becomes itself through disappearance [...] Performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated” (Phelan, 146).

Here, Phelan identifies two fundamental aspects of the discussion forthcoming in this essay. First, Phelan clearly identifies performance art with/as the singular event. In claiming unrepeatable as the essence of the event of performance, she defines performance in opposition to its document. “Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, [or] documented” (Phelan, 146). Phelan proposes that, “performance’s independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength” (Phelan, 149). However, this strong identity of performance with the present resolves into the second facet of this description: the performance event is thus constituted by its disappearance. Insofar as the event takes place once and only once, the passage of the event is thus marked, even in advance of itself, by its disappearance.

The performance event occurs only once before an audience in a bounded time and place. Phelan states of performance that, “a limited number of

people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward” (Phelan, 149). As such, performance is determined within a dialectic of presence and absence. In electing to preserve the identity of performance as an experience of the event in the present moment, Phelan excludes the possibility for the performance event to reach any other audience.

Phelan excludes the document from the *being* of the performance. Generally speaking, the performance document, while most often photographic or videographic, can take the form of any aspect of the performance, including the testimony of its audience members. For Phelan, the definition of the document is never clearly given, except to negatively define the performance: the document cannot be a *substitute* for the performance. She asserts that it is not metonymic of the event,

i.e., the part—document—cannot stand in for the whole of the performance (although this is often exactly how performance participates in the visual economy). Phelan is emphatic that the document is *other than* the performance, that the document *changes* the performance, and that even the presence of the camera or other documentary technology changes the event.

While Phelan cannot accept the document as being *of* performance, she does allow that writing about the performance is necessary, but suggests “writing toward disappearance” (Phelan, 148) as a strategy to preserve the singularity of the event in itself and to avoid “fall[ing] in behind the drive of the document/ary” (Phelan, 149). However, for Phelan’s argument to hold together, writing *about* the event must be neither event, nor document. She writes, “the challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance for writing is to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself” (Phelan, 148).

As we reach Phelan’s proposition for writing

about performance we must pause. What is writing, in this regard, for Phelan? How can she eschew the document *and* recognize writing *about* the event? What category does she provide for writing? The disappointing result of Phelan’s astute analysis of performance is that the remainder of her article unravels her argument. While she attempts to employ examples of performances, she ends up writing descriptions of “what happened” in expository language with the aid of documentary photographs. For instance, in the excerpt below Phelan describes a performance by artist Angelika Festa:

In her 1987 performance [...] Festa literally hung suspended from a pole for twenty-four hours [...]. The performance took place between noon on Saturday May 30 and noon on Sunday 31. The pole was positioned

between two wooden supports at about an 80° angle and Festa hung suspended from it, her body wrapped to the pole with white sheets, her face and weight leaning toward the floor. (Phelan, 153)

However, Phelan’s article is not without value to this project. First, her work is necessary to identify an affinity between performance and singularity. Second, I wish to pursue the obstruction she suggests, but fails to enact, to writing about the event. Third, I wish to challenge Phelan’s insufficient

distinction amongst writing, the experience of the witness (who will testify to the event), and the re-production that is manifested in the document. Insofar as the performance exists in its disappearance, the distinction amongst these three modes of witnessing cannot be maintained.

In this regard, I would like to offer some amendments to Phelan’s framework. While I agree with Phelan’s dismissal of the totalization presumed by the reproductive document, this should be taken as a challenge to remembering, rather than

as a prioritization and elevation of the original as singular. Instead of considering the performance document to be a totalization or a representation, let us think of documentation under the rubric of translation. This reconfigures the relation of performance to document as one of migration and change, rather than opposition or substitution. Thinking of the document as a translation of the event allows for a distance and movement from the event, but also acknowledges a filiation to the singular original. Yet this does not go far enough. Simply shifting the register by which we characterize the document does little to alter the overarching problematic with which we are engaged: the question of the encounter with the memory of the event of disappearance.

The foremost concern at hand is to reconsider the document as a mark that is made to remember.

Within the framework of the document as translation, a landscape of Derridean concepts appears. I would like to affiliate the document with a selection of these concepts in a preliminary gesture of naming, that I will later implicate more substantially into the body of this text. Thus, the document as translation is linked to the concepts of supplement, spectre, and remnant. Following this key, the performance event fits within the discourse of idiom, as it matches the untranslatable remainder that is lost in the translation of the original text.

Debates concerning the loss or preservation of idiom in translation can be mapped almost directly onto those concerns regarding the performance and its loss or preservation in the document. The concept of idiom designates those words that are specific to one language but do not exist in another. The idiom of a particular language is untranslatable—thus the idiom is what defines the differences between languages. However, these differences are only recognizable when compared with another language against which the idiom resists translation. Without translation, and without the loss that translation produces, there would be no idiom. As Derrida writes (summoning the ghost of Phelan):

The idiom is what resists translation, and hence is what seems attached to the singularity of the signifying body of language—or of the body period [...] Some think that, in order to fight for the just cause of antinationalism, we must rush headlong into universal language, transparency, and the erasure of differences. (*Sovereignities in Question*, 102)

Writing in response to the hardened grasp of the idiom, John Felstiner, translator of Paul Celan’s poetry into English suggests, “too easily, I believe, lyric poetry gets labeled untranslatable [...] but then why not think of translation as the specific art of loss, and begin from there?” (Celan, xxxviii).

Thus, in accordance with the ontology of per-

LINE 5

Images of plastic, shoes, canvas, cotton, metal, legs... and the coffee cup beneath my field of vision began to overwhelm my focus — scent, 3 up and 3 down — ground floor — exit — Bing — doors opening — shutters closing — Clank — Exposure, completion.

Verbal transcription Note: Elevator Conversations (originally A Conversation for 2 – Robot&Rhythm)

“C...TT... Welcome -MoveForward-Slowly-YouWork.. AllWeekEnd-Wall-IWork...YouHave”DaysOff-Iwork-onweekends- Pre’tty’Much - AsWell-AnyDay-YouFlight-AnyDay-A lot... AtWork-DontYou?... Pre’tty’Much - Othercities? Any..Day..Too.. AnyDay..OneWeekEnd?... Yes!\ Aswell..Yes// You-Work-OnWeekDays... HereAndThere... Have-Days-Off?... Iwork-Outside-Pre’tty’Much-Tokyo?... AnyDay-YouFlight... Yes!/.ALot.. HereAnd..There - DontYou?... WHA... YourWork-IWork-OnWeekDays-Pre’tty’Much-OnWeekEnds-AnyDays-As Well... Yess!YouFLight-Yeah-DontYou?-AndThere-ToOtherCities?- Yeah- Outside-HereandThere... YouWork?... Yeah - OnWeekDays?- WHA- YouHave... IWork...DaysOff...PrettyMuch - OnWeekEnds? - AnyDay- AsWell?... Yes//. YouFlight-HereAndThere... A lot... HereOnAndThereWeekEnds-AsWell- Well - You Work - I Work - OnWeekDays... Pretty’Much... You Have - Pretty’Much - Days Off - AnyDay!”

formance proposed by Phelan (and the ontology of translation proposed by Felstiner), I suggest that we imagine a form of documentation (as Phelan does of writing) that is sensitive to allowing the performance to disappear—a document of loss—a document as remnant. This would be a document that permits and encourages the withdrawal of the event. As mentioned, the relation of event to document hinges on a dialectic of presence and absence: the document allows me access to the experience of an event from which I was absent. In other words, the experience of the document anticipates an experience of my own absence, and testifies to the event's disappearance. The encounter with the document proposes an encounter that extends beyond presence—both mine and the event's—to an other encounter that is an other *singular* encounter.

The relation to the document is a (mediated) recognition of and relation to the Other. This Other can never be an object for my consciousness, it must always escape my grasp—and thus always retain its Otherness. The nature of experience presupposes that one can never have an immediate experience (of the Other). The immediate experience (intuition) overwhelms consciousness in its immediacy and exceeds what can be recuperated into the realm of conscious experience. My experience, as such (as experience that is related to me as authoring subject) is thus infinitely mediated, infinitely constructed, and indeed the Other remains infinitely Other to me. Like the text in translation presupposes languages that I do not speak, the document (as document) presupposes that there are places and times that I have not been and will not be, thus rendering an awareness of an Other through a mediated encounter with absence. This absence figures as both my own *not being* present to the event, and the Other's *not being* present to my act of witnessing.

Thus the document carries the trace of the absent original as Other. Both document and translation are haunted by the original—the original permeates them in its *absence*. Thus the missing event haunts the document as a spectre. Derrida writes:

The spectre is [...] of the visible, but of the invisible visible, it is the visibility of a body that is not present in flesh and blood [...] Phantom preserves the same reference to *phainesthai*, to appearing for vision, to the brightness of day, to phenomenality. And what happens with spectrality, with phantomality [...] is that something becomes almost visible which is visible only insofar as it is not visible in flesh and blood. (Derrida, *Spectrographies*, 418–419)

Phenomenologically, then, the document as haunted remnant ceases to be a means for reproducing the *appearance* of the performance. Instead, the document becomes a means for sustaining the performance's *disappearance*. This

means that instead of reproducing an insufficient rendition of *what happened*, the document allows us to recall *that* the performance happened—that the event to which the document referred is *not* present. The document, like the text in translation, is *haunted* by the disappearance of its original. For example, consider Germaine Koh's *Self Portrait*, a painting housed in the Kelowna Art Gallery that she revisits to “age” based on her present appearance. In this work the relation between performance and document is continuously renegotiated, and the event, the original, younger Germaine, withdraws deeper and deeper into concealment the longer the document exists (of the event that no longer exists). Rather than straining to reanimate a dead event, the task of the document is to create a site for mourning that loss. Thus each visit to Koh's painting is charged with the passage of time, and reflects the lost event of the previous layer of paint. The document provides an encounter with the lost event, and its display (an aspect of the document that we have avoided thus far), can be seen as a site to encounter the spectre of the event and to mourn its passing. Koh's work extends this work of mourning—each time she exhibits the work, we are granted time to mourn the loss of the previous work.

What then *is* the experience of this spectral document? As Derrida puts it, discussing the date as it recalls the singularity of the event past, “what becomes readable is not, it must be understood, the date itself, but only the poetic experience of the date” (*Shibboleth*, 8). What is experienced through the document is not the performance itself (the document only comes to appear as an incomplete intermediary), but the experience of loss or disappearance that circulates as the very ontology of the performance. “It shows that there is something not shown” (Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, 413). The document marks a place in the viewer's relation to and through presence, manifesting an experience of separation *from* the original experience. This experience of separation and distance, of absence, is that of being outside of the work, mourning its loss.

This spectre of the performance, withdrawn from the visible surface of the document, *watches us*. Derrida writes:

the spectre is not simply this visible invisible that I can see, it is someone who watches

or concerns me without any possible reciprocity [...] the father comes before me, I who am ‘owing’ or indebted... I who am because of him, owing to him, owing him everything (*Spectrographies*, 412).

The performance as original originator haunts the time of the document. The site of encounter with the document is a site for mourning—an encounter with a mark that is sustained through space and time. The document haunts by loaning us the time to encounter the performance past.

Let us now consider the borrowed time of this encounter with the work of mourning. Derrida describes, in *Of Hospitality*, the demise of Oedipus. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles' third play, Oedipus is a foreigner in a foreign land, blind, guilty of parricide, and dying. Oedipus commits Theseus, a stranger, by oath never to reveal the

location of his (Oedipus') tomb to his (Oedipus') daughters. Derrida provides a lengthy discussion of the particular significance of the hidden location of Oedipus' place of burial. “There is no *manifest* grave, no visible and phenomenal tomb, only a secret burial, an ungrave, invisible

even to his family, even to his daughters” (*Of Hospitality*, 113). By suppressing the place where he is subsumed beneath the earth and disappears from visibility, Oedipus denies his daughters the chance to mourn his death. Thus Oedipus dies:

Without a tomb, without a determinable place, without monument, [...] without a stopping point [...] mourning is not allowed. Or, what comes down to the same thing, it is promised without taking place, so thenceforth promised as an interminable mourning, an infinite mourning” (*Of Hospitality*, 111).

Thus we have an invisible originator or father who has denied his progeny a place for mourning: these daughters are left hostage to their father's ghost in an interminable state of mourning, and indeed their mourning is compounded for they also must mourn the loss of a place to mourn. The time for mourning their father's death can never end—the debt of mourning can never be repaid. The void that Oedipus has left in his wake is thus an infinite absence, an infinite debt, a loan that exceeds any accounts. Like the singular event, Oedipus' grave becomes, “the

secret that must not be violated by speech” (*Of Hospitality*, 97). His daughters can never be free of the spectre of their father, since his placeless tomb will forever be nowhere, everywhere, wherever they are.

To bring this back to the document of the performance, it is important to see the document as a *site* for mourning, both to revisit the past event, but also to achieve some detachment from it. The time for mourning must be finite. When Oedipus denies his daughters a place for mourning he is committing them to an endless surveillance by his spectre—in other words he denies his daughters a document of his performance. Thus Oedipus' ghost haunts infinitely, and his daughters can never be released from his ghostly presence-in-absence. The document gives us a place to encounter and mourn the invisible spectre of the Other. As Derrida writes, “the other, who is dead, was someone for whom a world, that is to say, a possible infinity or a possible indefiniteness of experiences was open. It [the document] is an opening” (*Spectrographies*, 422). The document is thus a position beyond the self so that we may be in relation to the event - to encounter the event, to repay its borrowed time, and to let it disappear.

In conclusion, the performance cannot be documented (if the document is meant to preserve), but the document can perform (if the document is meant to let the performance be towards disappearance). Or, the performance cannot not be documented—the performance, as performance, cannot *be* as anything but becoming its own *not being*, in being towards disappearance. And, if the document can perform, which it does, it can perform *like* the performance—it can reproduce the *being* of the performance as being towards disappearance. Therefore, the performance is always already its own remnant, and the document need only perform this disappearance. ●

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Euripides' Pharmacy: Derrida, Deconstruction and Dionysian Drug Dealing

Anders Lindström

Today most of us would perhaps connect the Greek term *pharmakon* to Jacques Derrida and his inventory of Plato's Pharmacy. Needless to say, the *pharmakon*, with its double attribute of poison and remedy, was not invented by Plato himself.¹ On the contrary, the ambiguity of this element has a long history, a history that also presents the *pharmakon* as a medium of magical qualities. During the classical period of antiquity, Plato in particular will use the ambivalence of the *pharmakon* to give it a philosophical charge as he is struggling with the sophists, but had the *pharmacy*, with its winding corridors and mirror clad walls, been explored before Plato?

Nietzsche proclaimed in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Euripides, being closely associated to Socrates, was the sole reason why the art of the tragic poets came to an end.² We all know Socrates' view on mimesis from Plato's *Republic*—resulting in the banishment of all poets—but the question is if, and if so in what way, the pharmacy already was in use in the late works of Euripides? Through his tragedies, being the youngest of the three tragedians, we can closely follow his encounters with the rise of sophistry in Athens. In his last play, the *Bacchae*, this conflict comes to its violent crescendo in the confrontations between Pentheus, ruler of Thebes, and Dionysus, son of Zeus; between the *nomoi* of the *polis* and the unquestioned status of the divine unwritten laws; a clash between rationality and its other. Dionysus, in representing the other, enters the city of Thebes as a “man full of many wonders” (*thaumatôn pleôs*, 449) and the leader of the Bacchic revels, and his key-attribute is the *pharmakon*.³

I. The Pharmacy

Already at the entrance of the pharmacy we recognize the ambiguity of the *pharmakon*. The *pharmakon*, acting as both remedy and poison, alternately or simultaneously beneficent or maleficent, is a charm of nonidentity with spellbinding powers.⁴ Moving further into the pharmacy, we notice how the ambivalence of the *pharmakon* opens up into a maze, into a labyrinth of reflecting mirrors. According to Derrida it is within this labyrinth the *pharmakon* constitutes the medium that can make oppositions (good/evil, memory/forgetfulness, inside/outside etc.) slide over into the other, a movement where characteristics from one side are turned into their opposite. Through the pharmaceutical force of the *pharmacy* the reversals take place; the play of differences that Plato tries to dominate and has to stop in his efforts with the spread of sophistic ideas in classical Athens.⁵

If the *pharmakon*, in the writings of Plato, is the

element where the transformation takes place, there seems to be a slight alteration in Euripides' distribution of the *pharmakon*. In the *Bacchae* several transformations of opposites are generated, contrary values sliding over into the other, a play of differences set in motion as Dionysus enters the city of Thebes. Although Derrida never took a real interest in Greek tragedy, what can be said about Euripides' *Bacchae* keeping Derrida's account of the *pharmacy* in mind? In “Plato's Pharmacy” Derrida demonstrates how the *pharmakon* is caught in a chain of significations, a chain that also shows the indeterminacy of this

element. Running from the mythical Pharmacia, which Socrates mentions at the beginning of the *Phaedrus*, to the *pharmakon* and the *pharmakeus* (a magician or wizard), to the absence in Plato's writings of the *pharmakos* (the scapegoat in the banishment of something evil—the ritual cleansing of the city and the possibility of healing the *polis* in times of a crisis). This chain of significations is also recognizable in the *Bacchae*. Of course we won't find Plato's *philosophical* agenda in the dramatic structure of Euripides' tragedy, but the destructive violence that Dionysus unleashes in the civic of Thebes, in the heart of the Theban constitution as a state, has a resemblance to the *pharmakon* Plato unveils in his war on the sophists.

The ambivalence of the *pharmakon* is the ambiguity Plato, through a series of oppositions, in the words of the Egyptian king Thamus, attempts to master in the *Phaedrus*. Derrida claims that Plato had to make the legend of Theuth conform to the necessities of structural laws in his organization of the myth.⁶ These structural laws govern and articulate oppositions (speech/writing, life/death, father/son, soul/body, day/night, sun/moon etc.), an internal structure that provides a line of demarcation between mythem and philosophem. This hierarchical structure of oppositions gives Plato's myth a core of *logos*, a core that also encircles the problematic origin of Western *logos*. Derrida emphasizes the

origin of Western rationality, founded in the Greek *logos*, as the violent history of a series of oppositions—a polarization that has produced History in its entirety, in the *philosophical* difference between *mythos* and *logos*.⁷

In Greek tragedy there are no attempts to liberate the drama from *mythos*, on the contrary, the mythological framework was a necessary prerequisite for the tragic poets. *Logos*, on the other hand, is articulated within this framework—but in the *pharmacy*, staged in the tragic collision of the *Bacchae*, we can certainly trace the violent origins of Western rationality. Euripides' take on

the *nomos/physics* controversy, a clash that came with the rise of sophistry in classical Athens, is also dramatized within this framework of pharmaceutical force and archaic mythology. These notions are not simply polarized, as the cultural and philosophical aspects are blended in the dramaturgical structure of the *Bacchae*. Pentheus is not a traditional sophist, rather

a positivist with an agile tongue. He “knows how to speak”, the revered blind seer Teiresias declares: “you have a glib tongue, as though in your right mind, yet in your words there is no real sense” (268).⁸ But Teiresias himself, as both Vernant and Segal has argued, is following a sophistic model in his speech, and Dionysus, “full of wonders”, appears to be the master of sophistic marvels.⁹ Within the confinement of the *pharmacy* this comes as no surprise.

II. The Pharmakon

At the outset of the *Bacchae*, Dionysus has arrived at the gates of the city where he once was born: “I have come, the son of Zeus, to this land of the Thebans, I, Dionysus, whom once Cadmus' daughter bore, Semele, brought to childbed by lightning-carried fire” (1–4). Disguised as a man, “changed to mortal appearance” (48), he encounters Pentheus—ruler of Thebes and son of Agave—to prove himself a god and the rightful son of Zeus (42, 47). The citizens are to be pun-

ished for not carrying out his sacred rites and for spreading the rumor that Semele, Agave's sister who died giving birth to Dionysus, was pregnant with the child of a mortal man: “For this land must learn to the full, even against its will, that it is uninitiated in my Bacchic rites; and I must speak in defence of my mother Semele by appearing to mortals as the god she bore to Zeus” (39–42). He has already stung the women in madness from their homes (32), and they are now, “stricken in their wits” (33), roaming the hillsides of mount Cithaeron in Bacchic frenzy.

Teiresias, known for his wisdom, has also come to Thebes. In order to honor the homecoming of Dionysus, he has met up with Cadmus to show respect for the Dionysian rites: to celebrate him as a god in his dances, as the rest of the male inhabitants of Thebes refuse to participate in the Bacchic ceremonies: “for only we are sane, the rest are mad” (194–96). Teiresias accentuates the unparalleled status of the divine laws. They are not to be questioned, as they in their archaic origin always have been present through the ages: “Our wisdom is as nothing (*ouden sofizomestha*) in the eyes of deity, The traditions of our fathers, from time immemorial our possession—no argument casts them down (*katabalei logos*), not even by the wisest invention of the keenest mind” (200–03) When the divine unwritten laws, “the traditions of our fathers”, are concerned, one does not practice sophistry (*sofizomestha*) “in the eyes of deity.”

Pentheus does not pay heed to the divine laws; instead he puts his trust into the *nomoi* of the *polis*. Dionysus, and the rest of the Olympian gods, on the other hand “brings to correction those of men who honour foolishness and fail to foster things divine in the madness of their judgement (*mainomena doxa*) [...] what is held lawful over length of time exists forever and by Nature (*physei*)” (884–96). The madness of Pentheus, in his arguments to fight against a god, stubbornly holding on to the *nomoi* of the *polis*, is beyond any cure: “for you are most grievously mad (*mainē*)—beyond the cure of drugs (*pharmakois*), and yet your sickness must be due to them” (326–27). Pentheus' conflict with Dionysus and the divine roots of *physis* is based on his illusions of having conceptualized the world as a world of reason, of *logos* if you will, a worldview that will be set in motion by the *pharmakon* of Dionysus—first by staging wonders in the city, and then by striking Pentheus with divine madness.

In the *Phaedrus*, following the legend of Theuth, Socrates' claims that if writing can't represent the living words, then writing is nothing but simulacra, like a painting of something living, and as all forms of representation it is of course

LINE 7

Elevator at gallery. Verbal announcements. Repetition. Empty corridor. Busy Yokohama streets. Singular figure of a dark man on telephone, far right end of frame.

Verbal transcription Note: Elevator Lady Yoko Goingdown 2 (whispered, very fast, with few breaths)

“...ThankYouForVisitingLandMarkTowerSkyDining Today-TheExitIsOnTheFifthFloor-RetaurantIson TowerDiningAndShoppingMore-ItsTheWayItsTheWay ItsLandMarkPlazaForCustomersForCustomersWho WouldLikeToGoToTheFloorsBelowTheFifthFloor WeAreTerriblySorryTo-CauseYou-Inconvenience-... Ohh - Please-Change-ToTheEscalatorOrElevatorInLow MarkPlaza - ThankYourVeryMuchForComingToday - HHHH... - WeAreNowApproachingTheWayUp - hm”

far away from the truth. This is also the reason why poets have to be banned in the *Republic*: “This, then, will apply to the maker of tragedies also, if he is an imitator and is in his nature at three removes from the king and the truth, as are all other imitators.”¹⁰ The only way not getting your mind distorted by the mimetic nature of the tragedies comes through pharmaceutical force: the *pharmakon* becomes the antidote, the drug to counteract the delusions of imitation (595b).

Plato refers to the world of ideas as “knowledge of the real nature of things” (*to eidenai auta hoia tungkhanei onta*). This ontological knowledge is the “counterpoison” to the tragic poets’ art of imitation. The world of ideas is a prerequisite for absolute and objective knowledge, but from this passage Derrida concludes that it’s not the transparency of the forms and ideas that we first acquire, it is the antidote.¹¹ And it is this antidote, the element of the *pharmakon*, which Derrida describes as a “combat zone between philosophy and its other.”¹² The *pharmakon* is in itself a complicity of contrary values, a medium of an internal ambiguity that is prior to differentiation in general, an element that has not yet been divided into what Derrida explains as “occult violence and accurate knowledge.”¹³ The *pharmakon* is the element where the transformation of opposites takes place—the bottomless fund from which all dialectics draws its philosophemes.¹⁴

III. The Pharmakeus

Dionysus works miracles in the *polis*, but it’s all an illusion, a phantasmagoria. Referred to as a magician (*goês epô[i]dos*, 233), all wonders are dramatized by the god himself, with the aim of breaking down a structure of rationality taken for granted in the ordering of the *polis*. Pentheus’ own destructivity strikes back in a Dionysian mirror reflection, which in the long run—contrary to the followers who accept the rites of Dionysus—is madness without any ambition to cure him from his delusions. When the divine madness hits Pentheus it creates a doubling of his vision: “Look—I seem to myself to see two suns and a double Thebes (918–19).” In the labyrinths of the *pharmacy* he is turned into a Dionysian marionette: “Now you see what you should see (922).” Dionysus has lifted the veil from a world that has been separated by reason, a world here emerging as a double exposure to Pentheus, as Dionysus refuses him a harmonized vision.

In his arrogance (*hybris*) Pentheus is still concerned with social values in his defense of the *polis*, but as his one-way reasoning tries to calculate everything within a rational structure, he denies the other. Dionysus shakes the founda-

tions of this hierarchical structure of reason as he is undermining the structure of the Greek *polis*—the divine madness turns into an epidemic disease, a tribute that has to be paid in the forsaking of the other: “all of the women, I maddened from their homes” (36). These women are punished with a distorted picture of reality, when, at the same time, Dionysus own followers of maenads live in harmony with the world he has exposed them to in his rites. The divine madness contains a double attribute of remedy and despair, truth and falsity, a hallucinogenic poison and at the same time a beneficial medicine. When Dionysus

own *thiasos* becomes *seeing*, as in two opposing mirrors they see themselves and the god, the Thebans don’t see Dionysus.¹⁵ They are punished with a distorted view, a non-harmonizing illusion of what they conceive to be real. Dionysus unveils the bottomless foundation of the pharmacy and the row of mirrors falls like tiles in a game of dominos.

Returning to the *Phaedrus*, Theuth—father of written letters (*patêrôn grammatôn*), but also god of medicine—presents the art of writing as a *pharmakon* to the Egyptian king Thamus: “Here, O King, says Theuth, is a discipline (*mathêma*) that will make the Egyptians wiser (*sophôterous*) and will improve their memories (*mnêmonikôterous*): both memory (*mnêmê*) and instruction (*sophia*) have found their remedy (*pharmakon*)” (Phaedrus 274e). The King answers that it’s not a remedy for memory, but for reminding (*oukoun mnêmes, alla hupomnêseôs, pharmakon hêures*) that Theuth has discovered. It only gives a semblance (*doxa*) of wisdom (*sophia*), not truth (*alêtheia*), which in the long run will fill men with the conceit of wisdom (*doxosophoi*), not true wisdom.

There is according to Derrida, and here his own agenda becomes discernable, a subtle distinction in the difference between knowledge as memory and “nonknowledge” as “rememoration”—a distinction between two forms, two moments, of

repetition: “a repetition of truth (*alêtheia*) which presents and exposes the *eidôs*; and a repetition of death and oblivion (*lêthê*) which veils and skews because it does not present the *eidôs* but represents a presentation, repeats a repetition.”¹⁶ Derrida stresses the point that both of these repetitions contains a simultaneousness, they can’t be separated, just as we in the *pharmacy* can’t distinguish the medicine from the poison, isolate the evil from the good, the true from the false, since they are repeating each other—the *pharmakon* is always the same, simultaneously both remedy and poison, it has no identity.¹⁷

The labyrinth of the *pharmacy* opens up into a bottomless pit. “Platonism”, on the other hand, is what Derrida depicts as a powerful effort to conceal and master the *pharmakon* that operates in the dawn of Western thought¹⁸—the mirroring corridors of indeterminacy which constitute the passage into philosophy.

The Dionysian drug, the ambiguity of his *pharmakon*, in being a wizard or enchanter (*goês epô[i]dos*), can be distributed to ease pain, but is at the same time the element that triggers confusion and divine madness.¹⁹ Since Pentheus is acting the way he is, we are given a full-scale exhibition of the magic illusions of Dionysus as the *pharmakeus*—a wizard, master of phantasms, but foremost the god of presence (*parousia*).²⁰ In being the present god, which he is through his different guises in the drama, the *pharmakon* of Dionysus is the only filter for a human to extract the false from the truth: “nor is there any other cure from distress” (282). Dionysus gives the *pharmakon* a determination that it otherwise lacks: only through his divine intervention, mastering the *pharmakon* as the *pharmakeus*, a harmonized world can emerge. Could it be argued that Euripides’ *Bacchae*, in the Dionysian *Aufhebung* of contrary values, falls outside the judgment of tragedy as mimetic in the way Socrates proclaimed?

IV. The Pharmakos

The *pharmakon* is a prime attribute of Dionysus. The ambiguities of this element corresponds to Dionysus’ presentation of himself as “most terrible and to men most gentle (*deinotatos, athrôpoisi d’ epîotatos*)” (860–61). He is himself both the poison and the antidote, both the illusory drug and its vaccine. The Dionysian *pharmakon* is a magical dose (*dosis*), which he distributes in the *polis* as he sees fit. This makes Dionysus an elusive god of wonders, a master of illusion, with stunning resemblances to Derrida’s description of Theuth:

He cannot be assigned a fixed spot in the play of differences. Sly, slippery, and masked, an intriguer and a card, like Hermes, he is neither king nor jack, but rather a sort of *joker*, a floating signifier, a wild card, one who puts play into play. This god of resurrection is less interested in life or death than in death as a repetition of life and life as a rehearsal of death, in the awakening of life and in the recommencement of death. [...] His propriety or property is impropriety or inappropriateness, the floating indeterminacy that allows for substitution and play.²¹

In Heraclitus’ fragment 15 we learn that “Hades and Dionysus are the same.” The Dionysian *pharmakon*, not diverging from Plato, is the element where characteristics from one side are turned into its opposite, reversed—a play of differences staged in the *pharmacy*. The movement of the *pharmakon* contains a simultaneousness of falsity and truth. It’s an element of both poison and remedy. One side can’t be isolated from the other, as they in their origin can’t do anything but to repeat each other—the *pharmacy* is bottomless, a winding labyrinth of mirrors, without identity. But Dionysus, contrary to Plato, can crystallize the truth: expel the hallucinating ambiguities of the *pharmakon*, as the world of the other emerges.

Pentheus, after being struck with divine madness, is in an illusory state. He believes that he alone—as Dionysus dresses him in women clothing, deluded that the sacred garments are worn in order to blend with the maenads—is about to cleanse the mountainside from the Bacchic revels: “for I am the only man of them to dare this deed” (962). This distorted initiation into the Bacchic cult, Dionysus conveys, aims at a ritual cleansing of the city: “You alone take on the burden for this city, you alone” (963). Pentheus, ruler of the *polis*, becomes its scapegoat, the *pharmakos* that is the necessary sacrifice if the whole city is not to be destroyed, and at the same

LINE 8

Fluorescent tubes made visible at top right-hand corner of gallery. Aquarium tube out. Green moss balls dormant as ever. Skyscraper depicted. Satisfaction. Moving onwards and upwards.

Verbal transcription Note: Elevator Yoko Monologue 2 (whispered, very fast, with few breaths)

“...FromHereWeWillTakeYouToTheObservation FloorWhichIsTheClosestTheClosestTheClosestTo TheSky-WeWillGuideYouToTheSkyCordonSkyCordon- PleaseLookAtTheSpeedTheSpeedTheSpeedMeter AboveTheAboveTheDoors-TheStrongWindbyNowIs FortyFiveKilometersPerHour-ThisIsTheFastestThe FastestTheFastestTheFastestElevatorInJapan-Japan-.. Hmm..-ThisBuildingisTwoHundredandThirtyMeters HighSixtyNineFloors-TheElevatorTake sFortySecondsToReachTheTop!”

time an example of what's in stall for those who turn against the gods.²²

The destructive violence of Dionysus is aimed at the whole of Thebes. Pentheus has to become the *pharmakos*, violently excluded, so the city can be reconstituted in its unity. The sacrifice of Pentheus is an expulsion of evil from the inner sanctions of the *polis* out of the city. The exclusion of the *pharmakos* will reconstitute the stability of the *polis* in the time of a crisis, a crisis that has been triggered by its own ruler. The ritual sacrifice Pentheus encounters on the slopes of mount Cithaeron is a pharmacological reversal, from ruler to *pharmakos*, from the *nomos* of the *polis* to the wild nature of *physis*, a transformation directed by the Dionysian *pharmakon*. The attempt to divide nature (*physis*) and culture (*nomos*) slides, as Dionysus is the present god, who makes the polarity in the structure of oppositions collapse.²³ He masters the contrary values, sets the violent play of differences in motion, a play that he dominates and at will can put a stop to. From the enchantments of Dionysus the illusions and the divine madness emerges that sets all determinations in motion, when he as *pharmakeus* distributes his magical *pharmakon*, which makes the polarity of concepts and connotations slide over into each other as he lifts the veil from the other.

At the end of the play, Pentheus' head is carried home in triumph—from the Bacchic *sparagmos* that took place on mount Cithaeron—by his own mother: “We with unaided hands both caught this beast and tore his limbs apart” (1209–10). In the delusion of her son being a lion, she proudly announced: “The Bacchic huntsman wisely, cleverly swung his maenads upon this beast” (1189–91). The ritual sacrifice of Pentheus might show what unforgiving forces are set in motion, as Cadmus argues, in the encounters with the Dionysian *pharmakon*: “You were made mad, and the whole land was possessed by Bacchic frenzy” (1295). Agave, now returning to her wits, responds: “Dionysus destroyed us, now I realize it!” (1296).

The house of Cadmus is certainly destroyed and Dionysus now turns to the founder of Thebes with a pharmaceutical arrangement: “you shall be turned into a serpent, and your wife shall change into the savage form of a snake” (1330). Cadmus, “who sowed in the earth the earth-born crop of the serpent” (1025), “the race (*genos*) of Thebans” (1314), is now himself transformed into a dragon-like serpent, facing the divine decree of “leading into Hellas a motley, barbarian horde” (1356).²⁴

The pharmacological force of the Dionysian *pharmakon* can be argued to follow the chain of

significations—*pharmakon*, *pharmakeus*, *pharmakos*—Derrida locates in the writings of Plato. The divine presence we encounter in Dionysus' fireworks collapses binary oppositions (*logos/mythos*, *nomos/physis* etc.), oppositions structured in a hierarchical polarization, traceable to the origin of western rationality. According to Derrida we extract meaning by privileging one side over the other, which Pentheus, in a logocentric gesture, exemplifies in bringing the supplemented side (*mythos*, *physis* etc.) over to *logos*, *nomos* etc. The attempt to master oppositions creates instability, as the supplemented side strikes back, which Dionysus enacts with violent force in the *Bacchae*. Logocentrism, Derrida argues, creates disturbances, which seems to be reflected already in Euripides' tragedy, disturbances that will destabilize the structures of a reason constructed by a hierarchy of oppositions. This hierarchy generates paradoxes, problems formulated within the system that can't be answered.

The *sparagmos* of Pentheus seems to be a symbolic dismemberment of a reason that has failed to recognize a world that it itself hasn't constituted. A world that cannot be controlled by reason, a world outside those structures that have determined what reason constitutes as reality, a world of rational determinations that Euripides in old age raised a critical voice against, but still a world that came to be consolidated in Greek thinking. In following this thread, the *Bacchae* could be read as the last critical instance, before this hierarchy of oppositions is tiled in the dawn of the West—the (instable) legacy Western history is built around. *The pharmacy* never closes. •

LINE 9

Bench and passageways at dusk, adjoining the elevators and entrances of a monolithic slab. Concrete slab more than slightly elevated off the tarmac. Illuminations and light fixtures.

Verbal transcription Note: Ferry Drone Perhaps 2 (constant HMMMMM, tchumtchum quieter each time)

“H... .. HMMMMMtchumtchum-
HMMMMMtchumtchum- HMMMMMtchumtchum-
HMMMMMtchumtchum- HMMMMMtchumtchum-
HMMMMMtchumtchum- HMMMMMtchumtchum-
HMMMMMtchumtchum- HMMMMMtchumtchum-
HMMMMMtchumtchum- HMMMMMtchumtchum-
HMMMMMtchumtchum- HMMMMMtchumtchum-
HMMMMMtchumtchum”

Notes

1. PHARMAKON ...a medicine, drug, remedy ...a medicine for disease ...a poisonous drug, drug, poison ...an enchanted potion, philtre: also a charm, spell, enchantment: any secret means of effecting a thing. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford University Press, 1958.
2. “In a certain sense Euripides, too, was merely a mask; the deity who spoke out of him was not Dionysus, nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn daemon called *Socrates*. This is the new opposition: the Dionysiac versus the Socratic, and the work of art that once was Greek tragedy was destroyed by it.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Ronald Spiers, Cambridge University Press (1999), 2008, 60. Henceforth cited as *The Birth of Tragedy*.
3. The presentation of Dionysus is inspired by the works of Jean-Pierre Vernant and Charles Segal, but the discussion is confined within *the pharmacy*, within those corridors of indeterminacy that seem to constitute the origin of western thinking.
4. Jacques Derrida, “Plato's Pharmacy”, trans. Barbara Johnson, *Dissemination*, Chicago (1981) 2004, 70. Henceforth cited as “Plato's Pharmacy.”
5. *Ibid.*, 103, 106 & 127.
6. *Ibid.*, 85.
7. *Ibid.*, 86.
8. *The Bacchae* by Euripides. A Translation with Commentary by G.S. Kirk, New Jersey, 1970.
9. Vernant, “The Masked Dionysus of Euripides' *Bacchae*”, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd, New York (1986) 1996, 403.
10. Plato, *Republic*, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. E. Hamilton & H. Cairns, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961, 597 c.
11. “Plato's Pharmacy”, 138.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.* The *pharmakon* is an element in itself bottomless, a drug without substance, without essence, *undecidable* as Derrida puts it, but the *pharmakon* is at the same time the necessary condition for the possibility of distinguishing the order of knowledge for Plato, since he is pointing in the direction of the origin of ideas, and further, beyond beingness and presence (*epekeina tēs ousias*).
14. *Ibid.*, 127. This transformation also takes place in the death of Socrates. To empty the deadly potion of hemlock was as voluntary as a necessary consequence of the laws Socrates had lived by. The content of the cup becomes the *pharmakon* that others conceive as poison, but to Socrates a remedy to release his soul (when he now is to face the real judges in Hades). Socrates takes the potion for the sake of the state and to not question its laws. The laws that he has committed himself to live by as a

citizen are not possible to evade in death by trying to escape his punishment in life.

15. “It is based on the meeting of two gazes in which (as in the interplay of reflecting mirrors), by the grace of Dionysus, a total reversability is established between the devotee who sees and the god who is seen, where each one is, in relation to the other, at once the one who sees and the one who makes himself seen.” Vernant, “The Masked Dionysus”, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, 393. “To see Dionysus, it is necessary to enter a different world where it is the ‘other’, not the ‘same’ that reigns.” *Ibid.*, 394.
16. “Plato's Pharmacy”, 135. This could be a starting point to compare Derrida's deconstruction with Heidegger's destruction of ontology, as it is presented in *Sein und Zeit*, in his reading of *aletheia* as *a-letheia*.
17. *Ibid.*, 169. In this repetition, which also seems to be the return of the written word as Socrates picks up the fertile trace of writing—a discourse he describes as: “The sort that goes together with knowledge and is written in the soul of the learner” (*Phaedrus* 276 a)—we can distinguish Derrida's deconstructive practice in *the pharmacy*. According to Derrida this repetition makes the opposition between speech and writing collapse, and rather than condemning writing Plato in the *Phaedrus* seems to prefer one sort of writing over another (149). To write in the soul is the noble art of dialectics which amounts to truth: “The dialectician selects a soul of the right type, and in it he plants and sows his words founded on knowledge, words which can defend both themselves and him who planted them” (*Phaedrus* 277 a). But neither maieutics or the re-discovery of truth makes it possible to conceptually handle the world of ideas beyond beingness or presence (*epekeina tēs ousias*).
18. *Ibid.*, 167.
19. Charles Segal, *Dionysiac poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, Expanded Edition, Princeton University Press (1982), 1997, 232f.
20. *Pharmakeus* [...]one who deals in drugs or poisons, a sorcerer, poisoner. Liddell and Scott (1958).
21. “Plato's Pharmacy”, 93.
22. *Pharmakos* [...]one who is sacrificed as a purification for others, a scape-goat. Liddell and Scott (1958).
23. In his divine presence he's at the same time the protector of tragedy, and since this is Dionysus first return to Greek soil the sacrificial crisis of the *Bacchae* is nothing less than the original Bacchanal. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore (1977) 1979, 127.
24. “We are told this by a poet who has resisted Dionysus with heroic strength throughout a long life—only to end his career with a glorification of his opponent and a suicide, like someone suffering from vertigo who finally throws himself of a tower simply in order to escape the terrible dizziness he can tolerate no longer.” *The Birth of Tragedy*, 60.

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Phenomenology and the Question of Religion: Reading Martin Hägglund's Radical Atheism

Jonna Bornemark

I. The turn to religion

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the idea that there has been a turn to religion within phenomenology has become widespread. A key figure in establishing this notion was Dominique Janicaud, although he used it to criticize a certain tendency within French phenomenology.¹ It is, however, debatable whether such a “turn” in phenomenology ever took place; in fact, from modern phenomenology's very inception in the first decades of the 20th century, the topic of religion has always been present, above all since phenomenology was understood not only as a method for investigating the religion “from within,” but also as a philosophical reflection that would take religious experience to be a profound philosophical issue, while still having the capacity to pursue such inquiries without itself becoming a religious philosophy.

Among the philosophers cited as evidence of a turn we have Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Henry, Gianni Vattimo, Jean-Luc Marion, and—some have argued—Jacques Derrida. But it is obviously not only in philosophy that the return of religion has been an issue. In politics and society at large there is an unmistakable new level of interest in religion, and the prophecy that economic and technological development, together with the progress of democracy, would preclude a religious mindset has not been fulfilled.

This return of religion in the public sphere has provoked a response from atheists which is centered on a somewhat belligerent argument against what is perceived as dogmatic religion. This type of atheism, which we can find in the writings of, say, Richard Dawkins or Michel Onfray, in fact occasionally takes on the tenor of the fundamentalist religious leaders themselves, since it focuses on debates about creationism or the existence of purgatory, while having little to say about the rich variety of religious experience among non-fundamentalists; and it never touches the core of the philosophical questions motivating the turn to religion within phenomenology.

Fortunately, this atheism does not exhaust the philosophical possibilities of atheism, as clearly evidenced by Martin Hägglund's recent book, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*.² Hägglund starts off from the same philosophical discussion that eventually led to the turn to religion within phenomenology, but instead of excavating a common ground, he sees the turn as a residue of a quest for being qua harmony and origin, which deconstruction has broken with once and for all. Whereas a philosopher like John Caputo has explored similarities between Derrida and Augustine, as well as between Derrida and the tradition of negative theology, Hägglund sees in Derrida a radical atheism that disconnects from the religious tradition as always and hopelessly complicit in a metaphysics of presence.

II. Radical Atheism

Hägglund's approach is refreshing, since he wants not only to give an interpretation of Derrida's work, but to develop the argument in its own right. His main focus lies on the discussion of the philosophical thesis, not on the debate on how to interpret Derrida. This makes *Radical Atheism* impressive in its argumentative strength and in the way that it develops a series of consequences. The book sticks to a central thesis and investigates its possible applications in different areas: time, writing, violence, life, and democracy. Religion is thus by no means the only theme, but instead functions as a name for a certain kind of ontological thinking.

But this strength is also to some extent a weakness. Where Derrida opens questions and remains elusive because of his constant shifts of focus, Hägglund

tends to systematize and simplify Derrida's philosophy into a single thesis that he sees running through all of Derrida's writings. This reading obviously has its advantages. It makes something visible and it clarifies a position that can undoubtedly be found in Derrida, but at the same time it returns to a systematizing approach to philosophy that in some respects may be said to be at odds with the idea that Hägglund wants to present.

A simplified version of Hägglund's thesis would run as follows: all entities are threatened from within themselves, and there can be no perfect or infinite being beyond finite being in time, no super-essential being that would be independent of everything else. On the contrary, being is always characterized by a gap, any essence is at its center haunted by its opposite, and thus always dependent upon it.

In phenomenology, one of the earliest and most important discussions that lead up to this philosophical position was Husserl's analysis of time. For Husserl, the lived world is constituted through a stream of experiences that is itself grounded in an inner time-consciousness. Time turns out to be the founding structure of experience and the very bedrock of transcendental subjectivity. But since time is a continual movement, this also has as a consequence that subjectivity

can never be fully present to itself, there is always a gap between subjectivity as the agent of the investigation and subjectivity as a phenomenon to be investigated—in other words, self-consciousness always comes too late to be fully conscious of itself. The present is thus never present without the non-presence of the past and the future. At the heart of presence we find non-presence. Husserl was unhappy with these findings since he constantly tried to locate a ground that would allow his own theory to become transparent to itself. After Husserl, especially in French phenomenology, this foundationalist project was abandoned, and being *as such* was now understood as slipping away from itself, i.e., finite being is no longer the trace or reflection of, or a still unfinished process moving toward, a perfect being (an idea that Husserl himself often

entertained: God is not so much “beyond being” as he is the *end* of time, the infinite *telos* of history as rationality). Finite being, finitude, should be understood exclusively through itself, which sets a definite limit to the rationalist project that Husserl subscribed to even in his final works.

Derrida is one of those later phenomenologists who pick up this theme and makes this structure of time as never fully

present to itself into a key argument. One of Hägglund's most fascinating analyses deals with how Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness in Derrida's writings is understood as a “becoming-space of time and becoming-time of space.” Ever since Husserl's interpretation of time-consciousness, phenomenology has had a tendency to prioritize temporality over space, and this is a tradition that Hägglund, drawing on Derrida, wants to overcome. He claims that time, in always “losing itself,” is immediately transformed into space—and vice versa, that the spatialization of time is necessary for the *possibility* of a relation between past and future. Space is thus what holds life together, and time is what makes its continual movement possible. It would indeed be worthwhile to explore this theme further, and I suspect that such an investigation would transform Hägglund's analysis. The way it is developed now, I can't help asking myself whether the preference for temporality at

the expense of space is in fact not continued both in Derrida and Hägglund's work. The theme of non-identity in Derrida's argument is developed through the analysis of time, and time has the role of always slipping away from itself, of a continual movement, whereas space as the ground of continuity plays a subordinate role.

This question can also be phrased in terms of self-, or auto-affection. It is here that we find the divide between Derrida and those phenomenologists who are most strongly associated with the “turn to religion.” The debate on self-affection focuses on the question of how the subject at the most fundamental level is given to itself. Already in Husserl there is an argument that the self is given to itself not only through representation, i.e., in a mediated or indirect fashion, but also in a more direct way through a self-affection, which we find for example in kinesthesia, the experience of one's own movements. Husserl understands kinesthesia as an immediate consciousness in which there is no room for words functioning as representations, a structure that seems to imply a sense of self that doesn't objectify itself in order to know itself. This argument has been developed most vividly by Michel Henry, who suggests that such an immanence is the presupposition of all knowledge that is divided into an object and a subject. In his emphasis on this immediate and non-divided knowledge Henry can be taken as the phenomenological counterpoint to Derrida and Hägglund. Derrida criticizes such pure immanence, since it either ends up in a solipsistic subjectivity that needs nothing other in order to know itself, or, in focusing on the passivity of the subject that receives the auto-affection, suggests a religious entity called Life, greater than any individual life, from which the pure immanence receives its undivided life. Hägglund emphatically rejects such an independent essence of Life as the origin of all lives. In fact he even states that the ideal of pure Life could be nothing but the ideal of *death*, since life in itself can never be pure, but is always haunted from the inside. Immanence as an independent sphere and self-affection without hetero-affection thus runs wholly contrary to the spirit of Derrida's thinking.

I am not convinced this is an argument against all kinds of self-affection, however. The self-affection of kinesthesia instead shows a phenomena that is difficult to understand in other terms than as a self-affection, but this self-affection could be understood as a temporalization of space and a spatialization of time, i.e. it continually moves away from itself, yet nevertheless includes a moment of where it as it were “touches” itself. This is a crucial aspect that remains undeveloped in Hägglund's analysis, i.e. that kinesthetic experience, as a kind of self-affection, takes place in a *bodily* consciousness. Hägglund emphasizes that all affection is hetero-affection, but in my reading he does not give sufficient

LINE 10

Dual window panel, painted emerald green with a dash of off-white. Rain formation altered, now upright or downright downpour. Both windows opened outwards.

Verbal transcription Note: Hard Rain 2 – Whispered, Moderate Rhythm – Increasing – Fast at the End

“... PitePat – PitePata – PitePite – PitePatate”PataPite
... Tssssss... PitePite - PitePata – PitePite – PitePatate
... Tssssss ... PitePat – PitePata – PitePite –
PitePatate”PataPite... Tssssss ... Patapitepite
– Pitepata - PataPite... Tssssss... Pitepite – Pata
– PitePitePite – PitePata – Pata... Tssssss ...
Patapitepite – Pitepata - PataPite... Tssssss... Pitepite
– Pata – PitePitePite – PitePata – Pata - PitePata
– PitePata – PitePata – PitePata – PitePata –PiteP
e’PitePe’PitePe’PitePitePePe – PaPaPaPa.”

attention to the dimension of “spacing.” Both in Husserl and Henry, the experience of the lived body is characterized by self-affection. In Husserl, however, this is immediately transformed into a double hetero-affection: the possibility of experiencing oneself as a lived body and of objectifying oneself, i.e. to be experienced by oneself as well as by others.

III. Towards the ultra-transcendental

The spacing of time and/or temporalization of space is such a pervasive theme in Hägglund’s model that he even calls it an ultra-transcendental condition, a term that Derrida himself sometimes uses, and links to the concept of *différance*. Ultra-transcendental, Hägglund suggests, means that there “is no limit to the generality of *différance* and [that] the structure of the trace applies to all fields of the living.” The claim for ultra-transcendental thus returns us to the question of foundationalism. Hägglund states that *différance* is a characteristic of being itself, not only of living being, even though the argument is developed only in relation to living beings. One might wonder whether his argument does not end up destroying itself: he argues that there is no sovereign instance, yet there is nevertheless a kind of ultra-transcendental rule. He formulates this in the following way: “the unconditional is the spacing of time that undermines the very Idea of a sovereign instance.” My simple question here would be: what prevents us from seeing the “unconditional” as another kind of sovereign instance, and consequently, the spacing of time as an ontological rule that is the foundation of all being (or at least all living beings)? Or, formulated in yet another way: Hägglund states that being is finite, but as long as there is being, its structure must be that of *différance*. Could the structure of being be other than that of *différance*, and if not: is *différance* then not infinite in a certain sense? If the ultra-transcendental condition means that everything is haunted from the inside, must not the condition itself then also be haunted from the inside? Would that mean that it is haunted by itself, and if so, would not this be a case of identity with itself, contrary to its own rule?

Change as the only stable category is not a new approach to ontology. On the contrary, it is as old as philosophy itself. Change as the only stable category is even a central part of many concepts of God, especially as proposed by the mystics. So one may wonder what is necessarily atheistic about it—apart from the prejudice that “God” must include a hyper-essentiality, which Hägglund’s description of the ultra-transcendental escapes. In most mystic texts, “God” is not one being among other beings, but precisely the ultra-transcendental condition for all beings: a condition that is not necessarily understood as independent from all beings but only realized in finite beings. But Hägglund claims to know

what the essence of religion is, namely the idea of absolute immunity, which includes both the idea that there is an absolutely self-sufficient and positively infinite being, and the idea that in God the human being can reach immunity. But can we really determine the foundation of all religion in this way? Must religion per definition be inscribed in an onto-theology, or does Hägglund fall prey to a modern understanding of monotheistic religion? Could not religion for example also be understood precisely as a way to relate to one’s own finitude, an attempt to relate to a “beyond” of this finitude that the insight into one’s own finitude makes possible, i.e., as an attempt to relate to the transcendence that shows itself *negatively* in finitude? Such transcendence has throughout our history sometimes been understood as an *other* world beyond this one, but there

are also far more nuanced expressions that attempt to relate to this otherness within ourselves and in the end do not simply attempt to save the “self” for eternity, but go beyond it.

Hägglund’s ultra-transcendental categories are, he says, “undeconstructible, not as a construction whose functions would be sure, sheltered from every internal or external deconstruction,” but as the very movement of deconstruction that is at work in everything that happens. De Vries and others have claimed, as Hägglund rightly points out, that this is also what is at stake in the concept of God, but Hägglund suggests that this is misleading since the trace is not “an absolute that can be substituted for God.” Yet what if “God” too is not an absolute that can be substituted for “God”? What if “God” too, throughout the history of thought, has been used as a concept that points to the “infinite finitude of life?”

IV. Desire, democracy, and the infinite

In one of the book’s crucial arguments, Hägglund also suggests that it is impossible to “desire” God as long as it is claimed that God is a positively infinite being. Hägglund has a good point here, since if God were absolute in the sense of fully and explicitly present, nothing would be at stake in religion. God could never be questioned and atheism would be impossible. He also claims that ultra-transcendental conditions can not be desired. What is desired is instead what can be lost, i.e., what is finite. If it couldn’t be lost, we wouldn’t notice it, but

instead would take it for granted and thus not desire it. I agree with Hägglund in that beings must be thought as finite, and that desiring them must imply a desire towards the finite, but does this really exhaust the relation between desire and a concept such as “the infinite”? Here I would like to point to at least three different questions: 1) Could desire not be directed towards an idea of infinity? 2) Could not desire itself be understood as a way to relate to infinity? 3) Is it really true that it is impossible to desire the ultra-transcendental?

At the basis of all three questions lies the idea of an infinity that does not equal absolute presence, something that Hägglund seems to take for granted. Infinity could instead be understood as always pointing beyond itself, it could be *exactly that gap and non-self-sufficiency* that create the

possibility for infinity as well as for desire.

The third question would be worth developing further. Is it really impossible to desire *différance* as an ultra-transcendental structure? Could not Hägglund’s own book be read as a desire towards the ultra-transcendental? If ontology cannot

be described in terms of desire, we would once again tend towards a type of intellectualism—as if only an impersonal attitude would be capable of naming the ontological, an attitude blind to its own desires. The question that must be asked is: what is the relation between desire and ontology? Maybe desire needs to be thought in relation to what Hägglund calls the infinite finitude of life, i.e., in relation to the structure of *being* and not only as directed towards *beings*?

On the level of politics, Hägglund gives a strong argument for democracy as a project that never can be “safe” or completed. As such, democracy is always threatened from the inside and not just from external enemies. Or put in a more current vocabulary: the fundamental threat does not stem from terrorists, but from how the state responds to terrorism. This is not an uncommon argument today and it is important that we allow this discussion to remain open, just as the claim that every generation needs to invent democracy anew, but I feel a certain unease when this claim is supported by an ontology. Hägglund suggests that *différance* as the ontological and ultra-transcendental structure of life is only truly expressed in democracy. So, after all of history, there would finally be a political system that responds to the structure

of being. To my mind, this does not square with the existential philosophical attitude adopted by Derrida: that we have to argue for our choices and political commitments without support in an ontological machinery.

So does this mean that we either have to give up all ontological strivings, or buy into an old metaphysical idea of a sovereign instance? I would argue that the answer is no. A more fruitful approach would be to understand the tradition of ontology and/or metaphysics as a way of *reaching out*. This would not be a history of mistakes that we, at our present moment, would finally have overcome (an idea that Derrida would dislike). Religious traditions too may be understood as different forms of such a reaching out. “God” does not only signify a sovereign instance, but just as much points to the experience we have of trying to formulate, in a language that must constantly be at odds with itself, the ultra-transcendental condition of a certain *dis-jointure*, or the power of *différance*—which is indeed not foreign to Hägglund’s own project. If we divide history into one religious epoch of onto-theology, and another where the metaphysics of presence is supposed to have been overcoming, it is easy to become blind to the richness and complexity of inherited philosophical concepts, including concepts like “God.”

Perhaps we are in the end aiming for the same thing: a liberation of philosophy and not the end of philosophy. From my point of view, however, this should be done by learning from a history that is replete with attempts to formulate an ontological relation that in the end always will elude us, that does not lend itself to straightforward verbal descriptions, but can only be addressed in a word that itself passes away, a word that needs to be brought back to life through an always renewed act of reading and interpretation. ●

Notes

1. See his *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (Combas : L’Éclat, 1991). Cf. also Janicaud’s response to his critics, as well as a development of the argument, in *La phénoménologie éclatée* (Paris: L’Éclat, 1998).
2. Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

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LINE 11

Transformation of an endnote. A shudder
or a camera shutter to welcome an arrival.
Passing through the gallery doors.

Verbal transcription Note: *Laughing Men*
in *Yoko 2 – Very Loud Whiper*

“...OhNoDon’t...TheySay...IfYouDoIt...
FallInWithOthers...//DontThey?... – YoureGoingHome...
ArentYou?... ArentYou?... Byeeee!”

E-flux, Derrida and the Archive

Karl Lydén

“To write in a digital age is to write in the archive”
Kate Eichhorn in *Invisible Culture*¹

In his book *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*,² Jacques Derrida undertakes an examination of the notion of the archive. It is a short and somewhat odd book, consisting only of beginnings and that which comes after the end: through six chapters it offers nothing more than an untitled introduction, an Exergue, a Preamble, a Foreword, a Theses, and, finally, a Postscript—and yet, there is a certain infinity to its propositions. But perhaps these perpetual beginnings should be left unexamined for now, because, as Derrida says: “Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive. But at the word ‘archive’—and with the archive of so familiar a word.”³

As we recall, *arche* names at once the origin and the order, both the *commencement* and the *commandment*. In ancient Greece, the *archeion* was the house, the physical address or residence of the *archon*, the one who commanded. It was the dwelling place both of the magistrates and the official documents, and the officials were first of all the documents’ guardians. The archon ensured the safety of the documents, as well as the functions of hermeneutics, interpretation and re-articulation. The documents were spoken by the archon, and the archon spoke the law. Thus the etymology of the word immediately points to the realm of both temporality and law in which Derrida situates the archive, just like it suggests that close connection to politics, power, government and order which has been so notably examined over the last few decades.

To some extent, it seems like the notion of the archive has become the perfect analogy of speech, discourse or even language. In a well-quoted passage of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault states: “The archive is the first law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events.”⁴ But to Derrida in *Archive Fever*, the notion of the archive rather seems to correspond to history. To history, memory, and psychoanalysis. Concerning his hypotheses, he says: “They all concern the impression left, in my opinion, by the Freudian signature on its own archive, on the concept of the archive and of archivization, that is to say also, inversely and as an indirect consequence, on historiography.”⁵ This Freudian signature on its own archive constitutes a slightly peculiar loop. Because while “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 content—at least in the case of psychoanalysis—also seems to determine

the functioning of the archive. Psychoanalysis, namely, is a “scientific project which, as one could easily show, aspires to be a general science of the archive, of everything that can happen to the economy of memory.” The archive can only be understood through psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysis can only be understood as a product of its archival structures. Like two creatures eating each other’s tails, this loop concerning inside and outside could perhaps be illustrated by the workings of archive.org: the Internet archive that archives Internet; the site that, since 1996, by “snapshots” archives every single webpage;

the mystical place inside the Internet that, by incorporating its content, also constitutes its outside.

In fact, one of many central questions of *Archive Fever* could be taken as whether the archive has an outside. In this respect, the “no” of Foucault is very clear: “The archive cannot be described in its totality, and in its presence it is unavoidable.”⁶ One could quote an equally clear

reply in *Archive Fever*: after all Derrida says that there is no archive without a certain exteriority; there is “[n]o archive without outside.” But perhaps one would then simplify things that are not easily reduced to a logic of yes and no. Partly, because the argument is far from completed in *Archive Fever*, and it leads a rather long way back to the notion of *différance* and the critique of Claude Lévi-Strauss in “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, or to the critique of Foucault in “Cogito and the History of Madness.” And in larger part, because of how this outside is constituted, and how it relates to the other factor in play: that of psychoanalysis. Thus, the question is as much whether psychoanalysis has an outside. In this lecture given in Freud’s own house—in which we all might very well live—Derrida says: “In any given discipline, one can no longer, one should no longer be able to, thus one no longer has the right

or the means to claim to speak of this [memory and archive, the history of institutions and of sciences, the history of history] without having been marked in advance, in one way or another, by this Freudian impression.”⁷

We should, then, obviously turn to the psychoanalytic characterization of the archive. According to Derrida, such characterization would take into account the memorization, the reproduction, and the reimpression of the archive, functions which by their very *repetition* are indissociable from the death drive. And by the death drive, the destruction drive that conditions the

possibility of any archival project, the archive *a priori* also works against itself. Yet at the same time, as we already have noted, in the very moment of psychoanalyzing the archive, Derrida accounts for how the archival structures have shaped the structures of psychoanalysis. On the early importance of correspondence, for example, he notes that one can only speculate about what psychoanalysis would look like

if “Freud, his contemporaries, collaborators and immediate disciples, instead of writing thousands of letters by hand, had had access to MCI or AT&T telephonic credit cards, portable tape recorders, computers, printers, faxes, televisions, teleconferences, and above all E-mail.”⁸

Archive, death drive, repetition, email. One might think of e-flux, the email service that every day anew fills up the inbox with information on contemporary art. Like Derrida, who seems to leave the archival analyses for some time to devote the “Foreword” (which accounts for the largest part of the book) to Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s reading of Freud and his questions about psychoanalysis as a “Jewish science”, I too wish to deviate a little. Because except for an email service, what is e-flux, if not an archive, or, to be more exact, one of the online archives of contemporary art? Or, very well, what is e-flux? E-flux is an email service that reaches

50,000 people around the world with three or four messages daily, announcing exhibitions, publications, discussions and events related to contemporary art. Whereas the vast majority of advertisements in art publications such as *Art Forum* come from commercial galleries, the e-flux announcements prioritize public institutions, museums, biennials, larger art fairs and non-profit organizations. By its website, e-flux provides an archive of the announcements that have been sent out since the start in 1999. To receive the e-flux emails is free; the postage is paid by the sender. Paying, however, does not guarantee inclusion; like most archives, the process of gathering material is highly selective. There are no official criteria, only formal and stylistic standards: the proposed material is submitted to e-flux, who rejects or accepts it.

Yet e-flux is more than repetition of emails. While running a communication based business, e-flux is also an independent, self-financed artist run project. “In its totality, e-flux is a work of art: a work that uses circulation (distribution) as both form and content,”⁹ as founder Anton Vidokle puts it. Started in New York by a group of artists in 1999, e-flux has carried out and commissioned art projects since 2001: at first on their website, and then at various physical addresses. In the web-based *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist*, curated by Jens Hoffman in 2003, various artists were invited to write on the relationship between artist and curator, and to propose a concept on how they would curate an exhibition such as Documenta; in *Martha Rosler Library* from 2005, over 7000 books was borrowed from artist Martha Rosler and made public in a reading room at the e-flux office in New York; in *e-flux video rental* from 2004, a collection of over 700 film and video works have circulated and visited places like Frankfurt, Seoul, Istanbul, Canary Islands, and Austin, Texas, as a free art video screening and rental; most recently, the web-based *e-flux journal* was started as both a discursive space and a site for actual art production.

Now, Derrida insists that the archive is not only a thing of the past, but more importantly, something that by its nature is constantly geared towards the future: “It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.”¹⁰ If this underlines the archival aspects of e-flux, the creating of a space that archontically “speaks the law”, what are then the consequences of being an archivist and an actor in the archive at the same time? What does it mean that e-flux carries out projects within the same sphere of contemporary art that they are a part of defining with their archive?

LINE 12

The gallery cold — a quick glance at the flick-clock time display; I continually double-checked the lay-out and cleanliness of the gallery; racing in circles and up and down, in search of nothing other than an affirmation of my extra-cautionary neurosis.

Verbal transcription Note: Taxi Radio Directives 2 (whispered, very fast, with few breaths – ideally none)

“...ThereIsAPossibilityApossibilityThereIsApossibility
TheMissileWillLandWillLandInThisAreaAround
TheNational-Pro’Tec’Tion... TheTownReleased
TheWrongInformationOverWave’Radio-
PeoplePanickAndPhoned-
TheEquipmentWasBroken’TheCivilServantRestarted
TheMachineTheMachineAccidentallyBroadcasted
TheWrongInformationTheTownIsSearchingForThe
CausesTheTownApologiseses”

Is this another example of when inside and outside seem to inhabit each other? It certainly is; but rather than a problem, this is perhaps the point of the project. To see why, one might consider another—yet very different and highly problematic—confusion of outside and inside: the events that forced the art critic at the Village Voice, Christian Viveros-Faune, to resign in early 2008. In an interview with Tyler Green on the art blog MAN, it was revealed that while working as an art critic for the influential New York weekly (and consequently, working under journalism ethics), Viveros-Faune was also selecting commercial galleries to be represented in two different art fairs.¹¹ First of all, this is problematic on a whole other level, a level of economics, which is not of primary concern here.¹² Secondly, and more interestingly, this is what Tyler Green called “the most basic conflict of interest”, precisely because the position from which Viveros-Faune writes is supposed to be an “outside” of interests; a transparent, economically and otherwise unbiased outside. This is the point. The outside of e-flux, the outside from which it is organized and directed, is situated in a private space: the private space of both economic and artistic decisions. e-flux is not a public archive. They do run it as a company, and they are an artist-run project. To demand that the position from which they make the email selection should be unbiased or situated strictly outside their own art production would make no sense. One could perhaps instead argue that the very confusion of inside and outside—the fact that e-flux is a virtual exhibition space within and through its own archive—makes the inherently legislative function of the archive less mystified. It is the fact that e-flux is an actor within the field of art that gives the legislation a visible author, or an author whose agenda becomes visible by the very projects undertaken. Perhaps one could say that e-flux has its own tail in its archive: it is a legislation that actually provides its own genealogy. Or, perhaps, one could say it with Derrida’s words: “every archive [...] is at once institutive and conservative. Revolutionary and traditional.”¹³

Now, the virtues of the archive, as opposed to the seemingly accusatory notion of “law”, are rather obvious: “But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accident [...]”¹⁴ The archival order or *commandment* is useful, simply because it makes “all these things said” accessible. Similarly, we could of course appreciate e-flux because it

transmits information that has no place in other media (transcontinental information about art exhibited and discussed in public and noncommercial contexts), or that it by its form provides information to people that otherwise might have been shut out from it, whether for economical, geographical or geopolitical reasons. But another aspect of e-flux emerges when you look at their projects: the video rental, the Martha Rosler Library, the manual of artists’ instructions *do it*, the historiographical ambitions with the *East. Art. Map* of Eastern European artists—basically, they are all archives. They are all—or almost all, in one sense or another—attempts to gather a vast material and classify it. Quite beautifully, e-flux is an archive that generates other archives. It is the ultimate “archive fever”:

“It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there’s too much of it, right where there is something that anarchives itself.”¹⁵

Except for describing the archive fever and the feverish archives, the quote above also offers a glimpse of Derrida’s use of both psychoanalysis and etymology in *Archive Fever*, creating an interrelated and perhaps infinite weave of desires and word stems. Besides the neologism of “anarchiving” and its many connotations (*an+arkhe*; the absence or negation of commencement/commandment, anarchy, etc.), one might consider the “Freudian Impression” of the subtitle: by impression, Derrida wishes to denote the impression left by Freud in anybody speaking of him, that is, the legacy of Freud; he also relates it to the complicated matters of translating *Verdrängung* and *Unterdrückung* as repression and suppression; and he defines it as

scriptural or typographic, that is, the impression as imprint or inscription, which is later related to the trace, to writing and the inscription on the body proper. Here, etymology means that mad way of opening up a text to infinity.

Archive Fever is a short and somewhat odd book, and its “Theses” does not account for one of the longer chapters. But it is in these pages and the following “Postscript” that Derrida momentarily seems to release psychoanalysis and the notion of the archive from their hardening grips around one another, by introducing Wilhelm Jensen’s novel *Gradiva*. Derrida notes that whenever

Freud talks about archives, he does it by way of archeology: “Each time he wants to teach the topology of archives, that is to say, of what ought to exclude or forbid the return to the origin, this lover of stone figurines proposes archaeological parables.”¹⁶ The novel *Gradiva* was analyzed by Freud in his “Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s *Gradiva*,” and the story recounts the fate of an archeologist who is obsessed with a woman depicted in a fresco. After a dream, the archeologist goes to Pompeii to seek the traces of *Gradiva*, to

look for any imprint of her toes in the ashes. Thus, the elegant scene evoked by Derrida in these last pages is an excavation in Pompeii, an archeological site of stones being removed one by one. And the scene is used both as an analogy for psychoanalysis and for the archive—now placed side by side, rather than in the act of engulfing each other—as well as an analogy for the metaphysical desire for a return to the origin, the digging for the bottom: that desire for an origin which is described as the vain hope for stones to talk. Because in Derrida’s archive, the idea of the origin is always contested: perhaps there are only perpetual beginnings. ●

Notes

1. “To write in a digital age is to write in the archive, but do we also write for and even like the archive? If so, how is the structure of the archive inflected in our writing, especially in emerging genres of writing?” See: Eichhorn, K., *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*, 12.2008; www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_12/eichhorn/index.htm
2. The text was first given as a lecture on 5 June 1994, at the Freud Museum in London. The original title of this lecture was “The Concept of the Archive: A Freudian Impression.”
3. Derrida, J., *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 1
4. Foucault, M., *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 129
5. Derrida, J., *op. cit.*, p. 5
6. Foucault, M., *op. cit.*, p. 130
7. Derrida, J., *op. cit.*, p. 30
8. Derrida, J., *op. cit.*, p. 16
9. Interview with e-flux founder and director Anton Vidokle online: www.dossierjournal.com/read
10. Derrida, J., *op. cit.*, p. 36
11. Tyler Green’s blog *Modern Art Notes* (MAN): www.artsjournal.com/man/2008/01/the_vviveros-faune_ethical_tra.html
12. Viveros-Faune may have displayed a particularly poor judgment, but while doing so, he certainly made some rather interesting points. Defending his double commitment and his job as a curator, he said: “I’m interested in curating, and I firmly believe that there is no interest in the art world without a conflict of interest. Now, that may seem counterintuitive, and it is, but I would argue that the art world is counterintuitive in the extreme. In what other industry, for example, does one of the major magazines that chronicles both the creative and the business end of the art world establish an art fair of the same name. Obviously, I’m talking about Frieze. And that’s nothing. Examine, for second, the practice of writing catalog essays.” Later on, regarding consensus, he said: “But the issue is: No one disagrees in the art world. There is very little active disagreement in the art world, especially compared to the literary world where people eviscerate each other. You have an argument in the *New York Review of Books* and you have the writer and his friends piling on [...]. But in the art world, because success is so based on inside information and insider relations, I find very few people tell you what they really do think.” See: www.artsjournal.com/man/2008/01/the_vviverosfaune_ethical_tra.html
13. Derrida, J., *op. cit.*, p. 7
14. Foucault, M., *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 129
15. Derrida, J., *op. cit.*, p. 91
16. Derrida, J., *op. cit.*, p. 92

1993 Or Singularity was Here— the Case of Topolitics (Part One)

—
Staffan Lundgren

“Statement concerning CERN W3 software release into public domain/To whom it may concern/Introduction/The world wide web, hereafter referred to as W3, is a global computer networked information system./The W3 project provides a collaborative information system independent of hardware and software platform, and physical location./.../Geneva, 30 April 1993”¹

Some fifteen years ago, in 1993, Bernard Stiegler performed an improvised (yet videorecorded) interview with Jacques Derrida that would later be transcribed, edited, and eventually published as *Échographies de la télévision*.² The themes of the session vary, but are nonetheless bound together to some degree by the two philosophers reciprocal interest in (and to certain extent fascination with) the effects and velocity of the technologies of late capitalism. In many ways, a return to this interview a decade and a half later might be considered of questionable value, especially since technologies of the recent past are often regarded as *the* most obsolete—no longer new, bearing promises of the future, not yet old, bearing along the past. However, to both Stiegler and Derrida, teletechnologies—understood as the common denominator for technologies that carry things over spatial distances, i.e. one- or two-way communication systems such as television, telephone, internet, etcetera—yield a special interest as they—in an exemplary manner—unveil our ever-present faculty of repression and at the same time lend themselves to a philosophical and historico-political analysis of the technologies of making present.

Opening the chapter dubbed “Acts of Memory: Topolitics and Teletechnology,” Stiegler proposes: “The technique of alphabetic writing and the widely shared practice it makes possible were the condition of the constitution of citizenship” (*Echographies* 56). Considering this ancient technology to be radically different from that of teletechnologies, in the sense that the former inevitably encompasses not just the possibility of writing but also of reading, Stiegler sees in the latter a lack of competence “with regards to the genesis or production of what he [the addressee]

receives. And yet, thanks to technical evolution, machines that can receive and, simultaneously, produce and manipulate are becoming widely available” (*Echographies* 56).

This technology, then, both has its historical predecessor and represents something hitherto unseen in that “this technical evolution makes possible a cultural politics aimed at turning the addressee into an actor or agent in production” (*Echographies* 56). Hence teletechnologies at the same time possess the ability to overthrow the remnants of an old schema—in this case that of producers and consumers—as well as, which in part amounts to the same thing, possessing the ability to annihilate borders and boundaries, dissolving the territorial foundations of the sovereign, the nation, the citizen, and democracy as such. Says Derrida: “The question of democracy, [...] may no longer be that of citizenship. If [...] politics is defined by citizenship, and if citizenship is defined, as up to now it has been, by inscription in a place, within a territory or within a nation whose body is rooted in a privileged territory” (*Echographies* 57).

Even though teletechnologies radically transform or even eradicate the foundations of democracy, or “the link between the political and the local, the topolitical,” as Derrida has put it, they still yield a possibility of intervention or interactivity (a notion that Derrida, and one must agree, calls “slightly ridiculous”). Derrida notes, as early as the infancy of the most interactive of these technologies (and eleven years before the introduction of the concept of Web 2.0), how the means present are not used in a way they could or should be, the possibilities inherent don’t “even come close to what we would like to see,

namely, for addressees to be able to transform, in their turn, what reaches them, the ‘message’,

or to understand how it is made, and how it is produced, in order to restart the contract on different terms” (*Echographies* 58). As this technology is still regarded as interactive by dint of its aura of bilateralism, this restart would mean the dawning of the age of

a new grounding of politics beyond mankind’s topological rootedness. However what we have seen so far rather amounts to the opposite. (A recent example: the idolization by political apparatchiks all over Europe of the Obama campaign and its use of the web as a means to promote and convey their message [as well as raise funds]).

The Stiegler/Derrida interview dates from the same year as Vernor Vinge’s notorious paper “The Coming Technological Singularity.”³ Here he proposes the often quoted and from an anthropocentric perspective rather dystopian conclusion: “Within thirty years, we will have the technological means to create superhuman intelligence. Shortly after, the human era will be ended.” With reference to Ray Kurzweil’s 2005 book *The Singularity is Near*, the concept of Singularity is here understood in terms of “an event capable of rupturing the fabric of human history.”⁴ Or in a more lengthy description by the same author:

The Singularity will represent the culmination of the merger of our biological thinking and existence with our technology, resulting in a world that is still human but that transcends our biological roots. There will be no distinction, post-Singularity, between human and machine or between physical

LINE 14

With one leg in and the other leaning out,
I reached into my bag to locate that singular
all-important document: my passport.

Verbal transcription Note: Waves and Clunk 2
Whispered, slowly, End Loud

“... Sloshh Sloshh Sloshh... Tap ... Sloshh ...
Tap ... Sloshh Sloshh Sloshh //PING!”

and virtual reality. If you wonder what will remain unequivocally human in such a world, it’s simply this quality: ours is the species that inherently seeks to extend its physical and mental reach beyond current limitations (*The Singularity* 9).

Transcendence returns as the core of humanity, this time by means of a future technology and the coming technological Singularity. In the minds of both Vinge and Kurzweil, this seems to rest upon an understanding of technology as something completely external. •

(Part Two will appear in the next issue of SITE.)

Notes

1. CERN celebrates the 20th anniversary of the web—or as they have chosen to describe it “World Wide Web@20”—in March this year. Why 1993 here occurs as a more significant point of departure is, as the quote states, the release of the W3 to the public domain (cdsweb.cern.ch/record/1164399). For more on the celebration visit: info.cern.ch/www20/.
2. Jacques Derrida, Stiegler, Bernard, *Échographies de la télévision: entretiens filmés*, Galilée, Paris, 1996. I refer to the English translation *Echographies of Television*, first published by Polity Press 2002, translated by Jennifer Bajorek and henceforth cited as *Echographies*.
3. www-rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/vinge/misc/singularity.html
4. Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, Penguin, London, 2006, 23. Henceforth cited as *The Singularity*.

Rewriting the Ontology of Politics

An Interview with Fredrika Spindler

SVEN-OLOV WALLENSTEIN: Your recently published book *Spinoza: Multitude, affect, power* is the first part of a trilogy that will also contain a volume on Nietzsche and one on Deleuze. Could you tell us something about the architecture of this trilogy?

FREDRIKA SPINDLER: The links between the three philosophers are, of course, obvious: Spinoza and Nietzsche have a great number of themes and fundamental points of departure in common, even if their respective ways of addressing them are largely different. What is clear is what I would call an affinity of thought: these are philosophies of affirmation, grounding themselves in an immanentist understanding of the world and of being, aiming to disclose the ways the belief in an unequivocal sense and finality diminish our power instead of augmenting it, thus also aiming towards an affirmation of the infinite complexity and plurality of the world. Their common lines of thought concern the importance of the body for thought, affectivity, the compositeness of the individual. These are also forceful vectors for Deleuze's thought, who himself never ceased to refer to the huge influence Spinoza and Nietzsche had on his thought. My aim here has, however, never been neither to conduct any strict comparative studies, nor to analyze how the key concepts in these respective thinkers have evolved or developed. Thus, I don't conduct any kind of chronological or historical-philosophical analysis. The three volumes are independent studies having specific points of departure: a number of themes that appear to me to be the most relevant in contemporary thought and are possible to develop through Spinoza, Nietzsche and Deleuze. Each of them are, to me, subject of proper analyses and development, even though the lines of thought that are followed necessarily are recurrent in all three of them. This is about three philosophers that in different ways make it possible to think about power, body and knowledge, about thought and the generating, creating capability of the body, about subject and identity, difference and becoming. These key concepts are also found in the trilogy's titles: *Spinoza: Multitude, Affect, Power; Nietzsche: Body, Knowledge, Creation; Deleuze: Subject, Becoming, Difference*. The three books outline a clear and common genealogy in which each element is autonomous.

SO: In the introduction to the Spinoza book, you say that Spinoza's concept of the subject already has political significance. How should we understand this?

FS: It seems to me that Spinoza rethinks the whole notion of human identity, both on the individual and the collective level, by analyzing it in the light of the collective dimension always already implied by existence. This is to say that the individual cannot be understood or seen as a pre-given entity. On the contrary, one has to examine the multiplicity of ties and affective relations to the social context in which every singular individual is already engaged. What we call "the subject" is thus already socially and collectively constituted before even forming any ideas of a self: this means that whatever theories we may have about the subject must also include

this collectivity—that is an ontologically political dimension. In short, Spinoza's theory makes two crucial points. One is that the human being, however individually she considers herself, is always already part of an infinitely complex nature, by which she is constantly determined and that she determines in turn. The human body is as such always already an assemblage of a large number of parts, which all relate both to each other and to other, external bodies. Intellectually or mentally, it's the same thing: all our ideas and thoughts both depend on each other, and on exterior circumstances, that is, other ideas and thoughts that our own ideas and thoughts come in contact with, confront, and combine with. Thus, our thoughts and moods, actions and desires, are always more or less directly related to the world we find ourselves in, but of which we only perceive the most immediate and forceful effects. The other standpoint, which is in fact a consequence of the first, is that it is impossible to think a human being outside of her context, that is the relations and interactions of which she is part. Collectivity is thus the point of departure, both in terms of a theory of knowledge—how and what do we come to know?—and in terms of the political. Rather than positing the idea of pre-existing and independent "individuals," who would convene on a "social contract," Spinoza takes his political and philosophical point of departure in the idea that the "individual"—far too long understood as an already constituted, irreducible and impregnable subject, in the name of which so many structures of power are always ready to talk—does not precede the social or collective but is constantly and incessantly—but unexpressedly—formed by it, by a complex tissue of affective threads.

SO: Spinoza has recently become a key reference in political philosophy, in works by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, Étienne Balibar, and many others. How do you situate your own work within this current Spinoza revival?

FS: What is interesting about Spinoza is that for a long time he has primarily been considered as a classical rationalist metaphysician, to be read and compared with Descartes, but also Leibniz and Malebranche, as well as other key modern philosophers. In this reception, the *Ethics* has been privileged and considered the chief work of Spinoza, and the focus has been on the question of the meaning of the concept of God, on whether Spinoza was an atheist or possibly a pantheist, on the relation between God and nature, between the substance, the attributes and the modes, and on the theory of knowledge. My own introduction to Spinoza completely followed this perspective initially. When Balibar,

Matheron, Macherey and Negri, some three decades ago, introduced another Spinoza—the political philosopher—this was possible from the very specific context they found themselves in or rather constituted: a French, Marxist or left-wing orientated philosophical context, closely connected to Althusser who was one of the first to see Spinoza not only as an important political philosopher historically, but above all, as a thinker bearing the potential to transform our own contemporary way of thinking the political. This context—ideologically, politically and philosophically—is, of course, extremely influential to how these authors read Spinoza, even if between them they differ largely and also polemicize concerning each other's readings—Balibar in respect to Negri, for instance. My own reading refers naturally in many respects to these authors—Balibar has been important to my discussions on how to understand the notion and difficulty of democracy in Spinoza; Negri's *The Savage Anomaly* for the idea of further developing a reading from the notions *potentia* and *potestas*, and my own discussion on the concept of multi-

tude is naturally also referring to Hardt and Negri's work, even though our lines of reasoning differ on important points. What I feel most relevant at this moment is to take further the analysis of the differences between Hobbes and Spinoza's political theories, both concerning their

understanding of individual and multitude, and of the relation between politics, religion, and the notion of sovereignty. In the end, what interests me is seeing how, on the one hand, our own political contemporaneity is not only rooted but perhaps even locked into a Hobbesian perspective of sovereignty, which also implies an unproblematic understanding of what the individual and the collective are, and on the other hand, how the Spinozist understanding would make possible the formulation of a real political alternative.

SO: Is there something in Spinoza's attitude to religion that makes him relevant today?

FS: Very much so, and in several ways. First, I think that his analysis of the very origin of religious thought and, even more, of the religious need, found in both the Appendix of Book I of the *Ethics* and in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, are still quite relevant and applicable in our time. What he says is that in a certain sense, the religious, and also the superstitious, are constituent parts of human nature, since man, confronted with the uncertainty and the menaces implied by existence, is constantly oscillating between hope and fear. This unstable state of emotion, combined with—from the point of view of the theory of affectivity—the just as natural but

also completely mad conviction that man is at the center of nature as such, leads to a certain number of ideas (imaginings) that corroborate our wishful thinking concerning the state of nature and ourselves, ideas that we soon enough promote to norms and truths. This is in fact precisely an analysis that Nietzsche in turn will continue to develop in different ways, and that I am addressing further in the coming volume, but Spinoza's point is precisely that it is the so-called sad passions, sprung from uncertainty, fear and powerlessness, which are the driving forces in the creation of the fiction of a Beyond, of unequivocal truth and meaning. These are passions that in turn lead nowhere but to even more enslavement and a further diminishing of the force that, according to Spinoza, each human is constituted of. Simply put, his analysis of religiosity concerns our relentless displacing of our own power outside of ourselves, our paradoxical enhancement of our powerlessness, and, not least, how we ourselves enable and make possible all the structures of worldly power that benefit from sadness, fear and submission. That such an analysis would be relevant today, and that we could advantageously interpret what is commonly named the return of religiosity from this perspective, seems very clear. Also, it is clear that Spinoza's analysis of religiosity is not necessarily limited to the specific context offered by the 17th century's linking between church and state, but rather speaks about all kinds of explicative models taken for granted and validated in different situations. Religion, and our relation to it, is a strong and forceful example of this, but the belief in science *an sich*, or in the economy—the Market, Capital—offer just as good, and today perhaps even more relevant, examples that would largely benefit from a Spinozian analysis.

SO: I remember the title of book by Pierre Macherey from the late 1970s, *Hegel ou Spinoza*. I guess that many, especially in the Hegelian and/or Marxist tradition, would say that a modern theory of the state in relation to the subject begins with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, where the issue is to find a theory of institutions, the "objective spirit," that also respects the "infinite right" of the individual. You propose a reading of Spinoza as a democrat in the "purest sense" of the word, which, one assumes, must be read as a counter-statement to the Hegelian tradition. How do you see the link to Hegel?

FS: I have not actually discussed this so far in my written work, but it is, of course, a very relevant link. It is obvious that most of the crucial Spinozist standpoints are precisely those that both a Hobbesian and a Hegelian tradition tend to overlook: this concerns the notion of the individual, the notion of right, and the notion of objectivity. To Spinoza, what we call the individual, that is a singular mode of the substance, does not "have" a right: rather, it "is" its right in the sense that it *is* the degree of power constituted by its conatus—this is what Spinoza explains concerning the notion of natural right in chapter XVI of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. However, this "right" has no juridical sense unless we consider the individual in question in its necessary always already present social and collective context.

LINE 15

The trailing leg edged its way to the elevator, the door shut. Locked. The elevator button pressed. Awaiting.

Verbal transcription Note: Sapporo Bird Station

"...TchiTchi – Tchi (short whistle) TchiTchi Tchi Tchi Step Step Tchi... Tchi Step Tchi TchiTchichi Step Step Tchi Tchi Step Step Step TCHI Step Step Step //TCHI Step Step Step TCHI TchiTchi Tchi Tchi Tchi Step Step Step TCHI Step Step"

Moreover, as such, the individual or the subject is not constituted before or outside of a collectivity, rather, these notions are co-constitutive of each other. This makes it impossible to state any right outside of the social context in which the individual is situated, which in turn means that the individual's right is always co-dependent on the formulation of the collective right. In other words, the challenge of any society is to maintain the maximum degree of individual right (that is, what the individual "is") while ensuring that this at no moment endangers or lessens collective right. In a wider sense, it is also quite clear to me that the Spinozist and the Hegelian notion of socio-political economy differ essentially, since to Spinoza, it is evident that a state based upon the endless enrichment of particulars is bound to dissolve into chaos before long. The equation he sketches out of a durable and good state, of which the only meaning is to ensure as much freedom as possible to its citizens, is dependent upon not only juridical and theoretical equality but concrete, material right. However, when I state that Spinoza is a democrat in the purest sense, it is precisely because he knows that there can actually be no real alienation of natural right: on the contrary, it is the same principle that must be maintained in whatever civil state we consider, insofar as we wish to have a durable state, since it is only by satisfying any individual's desire to persevere in its own being that will make valid the mere possibility of the civil state. This means that democracy, literally the power of the constituting people, is not as much one possible regime among others—democracy versus monarchy, for instance—but rather the power at work in any kind of social context. As such, it is passionate and often dangerous and self-destructive—but also impossible to overcome or alienate: to Spinoza, democracy is primarily an ontological state, the principle within each form of government, as he puts it in the *Political Treatise*. Thus, paradoxically, democracy is always already at work as soon as a collective existence is formalized. In other words, even the most catastrophic governments—despotism, totalitarianism, etc.—have in fact a democratic foundation since they have been made possible and have been realized by collective passions that, rather than working in a constructive way, have led to a reduction of both the power of thinking and acting. But here is also the challenge: taking this ontological aspect of democracy in consideration, understanding it, and understanding what kinds of passions and affects are at stake in a given situation, there is also a possibility of conceiving a democratic regime, based upon this knowledge and taking it into account: this, as I see it, is the task of our political philosophy today.

sow: Today the split between analytical and continental philosophy often seems to depend on the relation to history, or more precisely the extent to which historicity is a condition of possibility for thought itself. Here too you discern a different proposal in Spinoza, a certain idea of the "untimely" that will recur in Nietzsche and Deleuze. How should we understand this untimeliness?

FS: There is an untimeliness in a first and quite common sense in Spinoza (even if this is not a term used by him) in the same way there is in Nietzsche or Deleuze: Spinoza was in his own time (and as I see it, he still is in ours) a subversive thinker whose whole system and analysis sharply contrasted with prevalent traditions, even if he worked with a seemingly classical apparatus of concepts. But in a second and deeper sense, his untimeliness concerns a different understanding of the concept of time as such, which in turn implies a different view on history and historicity. In short, one could say that Spinoza turns quite forcefully against an idea of time as a linear chronology: this, to him, constitutes rather what he calls "tools of imagination" that we use in order to grasp the very complex tissue of things in an infinite cause-effect-flow. Since this cause-effect-flow is way too intricate and complex for us to take in as a whole, we use normative categories of time so to speak for reasons of comfort, referring to the past in accordance with a given discourse of which the contents naturally vary from context to context. But

this means that we do not have, strictly or adequately speaking, any real knowledge about things: the contexts of cause and effect that we can take in are always fragmentary and incomplete. To Spinoza, any kind of adequate knowledge must, on the contrary, ground itself in the knowledge of the two fundamental ontological registers constituted by what he calls duration—*duratio*—and eternity—*aeternitas*.

Eternity is not to be understood as something "more" or "beyond" time, but rather signifies absolute presence of the whole of nature as such—to put it simply, where a thing is seen as a direct expression of a certain degree of the power of the substance. Duration, however, is the time in which we are—that is, where things have a beginning and an end, but where we see them according to whatever affective context we experience them in. It is thus a question of variation in intensity, rather than chronology. And what is particular with Spinoza is that he means that it is in this duration that we experience eternity—he says that we *feel* and *experience* eternity, whenever we are capable of seeing a

thing in its own essence, that is, as a singular expression of the substance. So eternity, to Spinoza, has nothing to do with an after-life (and to him the soul is not immortal either). What are the consequences of this standpoint for our understanding of historicity? Firstly, that what we call "history" is always only a fragmented portion of a course of events, never an all-encompassing process that can be represented. Secondly, that "history" does not actually teach us anything about what something *is* or *has been* in itself, but only on how we have chosen to retain, to tell, to recreate the narrative about something (which in itself, for Spinoza just as later for Nietzsche, is interesting enough and makes possible a Foucauldian analysis of discourse *avant la lettre*). Thirdly, that what we call "history", precisely because it is always about a specific narrative, necessarily ideologically, affectively and contextually impregnated, must not be understood either as "fate" or finality: that history does not have a direction, an aim or a completion, but is precisely a narrative that rather than disclosing *knowledge* about the essence of things and being discloses

how we think of them, in a given perspective. This, in turn, means that Spinoza actually thinks that the historical analysis is indeed very important, but in the sense that it is the understanding of how a historical narrative is created and transmitted that makes it interesting, since this renders possible an understanding of how different social, affective and political structures have arisen: this is the central theme of Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*.

sow: One of the lines that you draw from

Spinoza to his great successor Nietzsche, and I assume to Deleuze, Foucault, and many others today, is the problem of the body. There's a famous passage in the *Ethics* where he says that we do not yet know what a body is capable of. And in *Spinoza—Philosophie pratique* Deleuze has a chapter where he says that Spinoza's philosophy takes the body as its guide. What does it mean to take the body as one's guide in philosophy?

FS: I'd say that this means several things. In the first place, it is a statement that is literally overturning a system of values that has lasted for millennia: it implies the revalorization of

the body in a philosophical tradition that, with very few exceptions, since Plato and probably even in our time, has privileged the soul or the mind. With Spinoza (the metaphysician, the ontologist!), there is no longer such a hierarchy: body and mind are stated as the two sides of a being, expressive of all that occurs to, within and from this being. In the second place, it implies the elaboration of an immensely interesting and fruitful theory of knowledge, where thought is understood as being based upon an individual's physical interaction with and in the world. For Spinoza, thought is the simultaneous response, to begin with, to whatever happens to the body—an affection, something making an imprint on us, corresponds to a physical image and a mental thought: this, in turn leads to an alteration (however infinitesimal) of our conatus or essence, the degree of effort by which we persevere in our actual existence. This alteration, or variation of intensity, is the affect, translated mentally in terms of joy or sadness, with a large number of possible derivations.

At the core of Spinozist thought we find the idea that the body is constitutive in thinking—that a corporeal interaction in the world is synonymous with mental attention and activity. Moreover, this means that the more complex our body is, the more we can think. It is physical complexity with all the needs and complications that may come from it, something which in occidental philosophic traditions has mostly always been treated as a hindrance for thought, which is to Spinoza, on the contrary, the condition for a super-capable mind. The more we can affect and be affected, the more we can think. This is a theory of generosity and change, rather than the traditional valuing of inertia, unequivocal truth and overcoming of the physical condition. **sow:** What would a Spinozist position amount to in contemporary theoretical work on the body, say, with respect to phenomenology, or to the current trend towards a complete naturalization of consciousness?

FS: I think there are extremely interesting possibilities of Spinozian research in the realm of neurology for instance, as Antonio Damasio has shown with his book from a few years ago (*Looking for Spinoza*, 2003). Spinoza's theory of affectivity, and the correlation between the body and the mind, is currently referred to in this domain by Jean-Pierre Changeux, for instance, and I think there still remains some very fruitful connections to be found here. The radicality with which Spinoza urges us to rethink what it is to *be*—rather than *have*—a body, what it is to *be thinking* rather than *to have* thoughts, calls for a profound repositioning of whatever we still, unquestioningly and relentlessly, call "the subject", be it in philosophy and the human sciences or in the natural sciences where this enigmatic concept still appears to be taken for granted. •

LINE 16

The smell of slightly perfumed tyres occupied the modestly sized elevator. Scratched silver, worn foam rubbings etched across the notice panel, new information pervading: scent, 3 up and 3 down — ground floor — exit — Bing — doors opening.

Verbal transcription Note : Department Store Girls 2 Spoken Normally – calmly, increasing

"... WeAreHavingATimeSaleATimeSale- PleaseWeAreHavingATimeSaleATimeSale- ASpecialCompainASpecialCompain WeAreHavingATimeSaleATimeSale ASpecialCompainASpecialCompain //ASpecialCompain WeAreHavingATimeSaleATimeSale-PleaseAt TheMomentWeAreHavingATimeSale,ATime Sale VeryReasonableVeryReasonable ATimeSale ATimeSale WeAreHavingATimeSale,ATimeSale - Please - WeAreHavingATimeSale,ATimeSale WeAreHavingATimeSale,ATimeSale - VeryReasonableATIMESALEATIMESAL Everyreasonable itsaSpecialCompainASpecialCompain SPECIALCOMPAINSPICIALCOMPAINATIME SALEWEAREHAVINGATIMESALEveryreasonable veryreasonable."