The Age of Thinking Writing

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Abstract

One can trace the challenge to philosophy represented by the technical evolution of the 'human sciences' or 'conjectural sciences' in the diverging ways by which it is treated in the texts of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan and others, during the mid to late 1960s. Derrida is writing partly in explicit response to the counterchallenge towards technology represented by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. In this article, I analyse the relationship between an emergent notion of historicity and the historically emerging techno-sciences as a way of putting the question of the age into relief. The question concerns the current role of philosophy in a heritage still awkwardly divided between a residually existential philosophical tradition and a cybernetic influence in contemporary cultural, political, and technological affairs.

Keywords: *age, epoch, repetition, cybernetics, historicity, Derrida, Heidegger, Lacan*

The Present (*époque présente*)

> Whoever believes that philosophical thought can dispense with its history by means of a simple proclamation will, without his knowing it be dispensed with by history; he will be struck a blow from which he can never recover, one that will blind him utterly.[1]

> History has always been conceived as the movement of a resumption of history, as a detour between two presences. But if it is legitimate to suspect this concept of history, there is a risk, if it is reduced without an explicit statement of the problem I am indicating here, of falling back into an ahistoricism of the classical type, that is to say, as a determined moment of the history of metaphysics. Such is the algebraic formality of the problem as I see it.[2]

The age, or the present epoch, as it appears to thinkers at a given moment, may be characterized in different ways. Martin Heidegger often refers to 'the epoch of Nietzsche's metaphysics', whereas Jacques Derrida identifies the age, in *De la*

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[1] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Volumes I & II*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 203.

[2] Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, trans., with an introduction and additional notes, by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 291.

grammatologie, as 'the epoch of Rousseau'.[3] Various attempts to grasp the historicity of an age in terms of its modes of political and intellectual 'governmentality' (borrowing the famous phrase from Michel Foucault) do not follow the more popular lines of a historical materialism.[4] In this article I identify the connection between Heidegger and Derrida as instrumental in questions we can pose today regarding the age in which we find ourselves.

How can one, in a preliminary calculation, respond to questions of a historical kind? One might address a given period of thought, once time enough has passed and given way to an intellectual distance no longer contingent on unanticipated future contexts that belong to its unfolding continuum of effects. The accidents of thought as it takes its chances in history might seem to recede behind more enduring formations in the remoteness of a retrospective glance. Yet, in even a preliminary computation, some hesitations cannot be avoided.

First, the designation 'period' carries with it a promise and always also disappointment in attempts to establish the rigorous boundaries that dates and times at best suggest. More often, a memorable date designates if anything a subversion or a rift in the encounter with the world event. And we rediscover as the symptom of this disappointment an endeavour to rethink the historical (i.e., what could be meant by a period of thinking) under terms like *époque* or *âge,* inscribed in the texts we will attempt to read, which even now count among the most rigorous meditations on history available to us. No promise of a rigorous boundary is implied. These terms suppose a more difficult and certainly a less obviously calculable sphere in which the immediate correspondences between contemporaries are mediated through *tendencies* that can at best be captured in designations, e.g., Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud.[5]

These titles do not so much name the discrete and unusual (exemplary, outstanding) texts of significant authors as they indicate the most radical or even contradictory instances of a more general field of thinking. The name functions as a peculiar synecdoche, which stands for a whole from which it deceptively stands out, a subversion or rift in the progress of the encounter that represents the field in its fault lines. A commentator can address an entire historicity of thought by attending to the slightly less daunting identification of a precise structural problem, e.g., in Derrida's phrase, 'the age of Rousseau'. Derrida writes:

> Within the age of metaphysics, between Descartes and Hegel, Rousseau is undoubtedly the only one or the first one to make a theme or a system of the reduction of writing profoundly implied by the entire age. (*DG*, 147/*OG*, 98)

From Plato's *Phaedrus* to Hegel's *Encyclopaedia,* the reduction of writing in distinct though often marginal places describes a regular theme throughout metaphysics.

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[3] Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 145; *Of Grammatology*, corrected ed., trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). Henceforth cited in text as *DG/OG,* with respective page numbers.

[4] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Pres, 1991). See also Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Foreword by Fredric Jameson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 11-12.

[5] 'The names of authors or of doctrines have here no substantial value. They indicate neither identities nor causes. It would be frivolous to think that "Descartes," "Leibniz," "Rousseau," "Hegel," etc., are names of authors, of the authors of movements or displacements that we thus designate. The indicative value that I attribute to them is first the name of a problem' (*DG*, 147-8/*OG*, 99).

Rousseau stands out in his repetition of the 'inaugural movement' by focusing the value of presence on *feeling*, and on 'self-presence within consciousness' (*DG*, 147/*OG*, 98). He brings the theme of the reduction of writing into the sphere of subjective experience. And by *theme* we are also to understand *system*. The theme of the reduction of writing reveals a defence system focused on preserving (later indemnifying, immunizing) the integrity of consciousness to itself.

Derrida adopts a formula, identified in his reading of Freud, for an apparent paradox that disguises the coherence of a desire.[6] This is the topic of 'The Violence of the Letter', in which he questions the idealization by Claude Lévi-Strauss of the Nambikwara as a society without writing and without history. We must expand the sense of writing, on rigorously rational grounds, beyond the ethnocentric myth that writing is essentially a matter of phonetic notation. Instead: 'all societies capable of producing, that is to say of obliterating, their proper names, and of bringing classificatory difference into play, practice writing in general' (*DG*, 147/*OG*, 109). Several issues are intimately linked. Rousseau's text, directed by its system of defence against writing, inhabits Lévi-Strauss's text on several levels. The ethnocentric prejudice, which takes its model of writing from alphabetic writing, as if in its ideal form writing as phonetic notation represented speech, leads to the supposition that societies without phonetic notation have no writing at all. The error implies the disqualification of all writing that does not follow the principles of phonetic notation. The greater value placed upon the western notion of writing coincides with an apparently contradictory scorn for writing in general. The contradiction follows the 'kettle logic' that Freud describes as guiding the work of dreams: 'The paradox is only apparent, one of those contradictions where a perfectly coherent desire is uttered and accomplished' (*DG*, 161/*OG*, 110). [7] The ethnocentric prejudice ('ethnocentric oneirism') is masked by what in Lévi-Strauss takes the form of an 'unconditional affirmation of the radical goodness of the Nambikwara' (*DG*, 173/*OG*, 118). At this point Lévi-Strauss evidently gathers strength from readings of Marx that yield to a discourse of naïve liberation, which maintains that a Marxist theory of 'the exploitation of man by man' can be directed by a social theory of writing. The gesture therefore requires two distinct sides and disguises a problem – which lies at the heart of my question here – in the understanding and use of historicity.

The identification of writing (the appearance in the world of the *graphie*) as the mark of a catastrophic break from an entirely oral language allows a vigorous thematics of exploitation and evil, which evidently recapitulates the defensive structures of Rousseau's texts. While this identification is presented as a liberationist and anti-ethnocentric discourse, it nonetheless depends on the ethnocentric model of phonetic writing: 'The traditional and fundamental ethnocentrism which, inspired by the model of phonetic writing, separates writing from speech with an axe, is thus handled and thought of as anti-ethnocentrism' (*DG*, 177/*OG*, 121). The theoretical separation lets Lévi-Strauss situate the crucial topics of chance and the accidental outside the field of

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[6] See also 'Structure, Sign and Play', in which Derrida writes, 'coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire' (279).

[7] 'By a process exposed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Saussure thus accumulates contradictory arguments to bring about a satisfactory decision: the exclusion of writing' (*DG*, 67/*OG*, 45). For the designation 'kettle logic' (after Freud's example), see also 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, trans., with an Introduction and Additional Notes, by Barbara Johnson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 111.

conscious self-presence, as Rousseau's defence system requires (writing is a historical accident that happens to oral cultures).[8] But second, the distinction between language and writing, and the division between people with writing and those without, on which the liberating progressivism depends, is effaced when a coherent account of systemic or historical difference is required: 'this division is effaced by him, the moment that one might ethnocentrically wish to make it play a role in the reflection on history and on the respective value of cultures' (*DG*, 177/*OG*, 121). At these moments, Lévi-Strauss tends to eradicate the difference between writing, as 'the criterion of historicity', and 'oral cultures'.

The Age of Rousseau

One tenacious problem involves the sense of a *system* that is inseparable from a *history*.[9] One must nevertheless provisionally maintain the separation, which we inherit as an opposition, so that in distinguishing systematic aspects from historical ones – 'let us pretend to believe in this opposition' (*DG*, 145/*OG*, 97) – a strange new domain emerges.[10] *History* and *writing* constitute the same philosophically emergent system, which combines calculable and incalculable values algebraically. To characterize it would be to combine system and writing in an emerging historicity. If one wanted to construct the model implied by this, it would involve a system whose ability to connect to the truth of the world event requires that it remain both powerfully programmatic and yet infinitely open, its computable and incomputable elements generated alongside each other.

The system involves an exemplary defensive structure that depends upon an ethnocentric concept of writing. Once the concept of writing has been expanded, a powerful alternative to the structures Derrida identifies as those of 'the age of Rousseau' begins to emerge. A concept of writing comprehended as historicity implies an entirely novel sense of the relation to history. If we continue to use the word *writing*, based on the prevalence of the traditional system of defence against it, its sense extends not only beyond all the established phenomena of language but includes all systems that have the possibility of repetition as their main operational property.

System as a concept, and systems as historical phenomena, can hardly be distinguished from the history within which such systems have begun to appear. History itself begins to be thought within the parameters of a thinking-history-as-system, even if this happens by accident. Saussure famously tried to exclude writing (as accidental exteriority) from the synchronic system of language, but when pressed to provide an exemplary case chose the writing system. And, despite its exemplary efficacy, the writing system makes it less easy to distinguish clearly between diachronic and synchronic linguistics, because its functionality depends entirely upon the

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[8] Levi-Strauss lacks Rousseau's rigour here, as Derrida later demonstrates in his reading of Rousseau, where an inevitable consequence of Rousseau's attempt to situate writing in the development of language results in the following: 'the concept of origin or nature is nothing but the myth of addition, of supplementarity annulled by being purely additive' (*DG*, 238/*OG*, 167).

[9] See Josué V. Harari, 'Critical Factions/Critical Fictions', in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 17-22. This vintage statement identifies in the structural approach an inherent problem, which gives rise to the interruption of certain models of post-structuralism: 'on the philosophical level, history, although not entirely dismissed, falls nevertheless under the tutelage of the *system*.' (20)

[10] See also *Positions*, trans. and annotated Alan Bass (London: Athlone, 1987) 21-2.

possibility of intrinsically senseless marks in repetition. The deforming accidents typical of diachronic language change come to afflict the idea of a synchronic system of differences. The mark can no longer be understood as if it were a signifier whose identity depended on the present totality of relations within the system, that is, as an instance of a general relativity of differences. Rather it is comprehended in terms of the way it differs from itself in its repetition. Not only can the *intentional* not be disentangled from the *mechanical* but also the mechanical, and the accidents it brings with it, begin to overflow and usurp the limited domain of intention itself, and so a conscious subject comprehends increasingly little of the situation on which it relies. This condition brings into further relief the role of a defensive system, which now requires an adjustment, or a supplementary addition, in an operation against (or defensive of) its own defensive structure.

The clearest image of a system that acknowledges the incalculable alongside the calculable begins to emerge in methodologies of formal logic. George Boole's *The Laws of Thought* from 1854 already indicates the future direction of logic. Ernst Schröder's three volumes of *Algebra der Logik* published between 1841 and 1902 outline it exhaustively. Edmund Husserl's 1891 review of *Algebra der Logic* provides a glimpse of the rift that opens between a logic of algorithms (rules that can be mechanically applied in unlimited instances of a given situation) and a logical language as it pertains to conscious thoughts. Husserl's lengthy criticism of Schröder takes him (and by extension modern logic) to task for failing to distinguish adequately between pure deduction and more mechanical calculations: 'calculation is a blind procedure with symbols, according to mechanically reiterated rules for the transformation and the transposition of the signs in the respective algorithm.'[11] Husserl's distinction, by which he maintains a separate sphere for the work of thought, in principle independent of its calculating methodologies, legislates the border between *language* and *algorithm*, between logic and calculation, between the use of signs as symbols of thought and calculative procedures that substitute signs for signs. The use of a sign system whose function is to 'accompany thought as its expression' must be completely distinguished from the reiteration of rules in a calculation:

> The peculiar function of *language* consists in the symbolic expression of mental phenomena, which expression we in part need for the communication of those phenomena, and in part need as a sensuous support for our own inner movements of thought. […] The peculiar function of the *calculus* consists in its being a method for the symbolic derivation of conclusions within a certain sphere of knowledge. Thus it is an art which, through an appropriate symbolization of thoughts, substitutes a calculation process – i.e., a rule governed process of transposing and replacing signs with signs.[12]

Derrida recovers Husserl's struggle with the two sides of symbolic language both in his *Introduction to 'The Origin of Geometry'* and in *Speech and Phenomena*, which together demonstrate Husserl's lifelong albeit variously modulated preoccupation with writing, which begins with the question of mathematical theory, passes through the founding texts of phenomenology, and returns at the end, with the *Crisis* texts, to questions of mathematical objects, but merged now with the new theme of historico-

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[11] Edmund Husserl, 'Review of Ernst Schröder's *Vorlesungen über die Algebra der Logik*', in *Early Writings in the Philosophy of Logic and Mathematics*, trans. Dallas Willard (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 55-6.

[12] Husserl, 69.

teleological thought. Unlike the history of mathematical logic in its more mainstream, not to say more practical, analytic procedures, Husserl always maintains the structure (which marks him out as an exemplary figure of 'the age of Rousseau') instantiating a system of defence against the threat of indubitably useful mechanical or autotelic calculations taking over entirely the role of deduction and of creative consciousness. The theme of a transcendental phenomenology connects it indissociably to the metaphysical theme of defence. And it implies a historicity, within which Husserl remains at odds with both formalism and historicism in the practices of knowledge.

An Encounter with the Real

A second hesitation delays the initial reckoning by raising the stakes regarding what I identified as a structural problem, that is, in posing the challenge to scholars who must decide whether the *époque* or *âge* in question can indeed be separated into a historical closure, thus allowing them to discover objective criteria for evaluating its elements. If scholars remain within an *époque* whose closure has not yet been formed, then the hindrance to their calculating the age remains insurmountable, for such a closure would always have been directed purposively towards their present.[13]   And without such a closure the *époque* itself would stand in the way of a clear enough sense of the *present*, or rather the *époque présente* would not be distinct enough from the historical moment under review to achieve the objective distance that a calculation requires.

It might seem simpler to give up on the project of a preliminary calculation altogether. We are further encouraged to do this by the seeming dissolution or confusion, already underway by the 1960s, of an entire series of imagined or at least once firmly perceived coherences: of traditions, of histories, of the concept of knowledge, of ethnicity, of regional identities, of class as well as ethnic and sexual identity, of identity *per se*, of any security in decisions about the truth or falsity of statements, of the concept of truth *as such*. And while there may be good reasons for the presumption that such dissolutions could be regarded as *progressive,* on a possibly ethical level and certainly a political one, a nagging limitation emerges with the observation that such hallucinatory consistencies do not simply disappear. If anything, they tend to return in either obscure or virulent forms (in e.g., economic nationalism, fundamentalism, scientific and techno-scientific determinism, arbitrarily hierarchic organizations, innumerable structures of inequality). Even if we accept that the recurrence of older forms, which marks the current cultural environment, merely *simulate* older forms in a more extreme manner, the theme of *simulation* connects us to the history we are attempting to figure. And the concept of *truth* counts as a *return*, even when it is evidently mobilized as a perlocutionary abstraction to ground performances of truth propositions that have no relation to the adequate conditions for deciding truth or falsity in traditional senses.

One punishing trait of this apparent dissolution lies in the question of what happens to a thinking tied to the progression of what we might (and some still) call

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[13] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Utility and Liability of History of Life', in *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), offers a controversial formulation of the historical problem in terms of the need to establish a thinking capable of limiting the ahistorical tendency but without allowing history itself to become excessive: 'in an excess of history the human being ceases once again, and without that mantle of the ahistorical he would never have begun and would never have dared to begin.' (91)

European ontology, once we face up to the historical inevitability of its erosion, not only in philosophical manoeuvres that put ontological categories into suspense but also in global events that render the traditional categories insecure, even irrelevant. In the wake of a growing insignificance of the terms of the classical tradition (those of Western metaphysics or European ontology), even those texts, movements, schools, kinds of intervention, that retrospectively one can say signal the end of the endurance of classical thought might seem less pertinent today than they were fifty years earlier. The regional emphasis shifts away from Europe, as Europe itself fragments and is reconstituted in sometimes new and sometimes doggedly antique formations and divisions. And the theoretical frameworks that evolve to comprehend incessantly emergent forms of knowledge increasingly adopt the formal structures of their own historical environment: the radicalization of computing, the ubiquitous new media, the freshly authoritative grounds of the physical and life sciences, the disruptive, unpredictable contingencies and auto-regulative properties attached to the movement of economic globalization.

Giving up on calculation describes the popular response to more than fifty years of intellectual activity in the wake of what is still called – to my mind, with great insecurity – 'French poststructuralism'. A category in intellectual history can serve as an illusory comfort in a pronouncement disguised as a calculation. And such comprehension is often licensed by the idea (which like *truth* can always be an *abstraction*) of *the incalculable*. Here's Slavoj Žižek, writing in 1989:

> Post-structuralism claims that a text is always 'framed' by its own commentary: the interpretation of a literary text resides on the same plane as its 'object.' Thus the interpretation is included in the literary corpus: there is no 'pure' literary object that would not contain an element of interpretation, of distance towards its immediate meaning.[14]

To identify Žižek as an exemplary voice is to risk reducing to absurdity the entire field of questions on which I have been embarking. Despite the influence he may have had on the current intellectual scene, this description (which he pins largely on Derrida) has a farcical flavour. Nevertheless, in an admittedly parodic and simplified form it captures something of the problem posed by the historical terminology of *âge* and *époque*. The structure described by the relation between commentary and text captures the popular or received idea of a deconstructive reading, as exhibited at least on a casual reading of Derrida's 'Structure, Sign and Play' (1966). If we wish to get beyond the casual reading, we might nevertheless confront the signals that *give rise* to these kinds of understanding.

Another reason for referring to Žižek here is that rhetorically his *criticism* (which is also a defence of Jacques Lacan against a perceived critical assault) serves to separate Lacan, for whom he would be the advocate, as an exception to the so-called poststructuralist tendency. This allows him to make an extraordinary claim:

> Lacan always insists on psychoanalysis as a truth experience: his thesis that truth is structured like a fiction has nothing at all to do with a post-structuralist reduction of the truth-dimension to a textual 'truth-effect.'[15] (*SO*, 154).

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[14] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 153.
[15] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 154.

Žižek produces a performative border within the field, on one side of which resides post-structuralism and the dissolution of the classical concept of truth, and on the other lies the Lacanian (psychoanalytical) experience of truth. Yet, in Lacan, is it not as a performative that truth functions? 'I always speak the truth', says Lacan in *Television*, 'Not the whole truth, because there's no way to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real.'[16] Truth speaks in an enunciative modality and therefore as a function of repetition predicated on what is missing from it. Žižek's reckoning with 'the grand post-structuralist assumption', that there is no metalanguage (no purely theoretical formulation of a position), involves showing that the post-structuralist position can indeed be clearly articulated, i.e., in his own parodic (and fictional) account of the irrational position he criticises: in which a theory claims there can be no theory and creates an anti-theoretical discourse to prove the point. His universe (or his universal discourse) is that of the university in its institutionalisation of *theory* as a series of relatively discrete and, in this way, teachable *theories*.[17] However, because Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* makes exactly the kind of historical calculation that I am questioning, it will allow a better impression of what's at stake.

The *border*, false as it might be, suggests that there is something significant in the difference between a discourse that puts truth into question and one that is grounded upon it. The disappearance of gatekeepers in domains of information that still nevertheless operate on the *abstraction* truth is among the most unsettling characteristics of the age (whatever designation we give it). The dissolution of aesthetic borders between documents, governments, entertainments, fictional and historical narratives, and so on, at once raises the stakes for truth in propositions where the performance of statements of truth or falsity often accomplish a deterrence effect that plunges the idea of truth into its own abyss. Whether this is because of the automatism of the media or as an effect of the irrational circulation of capital, it is certain that both operate by way of a mutual escalation.

In this respect the 'experience of truth', in Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, which aligns with the inaugurating yet unthinkable 'encounter with the real', escapes both the implacable movement of a symbolic order (repetitions) and the counter-rational experience of imaginary desire (misunderstandings), yet underlies the connections and dissociations of both as their somewhat programmatic – or programmable – material cause. Derrida addresses the question of this *encounter* throughout 'Le facteur de la vérité' and discovers the ways in which it animates Lacan's text, evidently against (and neglected in) his intention. The 'truth' in Lacan's text breaks through, in Derrida's reading, in the signs of a historicity of psychoanalysis, through which it pursues a

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[16] Jacques Lacan, 'Television', trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, in *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: Norton, 1990), 3. Lacan here recalls the topic of 'The Freudian Thing: The Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis', in which the thing, or cause, speaks of itself in the words of Freud: 'I, truth, speak'. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: Norton, 2006), 340.

[17] Žižek's description of post-structuralism echoes discussions found in Robert Young's 'Post-Structuralism: An Introduction', from *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader* (London: Routledge, 1981). Young writes, for instance: 'Theory has now become precisely that which prevents the formation of a stable metalanguage by a constant self-subversion' (7). The same volume contains Barbara Johnson's 'The Frame of Reference: Poe Lacan, Derrida', which makes a case similar to the one that Žižek relies on in his defence of Lacan against Derrida (223-5).

detour before returning to Freud (*the Real*).[18] The question, in this case, would not concern the difference between a theory grounded on the experience of truth (psychoanalysis) and a truth-denying discourse (deconstruction) but rather it would come down on the question of historicity as the locus of truth.

It is time, then, to return to the question of the *age*. The fault line dividing articulable theories that posit a concept of truth as their basis and discourses that put truth into question animates Heidegger's 1964 text on the 'end of philosophy'.[19] A space opens, fracturing the concept of history, between *thinking* and *writing*, in which their inevitable and mutual antagonism produces a complex and perpetually open system. They collide in ways that provide a glimpse of a future that has not ceased to arrive.

The Cybernetic Connection

A cybernetic connection in French thought is well established by the mid-1960s, with especially Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, and Gilbert Simondon (in different ways but often in correspondence) engaging with the deeper technical consequences of ideas of complexity and feedback systems as they were discussed (during the 1940s and 1950s) by the multidisciplinary cybernetics group, which included Gregory Bateson, Julian Bigelow, Margaret Mead, John von Neumann, Claude Shannon, and Norbert Wiener, among others. The machinery of the cybernetic system (as Lacan, for instance, had conceived it) operates in an open disregard for distinctions between machines, animals, attitudes, social organizations, and so on, and between living and dead 'organisms'. One of the promises of cybernetics, then, involves a dislodgement of the conscious thinking subject from the locus of expressive intentionality and conscious oversight. In his 1954-55 Seminar, Lacan gathers some ideas from cybernetics in his explanation of the symbolic order, explicitly contrasted with that of imaginary desires:

> Why are we so astonished by these machines? It may have to do with the difficulties Freud encountered. Because cybernetics also stems from a reaction of astonishment at rediscovering that this human language works almost by itself, seemingly to outwit us.[20]

Lacan regards cybernetics, in its identification of the semi-automatic operation of communication and the role of the symbol in the transfer of information, as exemplary of the advent of the unconscious since Freud. By 1966, and the publication of the *Écrits,* the 'fundamental concept' for the way the unconscious operates in the symbolic is *repetition*, especially as it comes to light under the question of the *Wiederholungszwang* (the compulsion to repeat), which Lacan renames the 'repetition automatism'.[21]

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[18] Jacques Derrida. 'Le facteur de la vérité', in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans., with an Introduction and Additional Notes, by Alan Bass (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 411-96. Lacan says as much in 'The Freudian Thing', when 'the truth in Freud's mouth' admits '"I am thus the enigma of she who slips away as soon as she appears"' (*Écrits,* 340). Significantly Lacan starts this lecture with a complaint against ahistoricism in North American psychoanalysis.

[19] Martin Heidegger, 'La fin de la philosophie et la tâche de la pensée', in *Kierkegaard vivant. Colloque organisé par l'Unesco à Paris du 21 au 23 avril 1964* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 69.

[20] Jacques Lacan, *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-55,* trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 119.

[21] Lacan, *Écrits*, 11.

Repetition, as it is worked out in the seminar of 1964, gathers under its law some key concepts: *Wiederkehr*, 'recurrence' or 'return', which in Freud suggests a kind of non-Platonic recollection, and *Wiederholen*, 'repeating', which is related to *Erinnerung*, remembering.[22] In the 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"' in *Écrits* (which dates from 1956), Lacan establishes a 'truth' of psychoanalysis in the open system of repetitions as constitutive of a subject.[23]

Diverse operations depend upon varieties of *repetition* (recurrence, return, regulation, diversion, disjunction, dispersion, dissemination, iteration and so on). Scientific and philosophical discourses participate in the challenge to philosophy represented by the technical evolution of the 'human sciences'. Lacan proposes the new name 'conjectural science'.[24] But intense research in communication theory, information theory, systems theory, structuralism and semiotics, reveals the breadth of the challenge.

The UNESCO collection, *Kierkegaard vivant*, which appeared in June 1966, gathers texts by leading figures associated with the French existentialist tradition, as well as specialist Kierkegaard scholars and other luminaries of the contemporary intellectual scene. The papers had first been presented two years earlier at the Paris colloquium dedicated to the works of Kierkegaard, featuring key figures including Emmanuel Levinas, Jean Hyppolite and Lucien Goldmann. Gathered alongside the texts of Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Wahl, Karl Jaspers, Jeanne Hersch, and others, there is the text by Martin Heidegger (presented by Jean Beaufret) briefly referred to previously: '*La fin de la philosophie et la tâche de la pensée*' ('The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking').

Heidegger's text is not entirely out of place in such a collection. His contribution (which would be published in German in 1969 as 'Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens') proposes a new rubric for the task of thinking. The new title, replacing *Sein und Zeit,* would be *Anwesenheit und Lichtung* (presence and lighting/clearing).[25] But with the several senses of the word *Ende* – as 'place', as in the phrase 'from one end to the other', and as *completion*, meaning 'gathering into the most extreme possibilities'[26] – Heidegger's text seems to challenge its contemporaries, which otherwise celebrate arguably outmoded or defeated philosophical tasks. It comes as a call for an entirely altered *task* of thinking in the present historicity of a dispersion of philosophy into technical sciences. The familiar polemic proposes the task of thinking against an emergent 'fundamental science which is called cybernetics' (*EP*, 58). Equating 'cybernetic' with 'technological', Heidegger has intensified his lifelong interrogation of the manipulations of a scientific-technological world and now proposes that a task for thinking must remain concealed, as it always was, but now within the irrationality of a world dominated at 'the end of philosophy' by a 'cybernetic function' (*EP*, 58). Heidegger's allusions recall the lexicon of control, communication,

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[22] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1979), 48-9.

[23] Lacan, *Écrits*, 12.

[24] Lacan, *Fundamental Concepts*, 43

[25] Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969), 73-4. The term *Lichtung* lives on by way of interesting controversies over its meaning. See Richard Cocobianco, '*Lichtung*: The Early Lighting', *Engaging Heidegger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 87-103.

[26] Martin Heidegger, 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking', in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper, 1972), 57. Henceforth cited in text as *EP*, with page number.

information, system, and government.[27] But the terminology belongs, as its culminating historical symptom, to a broader historicity of techno-scientific tendencies that Heidegger's philosophy thematises, with increasing intensity, from before the publication of *Sein und Zeit* in 1927, and more prominently from the late 1930s onwards. This is one of the several signs of the 'legitimate completion of philosophy', where philosophy develops into 'independent sciences, which, however, interdependently communicate among themselves' (*EP*, 58). Philosophical thought, with its always implicit guidance by ontological principles, would have amounted to a historical science of the elusive ground of what appears, but it *breaks down* now into a technical ensemble of relatively independent studies of technical phenomena that depend each time on their mutual relativity.

The world of technical objects instantiates the end of philosophy. And the culmination of scientific and industrial tendencies leads to a new world of information systems. A technical object, which depends on a relative individuation from other technical objects, operates as a system (animal, human, machine, and so on) relating to other systems by explicable rules of systematisation and individuation.[28] Knowledge itself, Heidegger suggests, begins to follow the formal laws of the systems it projects as its object world. The task of thinking would therefore be neither philosophy, its inevitably erroneous identification in some *beyond* of the grounds for what can appear, nor science, a technical observance of the laws of arrangement and the rules of play that govern its objects. 'We are thinking', Heidegger writes, 'of the possibility that the world civilization which is just now beginning might one day overcome the technological-scientific-industrial character as the sole criterion of man's world sojourn.' (*EP*, 60) The task, clearing a path for thought to follow, reconstitutes an ancient arrangement defensively organized against the threat of systemic domination.

The Age of Nietzsche's Metaphysics

Heidegger begins '*La fin de la philosophie et la tâche de la pensée*' with a question: '*What does it mean that philosophy in the present age has entered its final stage?*' (*EP*, 55) The paper proceeds by unfolding first the task of philosophy, which deepens the main question of *Sein und Zeit*, concerning the *ground* of beings, and puts it in touch with the question of the end [*das Ende, la fin/stade terminal*]. *Anwesenheit* und *Lichtung* now stand in for *Sein* und *Zeit* in an account of how existing beings are brought to presence in their own way. Being itself, the ground of beings, must show itself as presence. Philosophy therefore (and this now means metaphysical thinking in all its stages) *grounds* the *ground* of beings. Beyond philosophy, if there is a beyond, the task of thinking remains that of grounding the ground. But at the stage where philosophy enters its end, the present age, the task of thinking must respond to the demands of the present, and this requires an analysis. The theme of the *Seinsfrage*, the question of being that *grounds* thinking, silently informs the presentation here in

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[27] Especially in Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: on Control in the Animal and the Machine*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961).
[28] See, for instance, Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Ninian Melamphy with a Preface by John Hart (London, Ontario: University of Western Ontario, 1980): 'All technical objects with recurrent causality in their associated milieu should be separated from each other and should be connected in such a way as to preserve the mutual independence of their associated milieus' (71).

recalling the way an *Umwelt,* which comes to presence as always ready-to-hand or available for use, becomes distinguished from the presencing of what presences.

Where in *Sein und Zeit* a professedly authentic account of time qualifies the ontological meaning of being as the locus of a futural repetition, *Lichtung* now qualifies *Anwesenheit* as a sphere in which *coming to* and *withdrawing from* shifts between *present appearance* and *the present clearing* on which appearance is grounded. It is an old formula: what gives removes the giving from the gift. The task of thinking (and thinking being: *es gibt*) involves shifting attention from the gift to the giving. A swift chronicle of stages in the historicity of metaphysics brings us up to date:

> [T]he ground has the character of grounding as the ontic causation of the real, as the transcendental making possible of the objectivity of objects, as the dialectical mediation of the movement of the absolute spirit, of the historical process of production, as the will to power positing values. (*EP*, 56)

The first stage, not identified by Heidegger in this paragraph, implicitly belongs to Plato, because, as he goes on to say, all stages are 'changing forms' of Platonism: 'Plato's thinking remains decisive in changing forms. Metaphysics is Platonism' (*EP*, 57). Beginning instead with Aristotle, Heidegger alludes to the altering forms by which metaphysics historically *departs* from what is present in its attempts each time to establish the *ground* of presence, the locus or topos of that which presences. Heidegger consistently (but also in a subtly changing lexicon) posits as *historical* the sphere from which phenomena come to presence and pass away. Complicating the sense of the *historical* Heidegger always insists on the *historicity* [*Geschichtlichkeit*], by which history itself comes to presence. By historicity, we are to understand a condition that is not susceptible to historicising. Rather it *grounds* whatever observations a historical being can make concerning historical phenomena, which is to say, concerning whatever can appear of a history. In the age of the archive, for instance, history appears in the form of the database, in long-term storage and as ready for use in the recapitulation of its documents. So, the historicity of metaphysics becomes available in the changing forms by which it is repeated from the standpoint of the *Zeitalter* or *époque présente*. When philosophy enters its end, the age itself forms the *Umwelt* or *Lichtung* that brings its history to presence. The forms by which the history of metaphysics comes to presence therefore follow possibly the most consistent concept in all of Heidegger's philosophizing: that of the *Wiederholung*, the repetition.

Wiederholung

Heidegger had already developed the theme of the *Wiederholung* by 1924, in the lecture 'The Concept of Time', Although he analyses it more thoroughly in *Sein und Zeit*, the explicit connection between *Geschichtlichkeit* and *Wiederholung*, between historicity and repetition, determines the ways in which Heidegger approaches the question of how beings come to presence. If history comes to presence by way of repetition, then repetition is also the resource by which a so-called 'basic problem' can be recovered. *Wiederholung* again comes to play a key role in the 'Kant Book' (*Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*), where, as in *Sein und Zeit*, it serves both as an irreducible ground of being and, more instrumentally, as a methodological resource for philosophy:

> By the *Wiederholung* of a basic problem, we understand the opening-up of its original, long concealed possibilities, through the working-out of which it is transformed. In this way it

first comes to be preserved in its capacity as a problem. To preserve a problem, however, means to free and keep watch over those inner forces which make it possible, on the basis of its essence, as a problem.[29]

One must get past a kind of diffidence in the definition of this procedural principle. The identification, earlier in the course, of how Kant's *Critique* borrows its point of departure from the unimagined future of its incipient progress makes the connection between procedure and topic clearer. Time itself is regarded in its essential form as repetition, wherein the temporal category 'the future' designates the possibility of repetition. And in the same gesture historicity, as inextricable from time, is regarded also as the possibility of repetition with respect to whatever can appear of history. The present age will be nothing but the coming to presence of the repetition of a past that was itself never present as such. The qualities of a disturbing sphere of being emerge: in any system governed by repetition nothing is older or more original, and nothing newer or more recent than repetition. In such systems, the present always therefore arrives from the future. The analysis of temporality in *Being and Time* treats the future (*Zukunft*) in terms of anticipation. The potentiality *for* being implies that *Dasein* comes towards itself ('*auf sich zukommen lässt*') in the structural form of the *ahead-of-itself* (*Sich-vorweg*). [30] The 'inner forces' that make a problem possible, which demand preservation, and which we come towards as our own future, occupy the locus (if one can say this) of repetition itself. This is a question of the preservation of the future in a repetition that opens, enters, clears, the space of repetition as such. Thinking involves locating a persistent problem, the problem of *time* or of *being* in general, but more pointedly the problem of the present age, and elaborating the conditions, and the repetition of those conditions, that come to presence in a way that perpetuates the problematical locus of the future. In this way, Heidegger interprets a basic (grounding or founding) problem of metaphysics as a possibility of its future. The legacy or tradition can be read in terms of its *Geschick*: not its destiny but its open possibilities of destination; not as fate in any of the traditional senses but as sending forth in a sense closer to that of telecommunication.

The Six Epochs

After Plato, the stages follow familiar determinations: the Aristotelian determination of the real by the causes; the Kantian critical philosophy, which posits the unavailable *transcendental* as the ground of objective knowledge; the Hegelian *Aufhebung* by which the *Geist* (Spirit) appears only in its own perpetual externalization; the historical materialism of Marx and Engels; and finally, the *Will to Power* of Nietzsche's philosophy, which determines the present by projecting it into the future. So much remains *implicit* here but it is a well-rehearsed narrative – for example, it recapitulates the chronicle that features throughout the *Nietzsche* lectures – and as such it provides a kind of shorthand for the systematic *Destruktion* of metaphysics already advertised but incomplete in *Sein und Zeit*. And the narrative inscribes an almost perfectly geometrical circle, beginning with Plato and concluding with Nietzsche's overturning of Plato.

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[29] Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 143.
[30] Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1927) 336-7. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962).

Heidegger's stages follow, with the approximate precision of geometry, the six stages in the section from Nietzsche's *Götzen-Dämmerung* that relate the fabulous account of 'How the "True World" Finally became a Fable.'[31] The inevitably satirical tone of Nietzsche's stages, which begin with the Platonic *idea* ('I, Plato, am the truth') and culminate in the opening into Zarathustra ('high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA'), threatens to put the passage into a self-reflexive abyss.[32] Indeed, commentators have identified the passage as referring, credibly enough, to Nietzsche's own development out of metaphysics.[33] These kinds of observation, by way of even quite careful analogical readings, can be extended to a general account of philosophical progress, which would move from a serene wisdom in the face of immediate experience, via the work of the negative, towards a perfection in comprehending the whole, philosophical history now as an allegory of philosophy in the irreducible sphere of the repeatable.

The 'error' in positing a ground in some *elsewhere* (*topos ouranios, topos noetos*) takes the form of a dichotomy between *truth* and *appearance*, where one begins to regard the sphere of mere appearance as illusory. As the illusory world displaces the true one in Nietzsche's fable, it threatens to erase it altogether. But without the 'true', which is rejected once it no longer serves a purpose, no grounds exist for the 'illusory'. Nietzsche presents the dissolution of both worlds at the sixth and final stage of the fable: '*we got rid of the illusory world along with the true one!*'[34] At this point, we face a *preliminary* sense of the word 'deconstruction', as Derrida uses the term to refer to both Nietzsche and Heidegger from the mid-60s (not, then, what it comes to mean as Derrida's career proceeds[35]). Rather than settle for a reversal of the hierarchy between what appears and its nonsensuous ground, we look forward to a complete alteration in the structure and a trans-valuation of the terms. Heidegger concludes his lecture, 'Nietzsche's Overturning of Plato' (from the course delivered in 1936-37, first published in 1961), by extrapolating from the apparent nihilism of the final stage, where 'everything vanishes into the vacuous nothing', an implicit de-constructive alteration:

> A path must be cleared for a new interpretation of the sensuous on the basis of a new hierarchy of the sensuous and nonsensuous. The new hierarchy does not simply wish to reverse matters with the old structural order, now reverencing the sensuous and scorning

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[31] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 171. Nietzsche's title, which mocks Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods), contributes to the sense of overturning that dominates this section.

[32] Martin Heidegger, 'Nietzsche's Overturning of Platonism', *Nietzsche Volumes I & II*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1991): 'the form by which Nietzsche relates the history might easily tempt us to take it all as a mere joke, whereas something very different is at stake here' (203).

[33] Heidegger sees Nietzsche's philosophy appear in the fifth epoch, but there remains some controversy about this. Maudemarie Clark, in 'Nietzsche's Later Position on Truth', in *Nietzsche*, ed. John Richardson and Brian Leiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), notes that 'No one denies that Nietzsche places his own philosophy in stage 6. The relationship of his philosophy to the other two stages seems less clear.' (73)

[34] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 171.

[35] Already in the texts of 1967 one can trace a distinction between a writing that 'inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in the logos' (*OG*, 10), and 'the movements of deconstruction' at work in the texts of Nietzsche and Heidegger (*OG*, 24). These two senses give way to the more complex analogous arrangement where a system of defence adopts the resources that it is defending itself against (*OG*, 233).

the nonsensuous. It does not wish to put what was at the very bottom at the very top. A new hierarchy and new valuation mean that the ordering structure must be changed.[36]

By 1940 Heidegger's idea of the clearing retains the urgency of the task of a thinking that would clear the path for a reinterpretation, but Nietzsche himself remains, as the overturning of Plato, the culmination of metaphysics rather than a step beyond. The task now involves a consideration of history in the way *Being* has entered an epoch of machination:

> The age of the fulfilment of metaphysics – which we descry when we think through the basic features of Nietzsche's metaphysics – prompts us to consider to what extent we find ourselves in the history of being. It also prompts us to consider – prior to our finding ourselves – the extent to which we must experience history as the release of being into machination.[37]

The theme of the age ('the age of Nietzsche's metaphysics') becomes more concrete with Heidegger's meditations on technology and cybernetics, and the historicity of the age emerges more clearly as determined by performative technologies: technologies whose productive calculability informs the image of the world. In this case, we face another nuance in the motif of repetition, a motif that more than any other stands out in the texts that interest me here. The *Wiederholen* of a basic problem (as the means to an interpretation of the historicity of an age) is now captured, if not caught and struggling within a sphere that is dominated by repetitions of an increasingly mechanical, regulative, and oppressive kind. But in a world governed from end to end by repetition, only repetition itself can offer a mode by which the unimagined future also finds its place.

Thinking Writing

Picking up on Heidegger's response to the challenge of cybernetics, Derrida begins to analyse and extend the implications of Heidegger's polemic in the first chapter of *De la grammatologie*, 'La fin du livre et le commencement de l'écriture', treating Heidegger's text to nuanced repetitions as it moves into what we might cautiously begin to recognize as an epochal shift in how thinking may be understood and accomplished. The field that Derrida begins to outline includes a special relationship, which implicates the theory of cybernetics in a more general structure. If, on the one hand, 'the inflation of the sign "language" is the inflation of the sign itself', and so fails to remove from its own sphere the principle (the sign) on which the sphere (language) gathers its elements, then, on the other hand, 'everything […] gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name of writing (*DG*, 15-16/*OG*, 6) One implication bears on Heidegger's adherence to language as the 'house of being' and, e.g., to the coupling of world and earth, with which he replaces the form/matter, intelligible/sensible and idea/word dichotomies.[38] Even more seriously, the thought of a writing, which takes theoretical mathematics as a significant point of

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[36] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Volumes I & II*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 209.

[37] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Volumes III & IV*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 196.

[38] See Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. and ed. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-56.

departure, and which boasts a very general application, poses a great threat to values associated with the philosophical tradition: mind, thought, soul, life, memory, humanity. At the root of the threat lies a writing that not only records, repeats, notates, documents any activity with which it is associated but which also describes 'the essence and the content of those activities themselves' (*DG*, 19/*OG*, 9). There is no doubt then that writing in its ancient sense (Plato and Aristotle both demonstrate indisputably defensive gestures against it) proceeds in its current historicity from the widespread technical and scientific approval of its most powerful properties, quite independently of the sphere of the voice, to which it was mythically, albeit never securely, attached:

> And thus we say 'writing' for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not, and even when what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also pictorial, musical, sculptural 'writing.' One might also speak of athletic writing, and with even greater certainty of military or political writing in view of the techniques that govern those domains today. […] It is also in this sense that the contemporary biologist speaks of writing and pro-gramme in relation to the most elementary processes of information in the living cell. (*DG*, 19/*OG*, 9)

The expansion of 'writing' allows a vast and rapidly emerging field of technical performances to be gathered under a single rubric. It includes, in addition to the hyperbolic antagonisms of media performances, shapes of biopower, of biopolitics, of biotech and pharmacology, which against the dream of a natural state untainted by technical additions, provides the very resources for the defence of the self that Derrida discovers at work in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's text, when the dangerous supplements of *sex* and *life* are revealed as technical processes in defence against overwhelming sex and murderous life itself (*DG*, 223/*OG*, 155).[39]

When theoretical mathematics offers a significant model for 'writing' in general, we begin to fall away from not only older but also even quite contemporary assumptions about writing as phonetic notation, or as pictographic, logographic, or syllabic representation. But, again more seriously, with 'theoretical mathematics' we fall away from the model of the sign, of a sensible signifier and intelligible signified:

> Its writing – whether understood as a sensible *graphie* (and that already presupposes an identity, therefore an ideality of its form, which in principle renders absurd the so easily admitted notion of the 'sensible signifier'), or understood as the ideal synthesis of signifieds or a trace operative on another level, or whether it is understood, more profoundly, as the *passage* of the one to the other – has never been absolutely linked with a phonetic production. (*DG*, 20/*OG*, 9-10)

The terms of theoretical linguistics, straining at their limits, crumble into the algorithmic logic of computation in this passage. Written marks are not mere signifiers, but they are formal idealities, syntheses of formal idealities, repeatable in illimitable situations and capable of operating each time as the trace of other ideal syntheses. And mathematical symbolism, as *passage between* idealities, leaves us with a system

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[39] Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie* (New York: Feminist Press, 2008) affirms the identifications 'cis-gender' and 'transgender' as 'technogenders' against 'technical processes that produce somatic fictions of masculinity and femininity' (128). In this way, the technical resources identified by Derrida under the rubric 'writing' serve both a performative and defensive service: 'Photographic, biotechnological, surgical, pharmacological, cinematographic, or cybernetic techniques come to construct the materiality of the sexes *performatively*.' (128)

famously (even notoriously) constituted, from end to end, by traces of traces.[40] Considerably more can be said of the levels between which mathematical writing operates. For this a chronicle is called for, which as a point of departure might take Hilbert's programme, and the failed attempt to establish an axiomatically sound domain of real mathematics uninfected by (or securely delimited from) an at least equally rich but structurally incomplete domain of idealities. This limited narrative would culminate, via Gödel's incompleteness theorem, in the Turing machine (c. 1936) and the computability theory that underlies current algorithmic performance.[41]

But, of course, it is not a requirement of Derrida's text to ground the paradoxical domain of grammatology on this one exemplary register. The stakes are greater in that the question of historicity, the question of how one understands one's relation to history, is both explicitly posed by the quasi-mathematical properties of a generalised writing and yet almost simultaneously excluded by formal practices. The cybernetic reference plays an exemplary role:

> Whether it has essential limits or not, the entire field covered by the cybernetic *programme* will be the field of writing. If the theory of cybernetics is by itself to dislodge all metaphysical concepts – including the concepts of soul, of life, of value, of choice, of memory – which until recently served to separate the machine from man, it must retain, until its historico-metaphysical belonging has also been denounced, the notion of writing, trace, gramme, or grapheme. (*DG*, 19/*OG*, 9)

Cybernetic theory, which in its focus on systems of information retrieval dislodges ancient distinctions between categories of the human and non-human, of life and death, still belongs to a historicity of metaphysical determinations. The distinctions that have their source in *the gramme*, in the mark, in the technical field of productive distinction itself, *constitute* the historicity of metaphysics.[42] This historicity designates a complex and at first obscure structure in *De la grammatologie*, whereby the most general predicates of the concept of writing arise on the side of a generalised *threat* to the values fictionally attributed to life, memory, decision, and indeed the human. If writing '*as such* and *after the fact*' (*DG*, 21/*OG*, 9) has only recently made itself known, then the historical phenomenon implies a transformed relationship between the sphere of decision and that of writing, in which writing and history cannot easily be distinguished. And so even the sciences of knowledge will be drawn into its complication.[43] The

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[40] See also Derrida, *Positions*, trans. and annotated by Alan Bass (London: Athlone, 1987): 'There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.' (26)

[41] The failure of Hilbert's programme is often connected to what Heidegger would have despised as the evocation of a *Zeitgeist*. Barry Cooper, in *Computability Theory* (London and New York: Chapman and Hall, 2004) writes: 'it is very striking that the disintegration of Hilbert's programme was also within a social and wider scientific context of growing confusion, complexity, and doubt about traditional certainties. We are thinking about many things—changing attitudes to imperialism, capitalism, racism, and war; accelerating modernism in music, painting, theatre and the arts generally; the supplanting of Newtonian certainty with quantum ambiguity and relativistic complexity; and the growing challenge to traditional moral and religious frameworks presented by psychological and humanistic frameworks' (6).

[42] Christopher Johnson neglects Derrida's references both to Heidegger and to the historicity of metaphysics in his brief account of Derrida's discussion of cybernetics in *Of Grammatology*, in 'The Cybernetic Imaginary', in *Reading Derrida's Of Grammatology*, ed. Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan (London: Continuum, 2011), 13.

[43] Gregory Bateson, 'From Versailles to Cybernetics', in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972). This lecture from 1966 reveals as much insight as blindness in an assumed relation of cybernetics

merging of categories like system, writing, and history, implies a historicity that revises the limited metaphysical dream of history and knowledge: '*istoria* and *epistémè* have always been determined […] as detours *for the purpose of* the reappropriation of presence.' (*DG,* 22/*OG,* 10) The 'nonfortuitous conjunction' of cybernetics and the emerging 'system' sciences informed by mathematics (information, communication, structural anthropology, sociology) gives rise under analysis to an alternative structure of history.

The essays in *Of Grammatology*, especially Part II, build out of the reduction of writing in Rousseau to accomplish a kind of generalisation, beginning with the already well-established observation that '[m]etaphysics has constituted an exemplary system of defense against the threat of writing.' (*DG,* 149/*OG,* 101) We can, fifty years later, reconstruct these arguments efficiently enough but in doing so it would be a mistake to neglect or to reduce what is implied in them concerning the historicity of our own attempts to adapt to an evidently changing universe, especially when the integrity of consciousness – the universal image of the conscious subject – appears more vulnerable than ever. Without taking an aggressively ahistorical position (which is paradoxically encouraged by a current cultural and intellectual environment oversaturated by historical content), it would be difficult to justify reading a text like *Of Grammatology* outside the model exemplified by the identification of an *age*.

Historicity is disclosed on this model by our *Befindlichkeit*[44] or by the way in which we find ourselves in relation to our present environment: repetition in the weave of its mechanical and informational platforms remains both predictable and unpredictable; unpredictable in the sheer extremes, or unintentional satires, of otherwise predictable recurrences (themes of nationalism, independence, otherness, the alien, of race, of sex, gender, themes of nature, of technology, and so on). Repetition, if nothing occurs to divert it or to block it in some way, will be given free rein in its perpetual recovery of hardened historical structures. The risk of a diversion or an attempt to block a tendency in repetition lies in the inevitability that the movement or event of diversion or the gesture of blockage, choking, plugging up, takes on a further unintended iterative force, the diversion itself becoming a kind of blind necessity in further repetitions of the same. If this is the age of the von Neumann architecture, then the epoch seems already tired of it and dreams of the next stage, the epoch of thinking writing.

(as knowledge without historicity) to history, where the 'cybernetic breakthrough' represents one of the two historically important events of the twentieth century. The treaty of Versailles is the other one, which Bateson historicizes in the traditional way, thus recapitulating the traditional structure of the relations between knowledge and history.

[44] 'In der Befindlichkeit ist das Dasein immer schon vor es selbst gebracht, es hat sich immer schon gefunden, nicht als wahrnehmendes Sich-vorfinden, sondern als gestimmtes Sichbefinden' (Sein und Zeit, 135). 'In Befindlichkeit, Dasein is always brought before itself, and it has always already found itself, not in the sense of perceptive self-finding, but in the sense of finding itself in its moodiness' (Being and Time, 174). In the language of finding (Befindlichkeit, Sich-vorfinden, Sichbefinden) the concept of existence resonates with the concept of mood or attunement (die Stimmung, das Gestimmtsein: attunement, mood), and this distinguishes for all serious philosophical thought since Heidegger between a concept of self, focused on perception, and an account of being-in-the-world, discovered existentially in Dasein's 'moods' or 'modes of attunement'.

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Epoca gândirii scriiturii

Rezumat

Putem trasa provocările pentru filosofie reprezentate de evoluția tehnică a „științelor umane" și „științele de conjectură" în modalități divergente prin care aceasta este tratată în textele lui Jacques Derrida, ale lui Gilles Deleuze, ale lui Jacques Lacan și ale altora de la jumătatea până la sfârșitul anilor 1960. Derrida scrie parțial pentru a da o replică contraprovocărilor ce vin dinspre tehnologie, reprezentate de filosoful Martin Heidegger. Acest articol analizează relația dintre noțiunea emergentă de istoricitate și tehno-științele emergente din punct de vedere istoric ca mod de a pune în relief chestiunea epocii. Această chestiune privește rolul actual al filosofiei într-o moștenire care face încă stângaci diferența dintre tradiția filosofică ce a rămas existențialistă și influența cibernetică în probleme culturale, politice și tehnologice ale lumii contemporane.