



Heidegger/Derrida--Presence

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HEIDEGGER/DERRIDA—PRESENCE*

TWO authors are named. Neither will be present—though one could be—at the event for which the title Heidegger/Derrida serves as an announcement, the event for which this text—which I, a third author, have signed in advance—is to provide a certain preparation. The concern of course will be not with those two authors themselves, but with the texts that bear their signatures, with what is usually called—quite carelessly no doubt—their texts. And so, in the title the names represent, i.e., substitute for and hence announce, certain texts. Or, alternatively, they represent, either directly or through the signed texts, a certain theoretical matter (*Sache*), what is usually called—quite carelessly no doubt—the meaning of the texts. Recall the opening sentence of Heidegger's *Nietzsche*:

“Nietzsche”—the name of the thinker stands as the title for *the matter* [*die Sache*] of his thinking.¹

The substitutional (representational) function thus traces the relation of author to text and, perhaps less obtrusively, the relation to what is meant by the author in the text: author/text/meaning.

Let me focus for now on the first of these relations, on the way in which the understanding of it has been prepared, most decisively though not exclusively, beginning with Aristotle's *On Interpretation* (16a). What is written ($\tau\acute{\alpha}$ γραφόμενα) is taken to refer to (to be a symbol of: σύμβολα) what is spoken ($\tau\acute{\alpha}$ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ); and speech is to be understood by reference to the subject who speaks, as an activity of the speaking subject. An author would perhaps reduce this schema by repressing or merely enacting speech silently; but the relation would remain fundamentally the same, the author producing the text through his activity, expressing in it what is already intact within himself ($\tau\acute{\alpha}$ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθήματα), originating it so as to be entitled to authority over it. Such is, in the merest sketch, the ordinary, i.e., traditional, conception which the texts “of” Heidegger and Derrida serve to bring thoroughly into question, both in what they say and often also in their very form of saying, both in word and in deed. Most directly, these texts disrupt the traditional conception by showing how it is inseparable from that metaphysics of subjectivity whose transgression these texts would

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¹Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1961), vol. I, p. 9. Trans. by D. F. Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), vol. I, p. xv.

broach. Thus, in the Heideggerian text, language proves irreducible to the activity of a speaker, requiring rather (to put it in the very briefest formula) a listening to something said in advance of its sounding in human speech.² To this extent language is withdrawn from the subject, the author dispossessed of what he would otherwise have taken simply as *his* text. Much the same displacement is released, though from quite a different direction, by certain Derridean texts, for example, by the critique that *Speech and Phenomena* brings to bear upon the Husserlian propensity to conceive expression, meaning, signification, in reference to the *τέλος* of intuitive fulfillment and thereby to compromise that very originality or ideality of meaning which the *Logical Investigations* was set upon establishing. The conclusion is that signification is essentially capable of functioning independently of all intuition, whether it be that of the sensibly present object or of the self-present subject. The operation of signification, the functioning of language, does not require the presence, even the mediated presence, of the subject; the text is unaffected by the death of the author.³ In this sense—though only and precisely in this sense—nothing is to be gained by the presence of the author, not even if he were to read his texts aloud, feigning even an ordinary dictation.

What is put at issue most immediately by the title is not, however, the chain of substitutions linking author to text and to meaning but rather the opposition between the two chains designated by the names of the two authors. Let me focus, then, on the slash. It functions as a kind of punctuation mark, as one of those nonphonetic elements which appear to distinguish writing, to mark it off from speech. If I were to pronounce the title Heidegger/Derrida aloud—for example, at the event for which this text is to provide a certain preparation—if I were to use this text as a pretext for speech, for purposes of that feigning of speech which occurs in reading, then it would be necessary to insert the mark in speech by some kind of artifice, for example, by a gesture that would trace it or by the substitution of a word such as “slash,” which would then be functioning in a way quite different from its straightforward semantic function. In living speech, present to its self-present au-

²“Speaking is of itself [*von sich aus*] a listening. It is a listening to the language that we speak. Thus speaking is, not at the same time but beforehand, a listening. In an inconspicuous way this listening to language precedes all other kinds of listening. Not only do we speak *the* language, we speak *from out of* it [Wir sprechen nicht nur *die* Sprache, wir sprechen *aus* ihr].” *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1959), p. 254.

³Jacques Derrida, *La Voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), ch. vii. Trans.: *Speech and Phenomena*, by David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1973).

thor, this mark, this trace of writing, cannot be simply *presented*; it remains outside that speech, thus requiring therein its representative, its substitutive gesture or word. And so, the very way in which this mark functions mirrors what will prove to be at issue between those two authorial chains between which the mark is drawn; the issue is presence or, more precisely, withdrawal of, withdrawal from, presence.

Ordinarily this mark—which I have already begun calling by substitution a “slash,” translating this artifice back into the written text—ordinarily it is taken as marking some kind of opposition. And yet, a primary strategy of the Heideggerian and Derridean texts is precisely to deconstruct binary opposition. Thus Heidegger’s *Nietzsche* proposes, in view of such founding oppositions as intelligible/sensible, an inversion of “Platonism” in which philosophical thinking would also twist free of it⁴—what the Derridean text will designate as the two operations of reversal and displacement. It is a matter of opposites that can be neither reduced to unity nor stabilized hierarchically nor dialectically sublated into a third term. Under the title *Dissemination* it is a matter especially of displacing the three of ontotheology, of destroying the trinitarian horizon, of adding a fourth, self-effacing term which, like *différance*, displaces synthesis, opening the triangle on a fourth side, reinscribing it as an open square.⁵

And so, it is here a matter of preparing such an opening from the opposition of the two authorial chains, in this way preparing for that event to which this text—which I, a third author, have signed in advance—is directed. Or rather, it is a matter of relinquishing this point, this apex, and of beginning to write a fourth text, feigning a preface (*ibid.* 33; tr.: 27). It goes without saying that here it can be a matter *only* of beginning, of merely locating the site for a deconstructive geometry.

“Everything starts with the dyad” (*ibid.* 31; tr.: 24), and so in order to begin it is necessary to return to the opposition Heidegger/Derrida. And yet—remaining for now within the classical conceptuality, e.g., of German Idealism—opposition is never simply such, never opposition as such; even if absolute in form, opposition is never absolute in content but presupposes a conditioning position. The opposition of opposites presupposes a common position, the slash conjoining before it can separate. It is from that position that one must begin.

Let us begin, then, from the positing of metaphysics as at its end, its limit, the delimitation of metaphysics in its closure, a positing

⁴ Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, I, 233 (Tr.: 201).

⁵ Derrida, *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 31 f. Trans: *Dissemination*, by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University Press, 1981), pp. 24 f.

of it for destruction (*Destruktion*) or—reproducing orthographically the necessary bond of the operation *with* metaphysics—the deconstruction of metaphysics. This positing is governed by a certain exposure of metaphysics, an exposure of a positing common to metaphysics throughout its history and warranting to this degree the phrase ‘metaphysics as such’. What is common to metaphysics is the positing of Being (*Sein*) as presence, its self-positing as metaphysics *of presence*.

Hence, it is imperative to understand what “presence” means, to understand how the meaning of presence is such that metaphysics of presence is posed for delimitation, deconstruction. It is with the question of the meaning of presence that one can begin to construct the deconstructive square.

In *Being and Time* presence means predominantly, though not exclusively, *Vorhandenheit* (presence-at-hand, in the usual translation). This is to be understood in its correlation with pure seeing, with *voεiv*,⁶ with intuition (*Anschauung*): When something gives itself to one’s sheer gaze, when it is simply there for one’s looking, displaying itself before and for apprehension, then it has the character of being present-at-hand. Such a character is to be contrasted with that of things with which one deals concernfully, when one manipulates things and puts them to use. The contrast between *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit* (readiness-to-hand, in the usual translation) is well known, and the relevant analyses offered by *Being and Time* need not be repeated or even summarized here. What does, however, need to be stressed is the rigorous order that the phenomenological analyses of *Being and Time* (I, 3) establishes with respect to these two modes: Presence-at-hand is founded on readiness-to-hand, and things come to show themselves as present-at-hand only when certain structures of readiness-to-hand get covered over or repressed. One could say, then, that in the strict sense everything is ready-to-hand; or, alternatively, that there is nothing purely present-at-hand. In what one might take as present-at-hand—e.g., the hammer merely stared at—there is always something else operative yet repressed, a concealed operation of readiness-to-hand, a disregarded instrumentality. What is decisive is the displacement of presence that this analysis produces. There are no simply, sheerly present things; for everything is openly or concealedly ready-to-hand, and what is ready-to-hand—the hammer when one takes hold of it and uses it—is not sheerly present as a self-contained positivity. Rather, it is extended beyond itself into the referential totality by which it is determined, its presence limited and yet rendered

⁶ Cf. *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1960, 9th ed.), pp. 25 ff. Trans.: *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

possible by its insertion in that totality. But the totality is one of *signifying* references; it is *Bedeutsamkeit*, the operation of signification.⁷ There is no pure presence; for in whatever presents itself there is already in play the operation of signification. Presence is delimited—limited and yet rendered possible—by the operation of signification.

The Derridean text too is addressed to a delimitation of presence, of that sheer perceptual presence that would be correlative to the stratum of pre-expressive experience which Husserlian phenomenology would rigorously separate from the operation of signification. It is on the most elementary level that *Speech and Phenomena* is focused: simple sensory presence (e.g., of a tone) in the living present. That is, it is a matter of deconstructing the phenomenology of internal time-consciousness, bringing fully into play the Husserlian analyses of retention and protention in precisely such a way as to show how that phenomenological text works against itself, withdrawing that very self-identical present, the living present, which, on the other hand, it would preserve as the nondisplaceable center, the living core, of time. Both the Husserlian and the Derridean analyses are well known and need not be repeated here. It is in a sense only a matter of stress, of stressing that the connection of the present to the immediate past and future is an essential, i.e., constitutive, connection. It is not as though there is first a present “now” which then comes to be connected to past and future; rather these connections belong to its very constitution as a present “now”—which is to say that there can be no simple self-identical present. The peculiar complexity of the “now” is elaborated in *Speech and Phenomena* by means of the concept of repetition. The point is that the “now” essentially involves a possibility, structure, or movement of repetition in two senses. First, the present “now” includes repetition of the previous “now,” namely in retention. In other words, the present “now” must be constituted in such a way that it is possible for the past “now” to be repeated in it; its constitution must be such as to include such possibility of repetition. Secondly, the present “now,” the *form* of presence, is itself ideal and hence infinitely repeatable, its return *ad infinitum* being “inscribed in presence itself.”⁸ Thus, the present “now” essentially involves

⁷“The relational character which these relationships of assigning possess, we take as one of *signifying* [*be-deuten*]. . . . The relational totality of this signifying we call *significance* [*Bedeutsamkeit*]” (*ibid.*, 87). The more phenomenological formulation of the results in §18 has usually been emphasized: Things can present themselves only from within a world whose structure (worldhood) is a referential totality. This formulation has the disadvantage of not underlining so forcefully the deconstructive character of the analysis.

⁸*La Voix et le phénomène*, 75 f. (Tr.: 67).

the possibility, structure, movement of repetition both of *previous* "nows" in itself and of *itself* as the ideal form of presence.

This figure of repetition may be called the *trace*. It is, as it were, the figure into which the phenomenological figure of closed-off presence gets deconstructed:

Such a trace is—if we can employ this language without immediately contradicting it or crossing it out as we proceed—more "primordial" than what is phenomenologically primordial (*ibid.*).

Or again:

In all these directions, the presence of the present is thought of as arising from the bending back of a return [*du pli du retour*], from the movement of repetition, and not the reverse (*ibid.*).

This operation of the trace, this bending back of a return by which the presence of the present is constituted—to employ still, under erasure, the language of phenomenology—this also is called *différance*. Or it may be called the operation of signification, taking the latter in the most deconstructively (not phenomenologically) primordial way. As in the Heideggerian text, presence is delimited—limited and yet rendered possible—by the operation of signification. The latter is not a matter of presence, not even necessarily of presence to or of an origin, a speaker; like writing, its function is independent of the absence, even the death, of the author. Or rather, this operation of signification is writing in that form in which it emerges from the application of the double operation of reversal and displacement to the metaphysical opposition speech/writing. As *archi-écriture* it is "at work at the origin of sense," delimiting presence.⁹

In conclusion, three issues:

(1) Though in *Being and Time* "presence" means predominantly *Vorhandenheit*, this is not the only meaning of "presence" in play. In fact, an entire chain of meanings is introduced at the outset (§ 6) only to be provisionally abandoned in the published portion of the text. But, beginning with the 1927 lecture course, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, and still more openly in later texts, a system of meanings of presence is developed along various, not easily reconcilable directions. A note in the Derridean text

⁹ "This arche-writing is at work at the origin of sense. Sense, being temporal in nature, as Husserl recognized, is never simply present; it is always already engaged in the 'movement' of the trace, that is, in the order of 'signification.' It has always already issued forth from itself into the 'expressive stratum' of lived experience." *Ibid.*, 96 (Tr.: 85 f.).

which is itself characterized as a note on a note from *Being and Time* calls attention to this issue, this problem of translation:

The following pages may be read as timid prolegomena to a problem of translation. But who better than Heidegger has taught us to think what is involved in such a problem? Here, the question would be the following: how to transfer into, or rather what transpires when we transfer into the single Latin word *presence* the entire differentiated system of Greek and German words, the entire system of translation in which Heideggerian language (*ousia*, *parousia*, *Gegenwärtigkeit*, *Anwesen*, *Anwesenheit*, *Vorhandenheit*, etc.) is produced? . . . Above all, how to transfer into the single word *presence*, both too rich and too poor, the history of the Heideggerian text which associates or disjoins these concepts in subtle and regular fashion throughout an itinerary that covers more than forty years?¹⁰

(2) On the other hand, the question is whether the Heideggerian text, moving in the system of translations of presence, succeeds in delimiting presence as such:

The Heideggerian de-limitation consists sometimes in appealing to a less narrow determination of presence from a more narrow determination of it, thereby going back from the present toward a more original thought of Being as presence (*Anwesenheit*), and sometimes in questioning this original determination itself, and giving us to think it as a closure, as the Greco-Western-philosophical closure. . . . In the first case the displacements would remain within the metaphysics of presence in general (*ibid.* 75; Tr.: 65).

Does this first case really "occupy almost the entirety of Heidegger's text"? Or, on the contrary, is there perhaps always in play in the Heideggerian text that directedness, announced in the 1927 lecture course¹¹, the directedness *ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*, beyond to an order that is not a matter of Being, of presence, beyond to the meaning, the truth, the clearing of Being, beyond to that which de-limits Being as presence?

(3) Finally, it is necessary to disrupt a web of assumptions that I have left undisturbed hitherto, most pointedly, the assumption that in asking about the meaning of presence one is asking simply for one or several positive senses. It is necessary to disrupt this assumption of straightforwardness because meaning "has never been con-

¹⁰ *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), pp. 35 f. Trans.: *Margins of Philosophy*, by Alan Bass (Chicago: University Press, 1982), p. 33. The issue is raised again near the end of "Ousia and Grammē": "What about presence then? We cannot easily think in the Latin word *presence* the movements of differentiation that are produced in the Heideggerian text. The task here is immense and difficult." *Ibid.*, 75 (Tr.: 64).

¹¹ *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1975), pp. 402-404. Trans.: *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, by Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982), pp. 283-285.

ceivable, within the history of metaphysics, otherwise than on the basis of presence and as presence" (*Marges de la philosophie* 58; Tr.: 51)—as, to take the exceptionally revealing Husserlian case, presence to eidetic intuition. To ask straightforwardly about the meaning of presence is already to assume what presence means, to assume it in the very question of meaning.

But then, is not the Heideggerian question itself caught in this web of assumptions and as a result held firmly within the closure of metaphysics? If the question of Being is determined as a question of meaning, as the question of the meaning of Being, then is it not in its very formulation a question of presence, a question directed toward a recovery of presence? Indeed this would be so, *were it not the case that* the Heideggerian text, from *Being and Time* on, engages ceaselessly in a deconstructive reduction, a delimitation, of meaning, its reduction to the *woraufhin des Entwurfs* (*Sein und Zeit*, 151), its referral to world, i.e., signification, and eventually to *ἀλήθεια*. Meaning as presence becomes, is reduced to, the meaning of presence, the latter taken not straightforwardly, but as that which delimits presence. The Heideggerian text, thus releasing the torsion in the question of the meaning of presence, twists it free of metaphysical closure.

Is it not in this way, through such distortion, that the Heideggerian text could be twisted together with the Derridean text, the authorial chains intertwined in a new contortion which, broaching the delimitation of what one would like to call presence *as such*, would form the site of the opposition Heidegger/Derrida?

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ORIGIN(S) IN (OF) HEIDEGGER/DERRIDA*

Everything begins by referring back, that is to say,
does not begin.— Jacques Derrida

IT would doubtless be far more fashionable at this time to take up the issue of ends, above all the end of philosophy, in the work of Heidegger and Derrida. Yet although the two thinkers are in considerable accord when it comes to final things—to matters of finality and especially to finalisms of all sorts—they are

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