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“LIVING ON: METAPHORS.” HEIDEGGER, DERRIDA AND THINKING ALIVE

The aim of this article is to explore the Heideggerian post-*Kehre* hermeneutics and Derrida's deconstruction in order to specify an area of exchange between them. It is argued that a fruitful relation between the two philosophies may be traced to their uses of metaphor. First, Heidegger's writings are probed into so as to amplify his metaphor of language as Saying. Then a reference is made to Derrida's key analysis of metaphor in philosophical texts that he carries out in “White Mythology” and “Before the Law.” In conclusion the notion of metaphor is delineated as a mode of an ongoing recreation of linguistic meaning that in turn continuously alters man's perception of the world and his own place in it.

I

Heidegger perceives poetic language as the clearest instant of understanding of an idiom as the House of Being. In poetic language the Being of beings may be revealed through a patient attending to the call of words themselves. This attending must be aimed, as Heidegger asserts, at listening to the Saying of language. He takes the word “Saying” from Old German *Sagen* which meant “let appear and let shine, but in the manner of hinting” (1982: 47). It is in Saying that “the being of language in its totality invests itself” (*ibid.* 122). However, the appearance of Being is not manifest, but rather occurs as “hinting,” which implies that poetic language as Saying never offers Being in its openness and clarity; instead, in poetic words the unconcealment and veiling over happen simultaneously. In Heidegger's rendering Saying becomes a site of two opposing drives that govern the nature of language as the House of Being. On the one hand, language “hints” at the possibility of uncovering of Being. On the other, it conceals Being in its everyday use which in *Being and Time* is referred to as idle talk (Heidegger 1996: 157–159). Thus language both veils and at the same time unveils Being in an endless process of seeking the truth. It is this conflict, or, as Heidegger calls it, strife, that lies at the core of his thinking of poetic language.

Most thoroughly Heidegger develops the notion of strife between concealment and unconcealment in his seminal essay “The Origin of the Work of Art.”

There, he states that in art, whose essence is poetry, a strife is staged between the earth and the world.

The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world. But the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there. (Heidegger 1975: 49)

The strife, as Heidegger sees it, is not a dialectic of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, but a perpetual tension between the earth and the world. This is a principal metaphor in all of post-*Kehre* Heidegger. Thomson unpacks the notion of “the earth,” stressing that it “is an inherently dynamic dimension of intelligibility that simultaneously offers itself to and resists being brought fully into the light of our ‘worlds’ of meaning and permanently stabilized therein. Despite our best efforts” (Thomson 2011: 89). He rightly observes that whereas “the world” is a metaphoric shorthand for what Heidegger denotes by ontotheology, “the earth” represents the drive towards unconcealment of truth, which cannot happen once and for all, but rather remains in poetic language as a perpetual possibility of a new interpretation. Thus “the earth” is “Heidegger’s name in 1935 – 36 for what he most frequently calls ‘being as such,’ a dynamic phenomenological “presencing” that gives rise to our worlds of meaning without ever being exhausted by them, a dimension of intelligibility we experience *both* as it calls for and informs *and* as it overflows and escapes our attempts to pin it down” (*ibid.* 90 emphasis in original). Falling back on investigations into the later Heidegger opus conducted by such scholars as Hubert L. Dreyfus and Julian Young, Thomson argues elegantly that the phenomenon of “the earth” is synonymous with man’s inexhaustible ability to redefine his understanding of being in the world; while “the world” corresponds to his need to assert that the latest cultural, scientific, social or any other paradigm is the best representation of the human condition. As “the world” stabilises every view of our position in reality, so “the earth” remains a repository of ever new paradigms that man is capable of extrapolating from art. Dreyfus translates the metaphor of conflict into Kuhnian terms, summarising his discussion of “The Origin of the Work of Art:”

All [...] aspects of a cultural paradigm and the practices it organizes that resist being rationalized and totalized are included in Heidegger’s notion of the earth. Earth is not passive matter, but comes into being precisely as what resists the [world’s] attempt to abstract and generalize the point of the paradigm. And since no interpretation can ever completely capture what the work means, the work of art sets up a struggle between earth and world. This struggle is a necessary aspect of the way meaning inheres in human practices. (Dreyfus 1993: 300)

It is the strife as generative of “a culture’s history” (*ibid.*) that lies behind Heidegger’s understanding of art, and particularly poetry as the essence of art. Dreyfus demonstrates that the elusive figure of strife grounds man’s social prax-

is, but at the same time shows that Heidegger's metaphor apprehends the insoluble aporia of our existence that is predicated on seeking to uncover what cannot be fully unconcealed. Thus it appears that the truth of being happening in poetic Saying embodies the conflict between "the earth" and "the world."

The happening of truth of being Heidegger describes with the Greek word *aletheia*, unconcealment. This is a pivotal term in his later writings in that, as James C. Edwards maintains, to Heidegger "truth is the coming into presence of something in such a way that it can be seen for what it is. Truth is dis-closure, un-covering, un-concealment" (Edwards 1997: 156). Truth is an occurrence, an event of unconcealment. Thus, as it is well known, truth of Being is the event of shining which Heidegger calls *Lichtung*. Gianni Vattimo explains the word in regard to poetic language, saying that "An artwork may be a place of "depositing of the truth," for the truth is not a metaphysically stable structure but an event" (1988: 69); the truth as an event is a chiaroscuro, this is what *Lichtung* denotes. The three terms are meticulously arranged into a working scheme which allows to pierce through to the heart of Heidegger's thinking of language. In the Saying of language, which is based on the idea of the conflict between the earth and the world, *Lichtung*, the instant of shining or opening, occurs, proffering a glimpse of *aletheia* as unconcealment of truth. Of course, *aletheia* is by no means a stable and finite event in which one at long last comes to behold the truth; it is rather a constant hypothesis that underpins the tension between earthly emerging and worldly stabilisation and withdrawal. It is this tension that lies at the core of language as Saying, forming the premise on which Heidegger erects his exegetic effort of Hölderlin and Trakl.

By now the short exposition of Heidegger's philosophy of poetry should have indicated an essentially paradoxical foundation of his thought. He further elaborates on the idea of strife in a short essay "...Poetically Man Dwells..." where he proffers a particularly good exposition of the ultimate knot in his thinking of language. Exploring a line of a poem by Hölderlin, he comes to the point where he posits the possibility of the revelation of God in the sky; the fragment shows the entanglements of the Heideggerian path of analysis:

God's appearance through the sky consists in a *disclosing* that lets us *see* what *conceals* itself, but lets us see it not by seeking to wrest what is concealed out of its concealedness, but only by guarding the concealed in its self-concealment. Thus the unknown god *appears as the unknown* by the way of sky's manifestness. (1975: 223 emphasis added)

The appearance of god occurs in his concealedness, which ushers in Heidegger's paradoxical understanding of *aletheia*. What comes out of the search for Being is the realisation that the quest turns out successful on condition that the hiddenness of Being is untouched and the haven that shelters Being is disguised ever further. In this sense a self-exclusive premise is created in the sense that Heidegger wishes to infuse his idea of language with a capacity for such unconcealment that

remains ultimately impossible; instead, the end to the quest for truth is continuously deferred. Edwards notices the underlying problem with Heidegger's idea of *Lichtung*: "The image of the clearing is [Heidegger's] way of attending to the unpresenceable final condition of any presence and its specific conditions" (Edwards 1997: 181). Therefore it becomes manifest that the attempt at presencing of what cannot be made present, or, in Edward's words, attending to what always escapes making present, is a metaphorical expression of the implication that Being must, of its nature, always remain beyond the immediate grasp of even poetic language. The ceaseless postponement that seems to underscore Heidegger's fundamental perception of language as Saying becomes the departure point for Derrida's own appropriation of Heidegger's premise.

II

Heidegger focuses on language understood primarily as an oral activity but his pondering on the poetic Saying inevitably focuses on language in its written form. As a result, the metaphors that he uses to speak of the pursuit for the truth of Being trace *aletheia* in the space of language which is a trace itself. Granted that poetry is understood as an oral art, Heidegger's own writings become a written trace of a spoken trace of poetic Saying. In this way a point of transit between Heidegger and Derrida is opened. In his "White Mythology" Derrida argues that the metaphor (traced in the language of philosophy in the case of "White Mythology," but Derrida's remarks on the use of the metaphor in a philosophical text presuppose a general view he takes on tropes) is a palimpsest-like construct that renders the final attainment of truth unfeasible. That is because every metaphor is "issued from a network of philosophemes which themselves correspond to tropes or to figures, and these philosophemes are contemporaneous to or in systematic solidarity with these tropes or figures" (Derrida 1982: 219). Metaphors are used to explain a particular notion or concept that cannot be phrased in any other more intelligible way. However, the very fact that we resort to degrees of intelligibility shows that the metaphor is always a figure for the absence of one clear meaning, or indeed an absence of truth.

Derrida conceives of the metaphor as having the capacity for hiding the origins (1982: 267), for it undergoes *catachresis* which Derrida, quoting from Fontanier's *Figures du discours*, explains "*consists in a sign already affected with a first idea also being affected with a new idea, which itself had no sign at all, or no longer properly has any other in language [...] [catachresis] is Trope from which there results a purely extensive sense*" (qtd. in Derrida 1982: 255 emphasis in original). The metaphor's extensive sense causes a deferment of meaning because the metaphor tropes only another trope of what has long been

gone. Therefore, as Derrida suggests, truth cannot shine in any language. As a result, the use of metaphor is always another step in the chain of interpretive or explicative manoeuvres. In this way, the metaphor is riddled with "fissures and faults" that characterise every text "that can *itself* only be written as a kind of preface to what remains to come" (Glendinning 2011: 35 emphasis in original). Poetic language is a pertinent example of such dissemination in that it proffers metaphorical expressions which then need to be attended to through hermeneutic exegesis which, in turn, can only by means of metaphors glean *aletheia* from *Lichtung*. Thus when Derrida argues that recurrence of metaphor in the process of exegesis shows "a presence disappearing in its own radiance" as a result of the inexhaustible pluralisation of metaphors (1982: 266), he seems to amplify Heidegger's tacit conclusion. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida anticipates the logic of "White Mythology," claiming that: "sign is metaphoric because it is *false* with regard to the object; it is metaphoric because it is *indirect* with regard to the affect: it is the sign of a sign, it expresses emotion only through another sign" (1976: 277 emphasis in original). A trope of a trope and a sign of a sign, metaphor is deprived of the capacity for the unconcealment of truth that Heidegger would like to endow it with.

In Derrida's understanding, the metaphor is turned into a space of the play of the supplement which "is indefinite. References refer to references" (*ibid.* 298). As the chain of signification is endlessly woven into a path with no final destination, so the possibility of apprehension of truth in language is revealed to be out of reach; metaphor does not only enter into a limitless play in which there is no transcendental signified (*ibid.* 50) but it becomes a many-tier construct in which every level enters into play with all others. The play continues to leave traces of meaning that lead only to other traces in the ceaseless flow of signifiers which cannot end in an apprehension of truth.

Derrida shows that the metaphor is a space of dissemination *per se*, but he never pitches it directly against the transcendental tradition of logocentrism. In spite of the fact that the language of philosophy presupposes an inevitable use of metaphoric language, the metaphors employed in it do not consign a text of philosophy to irreducible freeplay and aporia, but rather themselves must be understood as philosophemes. As a result, as Christopher Norris has shown in his brief approach to "White Mythology" and referring to the example of Derrida's interpretation of Husserl, "what Derrida brings out in Husserl (as likewise in 'White Mythology') is the *absolute and principled necessity* of thinking both with and against [Husserl's notions], since on the one hand they provide the only possible starting point for any philosophical reflection, while on the other they lead to a point where such thinking runs up against significant problems or obstacles" (Norris 1990: 57 emphasis in original). Against inane simplifications practiced by some critics of deconstruction, Norris argues that "Derrida's texts stand squarely within the tradition of Western philosophical thought, and none

the less so for seeking to contest or ‘deconstruct’ that tradition at points where its foundational concepts and values are open to a non-canonical reading” (*ibid.* 142). In this context the general word “texts” may be replaced with the particular example of metaphors. Derrida no more ends philosophy than Heidegger did, but rather both insist that philosophy as writing, and particularly as writing metaphors, has always been and will remain an endless project.

III

Derrida’s indebtedness to Heidegger’s reinterpretation of metaphoricity reaches far beyond the use of figural language and shows an affinity between the two philosophers that helps more clearly situate their respective projects. It may be argued that it is in the context of Heidegger’s thinking of poetic Saying that deconstruction locates its most potent complementation. In his essay on Kafka’s parable of “Before the Law,” Derrida shows that the guardian at the door to the law represents *différance* in its deferring capacity. There, he creates an infinitely layered construct of metaphors, each of which comes to elucidate the previous ones. Towards the end of the essay, Derrida makes his point overtly:

After the first guardian there are an undefined number of others, perhaps they are innumerable, and progressively more powerful and therefore more prohibitive, endowed with greater power of delay. Their potency is *différance*, and interminable *différance*, since it lasts for days and “years, indeed, up to the end of (the) man. As the doorkeeper represents it, the discourse of the law does not say “no” but “not yet,” indefinitely. (1992: 204)

The emphasis Derrida places on the doorkeeper’s “not yet” rather than on the “no” indicates that the potential for dissemination that lies at the core of the entire metaphor is not assumed as the constitutional predication. It is rather the case that Derrida, always shirking finite coinages, regards the metaphor as a spur to continue writing so as to trace not the truthful deep structure of reality but simply another angle of situatedness. If the doorkeeper’s “not” manifestly rejects the possibility of one’s being admitted to the castle of the law, then his “yet” insists that there remains a glimmer of elusive hope for gaining entrance. It is in such a reading of the guardian of the law metaphor that Derrida, as Norris has been shown to argue, is best seen to support philosophy’s mandate with a difference, for the guardian’s “yet” emphasises the need to think language through without jettisoning thinking with it. What Derrida seems to suggest is that the “not yet” guarantees that philosophy, or indeed any kind of writing must not assume there is a point where thinking can rest content that it has explained everything.

It may thus be noted that a common ground between Heidegger’s quest for Being and Derrida’s deconstruction is established in their metaphors of strife and guardian of the law. However, this affinity implies more than simply another

instant of Derrida's indebtedness to and radicalisation of Heidegger's project of destruction of metaphysics. Richard Rorty frequently enlists both philosophers as allies in his neo-pragmatist redefinition of philosophy as a certain kind of literature,¹ seeing them as exponents of what he terms "poetic thinkers." Rorty argues that, according to Heidegger, "the philosophical tradition needs to be re-appropriated as a series of poetic achievements" (1999: 9), which links him to Derrida whom Rorty, using Harold Bloom's notion, regards as a strong poet (1989: 41–42fn). In Rorty's view, both aim at the same goal but employ divergent tactics. In a lucid passage Rorty explains that

Instead of paring down, the later Derrida proliferates. Instead of hoping, with Heidegger, always to say "the same," "to bring to language eve and again this advent of Being which remains [...] the sole matter of thinking," he takes pains never to say the same thing twice. Whereas in Heidegger you know that whatever the purported topic of the essay, you will come back around to the need to distinguish beings from Being, in later Derrida you never know what is coming next. Derrida is not interested in "the splendour of the simple" but, rather, in the lubriciousness of the tangled. (*ibid.* 126)

Whilst Derrida always seeks to explode the text he is working on, Heidegger boils his down to the founding question of the conflict between the world and the earth. In spite of this difference in their approach, Heidegger and Derrida share the goal of seeing their writing as a necessarily endless process of creating new metaphors.

A close comparison of the metaphors of strife and guardian of the law demonstrates that Heidegger and Derrida perceive the nature of human existence as synonymous to the act of metaphor creation. Heidegger's strife and Derrida's reading of the law parable are both represented in spatio-temporal terms. The earth and the world are selected for their inevitable association with the ontic realm and so retain their spatial dimension. By choosing those two names Heidegger ensures that his metaphor is firmly rooted in thingly reality rather than risking abstraction. His other terms such as clearing or the oft-used wood paths seem to play a similar role. A change of the world through man's attending to the earth's meaningful possibilities is therefore no marginal shift but a thorough revision of our "'models of' and 'models for' reality" (Thomson 2011: 44). Heidegger asserts that "whenever art happens [...] a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again" (1975: 77). What art helps us overcome in time is the growing subjectivist assuredness that everything is available (*ibid.*

¹ Rorty maintains that „post-Nietzschean philosophers like Wittgenstein and Heidegger [Derrida may well be added to the list – W.P.] write philosophy in order to exhibit the universality and necessity of the individual and contingent." In this way philosophy has come to "surrender [itself] to poetry" (1989: 26). The task of philosophy in what Rorty terms our contemporary literary culture is to offer redemption from egotism of believing in one single truth theory "through making acquaintance of as great a variety of human beings as possible;" this in turn might be achieved by reading books understood "as human attempts to meet human needs" (Rorty 2007: 91).

84). This dangerous domination of subjectivism Heidegger denotes by the term enframing (*Gestell*). Thomson explains that “subjectivism becomes enframing when the subject objectifies itself – that is, when the human subject, seeking to master and control all aspects of its objective reality, turns that modern impulse to control the world of objects back on itself” (Thomson 2011: 58). Dreyfus notes further that “in our age, everything is in the process of becoming equal [...] all meaningful differences are becoming leveled” (Dreyfus 1993: 291). It is this characteristically late modern levelling, turning man into a “resource (*Bestand*) standing by for efficient and flexible optimization” (Thomson 2011: 57), that would reign unchallenged were it not for the endurance of art as poetic Saying. Therefor a total revelation of the earth in poetic language would result in putting an end to man’s conscious and intellectually productive existence.

Derrida’s law parable is also figured as a spatial metaphor. The law stays behind the gate, first of infinitely many, as though it is hidden in a castle. The countryman who comes to ask permission to enter desires to penetrate the inside of the castle, to find its core where the law is reposed, as we know to no avail. Time passes and the man grows old, but entrance is refused to the last moment. The context of Derrida’s reading of Kafka’s parable may be traced to Walter Benjamin’s ninth thesis on the philosophy of history, where Benjamin describes an “Angel of History:”

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin 1973: 257–258)

Benjamin offers here another spatio-temporal metaphor that reveals modernity as a constant fall from Paradise into a terrible catastrophe. What we call progress is in fact an advancing destitution that cannot be prevented. This cabbalistic image of time as destroyer results in the loss of all perfection, including the truthfulness of language. The countryman of “Before the Law” lives in the late stage of that universal catastrophe. He may be a distant heir of the *Angelus Novus* who has decided to defy the hurricane blowing from Paradise. He wishes to enter the law, to see its truth but, propelled irresistibly into the future, can only meet his death. For him, there is no regaining the long absent truth, instead all he can do is keep pleading with the guard to be allowed to pass. In fact, the longer he waits the further away from completing his quest the countryman gets. The space separating him from the law grows as time passes, an inevitable consequence of the storm of modernity.

As a figure of *différance*, the guardian represents the storm; his dishevelled persona is the image of modernity denuded of metaphysical sureness but at the

same time he remains the countryman's only interlocutor. The dialogue the two engage in may thus be regarded as the philosopher's quest for apprehending truth that cannot be phrased in the fallen language. However, it is this dialogue, the pleading to be let in, that grants the countryman his identity, for "the gate was made only for [him]" (Derrida 1992: 184). It is his gate as much as he belongs to the gate. In other words, the discourse of the law indefinitely defers the moment when the law can be revealed to the countryman, and in so doing forces him to wait, and ask; it forces and sustains his language that defines his life all the way unto his death. Derrida, as Norris repeatedly demonstrates, does not replace rational argument with freeplay of metaphoricity, but rather insists on two aspects of writing. On the one hand language must be thought through with attention to its blind spots in order that one does not too readily forget that we live in the calamitous modernity; on the other hand, since we cannot hope to reverse time, the only way to catch a most frail glimmer of truth, of the law, is by creating metaphors until the day we draw our terminal breath. The metaphor is a philosopheme whose basic structure entails transience and the necessity of reevaluation or replacement. One cannot apprehend the truth with it, but through it one can formulate critically acute perception of the world.

Heidegger and Derrida's views of metaphor are underlain with the fundamental premise of a necessity of restitution of the fallen language. To them, reaching the literal truth is tantamount to an instantaneous eradication of thinking itself. If there is no concealed earth that strives to shatter the manacles that the world would gladly stay in, there is nothing to attend to; therefore we become standing-reserves, accepting unawares that we have been optimised. Creating metaphors is the means to constitute a painful individuation, as opposed to some implied and smug sameness that comes at the price of non-fulfilment, which Derrida seems to imply in his "Before the Law;" the guardian's "not yet" promises something that cannot be given, still in the promise lies an invitation to continue trying if one is able to muster the necessary strength. Although "the panorama of futility" with time becomes wider, Heidegger and Derrida appear to invest their hopes in metaphors, as the creation of new figures opens the space to think differently, to counter the "leveling of meaningful differences," and thus preserves man and his world as a project never to be realised, but to be reformulated until death. Both the strife and the guardian's "not yet" may be taken as expressions of a human need to probe and explore various possibilities offered in metaphoric language. Heidegger says that poetic Saying may usher in a new historical epoch. Derrida is not so generous, for he suggests that writing takes place in the shadow of death, in failure to reach the law. However, the failure is recuperated by what may be termed transient apprehensions. Deconstruction thinks ideas with language as it thinks this language through, so that no claim or argument can be sustained indefinitely. This, however, does not mean that anything goes; on the contrary, every thesis must be thoroughly investigated in order that it

might avoid the simplifications resulting from the idea that words carry meaning unequivocally.

If living is accepted as analogous to creative thinking, Heidegger and Derrida offer a disillusioned philosophy of life. They may not delude themselves into assuming that the truth must one day be gleaned and displayed before all men, but they choose to quest both for and away from it. To them, literal meaning equals the demise of thought, and so metaphor, indeed a complex feature “proper to man” (Derrida 1982: 245), becomes a synonym of life in all its complex, uncertain and often self-contradictory aspects.

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