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Origin(s) in (of) Heidegger/Derrida

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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

**I**T 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

\*To be presented in an APA symposium on Heidegger/Derrida December 30, 1984. John Sallis will be co-symposiast; see this JOURNAL, this issue, 594-601. Robert Bernasconi will comment; his paper is not available at this time.

much more instructively divergent when it is a question of origins. They are quite differently disposed toward problems of origination: in art, in language, and in philosophy itself. So much so that we may conveniently regard them as engaged in a conversation on the very subject of origins. Of such a dialogue Heidegger has written that “basically, there are only two possibilities: either to go to their encounter, or to go counter to them.”<sup>1</sup> Here I shall go to their encounter.

It is a salient fact that whereas Heidegger seeks out the origins of entire domains of human activity—say, of modern technology in “enframing” operations of various kinds—Derrida approaches the matter of origins only as it arises in reading particular written texts: e.g., Husserl’s “The Origin of Geometry” or Heidegger’s own “The Origin of the Work of Art.” Whereas Heidegger allows for nontextual events to be (at) the origin, Derrida concerns himself exclusively with *already inscribed* engenderings. More drastically still, Derrida maintains that outside a text there “is” no origin—historical, metaphysical, or transcendental—if by “origin” is meant something having the kind of determinate presence often attributed to veridical perception. Just as “there never was any ‘perception’”<sup>2</sup> once we deconstruct the idea of such presence, so there never was any origin either—*except in (and as) a text*. To deny that origins are text-generated (as well as text-deconstructed) is tantamount to turning them into transcendental signifieds, whose claim to extra-textual validity is the ultimate, or rather the very first, ruse of Western metaphysical reason.<sup>3</sup>

## I

It would be wrong, however, to infer that Derrida lacks interest in origins. He passionately pursues them—even, as we shall see, clandestinely commemorates them—so long as they are placed under the suspension of double marks (quotation marks, parentheses, and those crossings-out which are a legacy from Heidegger). But it would also be mistaken to hold that Heidegger is committed to simple, pre-textual origins. For him, words are themselves origins, as is witnessed by his prolonged meditations on *logos*, *moira*, and *aletheia*. Further, the very notion of origin is nonsimple in Heidegger’s view. More an abyss than a ground or principle, it lands

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper, 1968), p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1973), p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> On the idea of the transcendental signified, see Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974), esp. p. 73: such a signified is “*always already in the position of the signifier*” (his italics), thus is textually inscribed from the outset.

us inevitably in paradox.<sup>4</sup> As a “founding leap” (*Ur-sprung*), an origin is noncontinuous; and it may even arise in the form of “strife” (*Streit*) between elemental factors: for instance, between “world” and “earth” in a work of art. The strife itself—a manifestation of a primal “dif-ference” (*Unter-scheid*)—is generative and not merely divisive.

There is difference—also named “rift,” “retreat,” “withdrawal”—at the Heideggerian origin. Nevertheless, however intrinsic it may be to the process of origination, difference is not the last word. The ur-strife between earth and world is said to attain “the simplicity of intimacy” and even a state of “repose,” the two opponents being carried “into the source of their unity by virtue of their common ground.”<sup>5</sup> A strife-born origin is reunified out of the intensity of its own internal conflict.

It is this moment of assured reunification which calls out Derrida’s sardonic *skepsis*. For it represents the long shadow of metaphysics still darkening the thought of someone as trenchantly anti-metaphysical as Heidegger himself. Derrida detects the same shadow falling on Heidegger’s unexamined phonocentrism, on his all too Platonic notion of “fallenness,” and on his privileging of authenticity and nearness. But it is Heidegger’s allegiance to reunification-within-the-origin which is most distressful—and most demanding of deconstruction. The same allegiance is revealed in the continual Heideggerian recourse to words prefixed by ‘ge-’, which connotes a gathering or grouping: e.g., *Geviert*, *ge-eignet*, *Ge-stell*, *Gemüt*, *Gedächtnis*, *Geschick*. ‘*Geschick*’ is especially noteworthy in the present context; it refers to the way that Being originates in epochs: *das Geschick des Seins* is a “destinal” sending of Being from a gathered origin.

But what, asks Derrida, if there is no assurance of such an origin—no gathering before (and even as) a *Geschick*, no “repose,” no “common ground”? What if the origin, rather than being a “grouped indivisibility,”<sup>6</sup> is always already divided from itself—so unredeemably that there is no prospect of reunification except by means of a metaphysical masquerade? What if all begins in difference without hope of “unity”; or more exactly in *différance*, which in its differing/deferring action “gathers itself only in dividing it-

<sup>4</sup> Hence the circle posed at the opening of “The Origin of the Work of Art”: “the artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. . . art is the origin of both artist and work” (reprinted in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1975), p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 49, 50, and 63, respectively for these citations.

<sup>6</sup> Derrida, “Sending: On Representation,” trans. Peter and Mary Ann Caws in *Social Research*, II, 2 (Summer 1982): 322.

self" (324)? What if such a *différance* at the place of the origin (and *taking the place* of origin) is "the condition for there being a *Geschick*, even a *Geschick* of Being, a dispensation of Being and time, of the present and of representation"?<sup>7</sup>

## II

*And of representation*: the issue of origins comes to a head in dealing with representation, "the metaphysical basis of the modern age."<sup>8</sup> According to Heidegger, representation of every sort is a matter of a subject's setting-before (*vor-stellen*) himself or herself an object (*Gegen-stand*) conceived as standing-over-against this same subject. Representing thus construed is in turn subsumed under the more general operation of "enframing" (*Ge-stell*), "that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve."<sup>9</sup>

It is altogether characteristic of Derrida to launch a deconstructionist reading of Heidegger by posing a question of translation: is "*repraesentatio*" adequately captured by "*Vorstellung*"? This is not merely "one problem of translation among others; it [raises] the problem of translation itself."<sup>10</sup> It raises the latter problem insofar as translation is thought to be a mere matter of representing an identical, unchanging sense in two (or more) natural languages (see p. 297). Such a view of translation presumes that there is: (a) such a thing in general as a "minimum and shared semantic kernel" (298); (b) such a kernel for the word "representation" in particular. Derrida questions both presumptions: on the one hand, the very notion of a semantic core is only one more instance of a transcendental signified, feigning to stand free from the aberrant itineraries of signifiers; on the other hand, the multiple meanings of 'representation' in its diverse epistemological, aesthetic, political, etc., acceptations defies reduction to a single operation of *vor-stellen* just as it resists synthesis under anything comparable to the gathering action of *Ge-stell*.

We are left with the irreducibility of the 're-' such as it is also found in other key words (e.g., *répétition*, *remarque*, *retrait*, *renvoi*, *restance*: these constituting a veritable *re-* series comparable in import to Heidegger's *ge-* group). Derrida fastens on this prefix and performs upon it a "double gesture": at once extracting it from the paleonym *repraesentatio* and grafting it back on with the extended

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* I have modified the translation slightly.

<sup>8</sup> *What Is Called Thinking?*, p. 83. Heidegger adds that this age "is not ending now but only just beginning" (*ibid.*).

<sup>9</sup> *The Question concerning Technology*, trans. Wm. Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> "Sending: On Representation," p. 302.

meaning of repetition.<sup>11</sup> *Repraesentatio* is ineluctably *re-praesentatio*—not as the mere reappearance of an originary (and now lost) (because past) presence, but as a generative act of repetition that “precedes” presence itself. In a word, “the presence-of-the-present [which is embodied in representations of all sorts] is derived from repetition and not the reverse.”<sup>12</sup> As repetition is the production of difference within the same—and not at all a return to the strictly self-identical—the “originary” activity of representation as *re-praesentatio* is disseminative rather than gathering or unifying.<sup>13</sup>

With this programmatic point in hand, Derrida can add that Heidegger’s epochal interpretation of the age of representation as derivative from the era of Greek presence—however admirably indirect this derivation may be<sup>14</sup>—itself depends on an unanalyzed model of representation as delegation-of-power. This lands Heidegger in an embarrassing ontological circle: representation (qua enframing or picturing) relies upon an onto-genesis or *Seinsgeschichte* which can be understood only on the basis of another sense of representation, which is left unclarified in Heidegger’s text.<sup>15</sup> The deconstructionist tactic is familiar: the subordinate term (i.e., *repraesentatio*) of a metaphysically determined binary opposition—a term supposedly derivative from the dominant term (presence as *Anwesenheit*)—is shown to be subversively operative within the opposition itself, being its secret motor and being even determinative of the dominant term, as in the comparable case of speech/writing. It is less a matter of the return of the repressed than of the insidious power of the repressed itself to undermine the repressing force from within: “representation” undermines “presence” at (and in) its own epochal game.

### III

No one gets away scot-free in the deconstructionist enterprise, not even the deconstructor. *Tua res agitur*: Deconstruction can be turned back against itself—in fact, Derrida has just demonstrated

<sup>11</sup> On the notion of “double gesture” (also called “double writing” and “double science”), see Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University Press, 1981), pp. 41, 65; on extraction-grafting-extension, see *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 52. This principle derives from the rule that “absolute ideality is the correlate of a possibility of indefinite repetition” (*ibid.*).

<sup>13</sup> On re-presentation as “originary” and as “older” than presence, see p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> On this point, see *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 39: a given *Geschick* “does not allow itself either to be logically and historiographically predicted or to be metaphysically construed as a sequence belonging to a process of history.”

<sup>15</sup> “It [is] difficult to avoid the question whether the relationship of the epoch of representation to the great Greek epoch is not still interpreted by Heidegger in a representative [i.e., representational-as-delegational] mode, as if the couple *Anwesenheit/repraesentatio* still dictated the law of its own interpretation, which does no more than to redouble and recognize itself in the historical text it claims to decipher” (“Sending: On Representation,” p. 322).

this in the case of Heidegger, himself a masterful deconstructor *avant la lettre*. It would not be difficult to show Derrida dismantling himself in turn, and in the very present instance. Must he not presuppose some core sense of 'representation' after all, if the critique of Heidegger as a crypto-representationalist is to work? If there is no such core or set of connected cores—if it is entirely a matter of "semantic mirage" (*Positions*, p. 6)—how can "representation" be coherently invoked in holding that Heidegger is making a suspicious use of it? To make his argument work, Derrida has to allow at least one meaning of 'representation' to be held constant, to wit, that of representation-qua-delegation. *This* meaning must endure in and through the juxtaposition of the deconstructing and the deconstructed texts—or else their *Nebeneinanderstellung* would be senseless indeed. Either such a perduring meaning is truly exceptional (requiring a special plea that Derrida does not make) or it is altogether normal [thereby calling into question Derrida's general project of subverting the very idea of an "invariable identity of sense" ("Sending," p. 303)]. One cannot have it both ways. Much the same problem is evident when the critical deconstructionist claim is made that "the idea of repetition and return . . . resides in *the very meaning* of representation" (*ibid.*, p. 308; *my italics*). Surely "the very meaning of representation" implies a constant semantic kernel akin to what Husserl would term, in his logocentric audacity, the "noematic nucleus" of sense.

The deconstructability of a deconstructionist is a much graver matter than, say, the psychoanalyzability of a psychoanalyst. The latter surprises no one, and would even be welcomed as salutary by any honest psychoanalyst. But an explicitly deconstructionist text aspires to a degree of self-probity and self-transparency that should leave no undeconstructed residue—at least none that would put into question a principal claim of that same text. Yet the fact is that Derrida cannot dispense with a notion that he has himself gone to pains to deconstruct. There is in Derrida's text, if not a return of the repressed, a deferred display of the deconstructed.

## IV

If 'representation' as employed by Heidegger has thus been rather thoroughly deconstructed—and this same deconstruction seen as subject to an auto-deconstruction within the deconstructing text—with what are we left? Derrida's answer is: *renvois*, pure referrals-back, "referrals."<sup>16</sup> Of these Derrida says, "as soon as there are *renvois*, and it is always already, something like representation no

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to Mary C. Rawlinson for this suggested translation of *renvois*. I would also like to thank Véronique Fóti for allowing me to read her insightful essay, "Representation and the Image: Between Heidegger, Derrida, and Plato" (forthcoming in *Man and World*).

longer waits [as in Heidegger's epochalism], and we must perhaps arrange to tell this story differently, from *renvois* of *renvois* to *renvois* of *renvois*, in a destiny which is never certain of gathering itself up, of identifying itself, or of determining itself" ("Sending," p. 325). In the perpetual deferment of *différance*, there are only traces making continual referrals—not references—to other traces.

Rather than worry about the barely suppressed metaphysics at play here (especially when the tracing action of the *renvoi* is said to be "the condition" (324) of Heideggerian *Geschick*), I would like to take up just one aspect of the deferring implicit in the *renvoi*: namely, its memorial, and still more specifically its commemorative, dimension. The issue of origins here becomes that of how (if at all) origins are to be commemoratively recalled. If "everything begins by referring back (*par le renvoi*), that is to say, does not begin" (*ibid.*), everything is in effect a memory trace—but of what? If not of a beginning, then of an (absent) origin. Everything begins by forgetting this origin:

The beginning of Western thought is not the same as its origin. The beginning is, rather, the veil that conceals the origin—indeed an unavoidable veil. . . . The origin keeps itself concealed in the beginning (*What Is Called Thinking?* 152).

On this view, when we think back to the origin(s) of Western philosophy, we think back not to an event in history (i.e., a beginning point) but to an event of withdrawal—ultimately the withdrawal of the ontological difference between Being and beings. Thinking back in this way—even though it is recalling a moment of oblivion—is for Heidegger a commemorative act, an act of *Andenken*. Otherwise put, in practicing *Andenken* we commemorate the trace (in a text) of the (withdrawal of the) trace of the ontological difference.

Nowhere is Derrida's acid skepticism more manifest than just here. Not only has the ur-trace of the ontological difference disappeared (as Heidegger acknowledges), but the very trace of this trace has vanished as well. Where Heidegger locates (and commemorates) the trace-of-the-ur-trace in, say, a fragment of Anaximander, Derrida will claim that the ur-trace has vanished *without a trace* in the pre-Socratic text. As against Heidegger's view that a text can gather traces that preserve forgotten traces, Derrida contends that, considered as a pure *renvoi*, no trace preserves (anything: any memory of any event, including an event of withdrawal). Far from making preservation possible, Anaximander's text exhibits "the *absolute erasure* of the 'early trace' of [the ontological] difference."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> "Ousia and Grammē: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*," trans. Alan Bass, in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University Press, 1972), p. 66; my italics. See also p. 23.

Such is the direct consequence of a doctrine of textual dissemination: even if a given text contains *renvois* to a concealed “origin,” these referrals in no way sustain this putative origin or its concealment. Recourse to commemorative thinking becomes pointless when origins are regarded as so hopelessly irretrievable. Hence the conspicuous omission in Derrida’s writings of anything like *Andenken*, which was for Heidegger an increasingly indispensable notion.<sup>18</sup> With the removal of any fore-gathering in an origin or in its traces comes a commensurate elimination of any after-gathering in commemoration.

## V

For both Derrida and Heidegger, the metaphysical tradition is a massive, inescapable fact; but their responses to this shared perception are revealingly different. Heidegger believes it both possible and desirable to go behind this tradition by commemorating its withdrawn origins in traces left in “early words concerning Being.”<sup>19</sup> Derrida holds out no such hope for circumvention and return; the *renvoi* can only gesture emptily back toward “origins” that seem more mocked than honored in the enclosure of their double marks. For we cannot commemorate what has not been deposited—gathered and preserved—in textual traces. In Derrida’s alternately despairing and exhilarating vision, a text, far from being an apt vehicle of commemoration, effaces the signs of its own generation. What Derrida says of the Heideggerian text he would also say of the text of Western metaphysics as a whole: it is “impossible to get around, for others and for myself.”<sup>20</sup> One cannot get *around* a text so as to locate its extratextual origin because in the very effort to do so one meets yet another text; any *soi-distant* “origin” is always already pre-inscribed in a text. In short, there is only the re-inscription of one text in another, the re-marking of one by the other—the tracery of intertextuality.

Here we must ask: in dealing with origins, is the choice limited to a nostalgic *Andenken* on the one hand and to an endless round of re-inscriptions on the other? I think not. Overlooked by Heidegger and Derrida alike is a third possibility, which I should like to call “transcription,” a word I borrow from Freud.<sup>21</sup> In transcription—as in its psychotherapeutic analogue, “transference”—com-

<sup>18</sup> Thus Heidegger came to claim that “Denken ist Andenken”: “thinking is commemorating.” [This is from *Was Heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1961), p. 159; the statement is omitted from the English translation.]

<sup>19</sup> *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Krell and Frank Capuzzi (New York: Harper, 1975), p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> “The *Retrait* of Metaphor” in *Enclitic*, II, 2 (Fall 1978): 10.

<sup>21</sup> See Letter 52 to Fliess (Dec. 6, 1896) for the notion of a continual “*Umschrift*” within the physical system.

memoration is at work, even if in no very visible manner. Indeed, unlike *Andenken*, such commemoration is often covert, since there may be no express remembrance of origins or tribute paid to them. Here we can concede to Derrida that “origins”—at least in philosophy—always come inscribed in texts even when these same texts do not refer to them explicitly. Instead of being restricted to sheer *renvois*, however, a transcriptive text can carry over (*trans-ferre*) an “origin” from a past text into its own textual space. Moreover, within such a space we are not constricted to an alternative of preservation or of re-inscription, each of which is static and inherently mummifying, a matter of ingathered indivisibility.<sup>22</sup> Precisely as *transcriptive*, the successor text is transformative; not being confined to repeating and re-marking, much less to gathering and preserving, it effects changes in the text of “origin” itself. This transformation—not to be confused with any merely progressive *Aufhebung*—is wrought by the transcriptive text’s commemorative activity.

Just as the death of loved ones can transform them into active internal presences in the quietly commemorative working-through effected in mourning, so philosophers can transcribe their fading or lost traditions, not excluding the metaphysical tradition, in ways that are at once continuously commemorative and yet quite self-critical. And as internalization has to be distinguished from mere incorporation in the intrapsychic realm,<sup>23</sup> so transcription has to be distinguished from *Andenken* and re-inscription, both of which operate by the incorporation of paleonyms. If “the ultimate business of philosophy is to preserve the force of the most elemental words in which Dasein expresses itself,”<sup>24</sup> it is part of the same enterprise to transform these words as well as to preserve and re-textualize them. It is a matter of letting the paleonyms resonate in new registers of their own “original” significance, rather than seeking nostalgically for their pre-metaphysical moorings or incorporating (“extracting”) them for use as “levers of intervention.”<sup>25</sup>

Of course we are not restricted to mourning—helpful as this may

<sup>22</sup> “In folding it back upon itself, the text thus *parts* (with) reference” (Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson [Chicago: University Press, 1981], p. 270; his italics).

<sup>23</sup> On internalization vs. incorporation, see Hans W. Loewald, “On Internalization,” in *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale, 1980) pp. 69–86; and Roy Schafer, *Aspects of Internalization* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968). *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962), p. 262; Heidegger underlines “force of the most elemental words.”

<sup>25</sup> On extracting and the lever of intervention, see *Positions*, p. 71.

be as a model<sup>26</sup>—for pertinent instances of transcription. Such instances lie open before us in the writings of Heidegger and Derrida themselves. For what reunites these two dissident thinkers and justifies their co-nomination as “Heidegger/Derrida” is a common capacity for creative transcription of certain philosophemes in the Western tradition. Consider only the way that in Heidegger’s text “presence” (*Anwesenheit*) transcribes *ousia*, “aspect” (*Gesicht*) conveys *idea*, and “letting-lie-together-before” (*beisammen-vor-liegen-Lassen*) translates *legein*. Here “translation” indeed becomes “transformation” (*Positions*, p. 20).

Or gaze finally at ‘*différance*’, a word which literally (and silently) in-scribes ‘difference’—the difference of Hegel and of Heidegger himself—into its internal structure. ‘Difference’ is also transcribed; it becomes other than itself by its conjunction with deferring, itself a transcription of Freud’s notion of deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*) and Levinas’ idea of the belated trace. The composite word ‘*différance*’ thus holds together—in one congenial gathering—Hegel and Heidegger, Freud and Levinas: com-memorating them despite its own divisive action. Instead of the decomposition of deconstruction we witness the re-composition realized in commemorative re-collection. If ‘*différance*’ does not “represent” these figures, much less refer to them, it nonetheless does remember them. It, this late/new word, does what Derrida himself, as tactician of deconstruction, disdains to do: it commemorates these very particular “origins” in the transcription accomplished by its own tracing.

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<sup>26</sup> Derrida has addressed issues of mourning and memory in recent (1984) lectures entitled “Mémoire(s),” written in commemoration of Paul de Man.