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Signature:

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Peter W. Milne

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Date

Judgement and Procedure: Kant, Husserl, Lyotard, Derrida

By

Peter W. Milne

Doctor of Philosophy

Philosophy

Rudolf A. Makkreel \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor

Geoffrey Bennington \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member

David Carr \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member

Thomas Flynn \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member

Cynthia Willett \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member

Accepted:

---

Lisa A. Tedesco, PhD

Dean of the Graduate School

---

Date

Judgement and Procedure: Kant, Husserl, Lyotard, Derrida

By

Peter W. Milne

M.A., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Louvain), 2001

B.A., University of British Columbia, 1999

Advisor: Rudolf Makkreel, PhD

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## Abstract

### Judgement and Procedure: Kant, Husserl, Lyotard, Derrida

By Peter W. Milne

This dissertation was written with two aims in mind. The first was to fill a gap in the literature on Lyotard and Derrida by conducting a careful and patient analysis of their relation to transcendental philosophy, primarily that of Kant but with some consideration of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology also. The second was to counter the usual conceptions of so-called "postmodern" philosophy as being either relativistic, liberal and individualistic, or even reducible to political conservatism. I show how both Lyotard and Derrida oppose the teleology at work in the Kantian Idea as it appears in the Architectonic of the first *Critique* and Kant's philosophy of history, and in Husserl's historical rationalism. But I connect this opposition to the way they closely follow Kant's reluctance to "close" his system in the way that, for instance, Hegel does through what he calls Absolute Knowing. Both French authors rely on the basic notion of the "event," by which each means something very similar: an event is that which comes only once, for which the mind is unprepared, but which nonetheless demands to be judged. In Kant, an aesthetic judgment takes place in the interruption of our normal, projective manner of looking at the world in terms of purposes (though the form of purposiveness may be retained). One must judge here without clear rules for deciding the issue. Taking some impetus also from Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* or "deferred action" (in which an "event" takes place the repercussions of which are felt only later), both Lyotard and Derrida see in this interruption a model for the ethical or political responsibility to think and judge in respect of that which does not immediately appear as "well formed." For each, this way of judging is of primary importance in a multi-cultural and international political sphere, where Western, humanistic cultural and historical norms have come under suspicion. I argue that although neither French thinker believes in the much vaunted "death of man" or the "end" of history, our conceptions of both humanity and history must be re-evaluated and reoriented to account for this need to find norms by which to judge what is unfamiliar without subordinating it to pre-given categories. My aim is to provide the ground for a reconsideration of these two contemporary thinkers that takes better account of their relation to the philosophical tradition. This inquiry simultaneously allows for a comparison of their respective bodies of work, and a re-evaluation of the original contributions to ethical and political philosophy of at least two thinkers of so-called "postmodernism."

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Advisor: Rudolf Makkreel, PhD

Committee:

Cynthia Willett, PhD

Geoffrey Bennington, PhD

Readers:

David Carr, PhD

Thomas Flynn, PhD

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I would like to thank my parents, Fred and Dorothy Milne, who have always encouraged me to pursue my interests, however impractical, and who remain my constant companions and supporters, however far the distance.

And Emily, who has endured it all with gentleness, affection, support, and occasional constructive dissensus.

And Rudi, who endured my absences, and one or two transgressions.

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## List of Abbreviations

The following is a list of the major works used throughout the text. All other references appear in the footnotes, and all works are reproduced in the bibliography. References to works by Kant begin with the standard Akademie page number followed by that of the translation, with two exceptions: that of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where I have adopted the standard method of referencing only the pagination of the A and B editions respectively; and that of some of the shorter works, if those translations do not note the German pagination.

Kant:

- CF *The Conflict of the Faculties*. Trans. Mary J. Gregor and Robert Anchor. In *Religion and Rational Theology*. Ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 233-327.
- GW *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. Practical Philosophy*. Trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 41-108.
- JL *The Jäsche Logic. Lectures on Logic*. Trans. and ed. J. Michael Young. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. 521-640.
- KPV *Critique of Practical Reason. Practical Philosophy*. Trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 133-271.
- KRV *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1998. In English: *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997 (1998). I have also periodically consulted Norman Kemp Smith's translation, New York: St. Martin's, 1965.
- KU *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001. In English I have mostly used: *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987. In some instances I have also made use of: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. When quoting from this latter I have identified it with the abbreviation CE to differentiate it from the Pluhar translation.
- OD "On a Discovery According to which Any New Critique of Pure Reason Has Been Made Superfluous by an Earlier One." *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*. Ed. Henry Allison and Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.
- PM "Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnizens und Wolf's Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat?" *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 20. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1942. 259-332. In English: "What real Progress has Metaphysics made in Germany since the time of Leibniz and Wolff?" Trans.



- Peter Heath. *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*. Ed. Henry Allison and Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. 337-424.
- PP “Toward Perpetual Peace.” *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 316-51.
- ProI *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*. In *Philosophy of Material Nature*. Trans. Paul Carus and James W. Ellington. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985.
- UH “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose.” *Political Writings*. Second, enlarged ed. Trans. H. B. Nisbet. Ed. Hans Reiss. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970. 41-53.
- WE “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 11-22.
- WO “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” Trans. Allen W. Wood. *Religion and Rational Theology*. Ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 1-18.
- Husserl:
- C *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Trans David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1970.
- LI *Logical Investigations*. Vol. 1. Trans. J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.
- OG “The Origin of Geometry.” Included in C as Appendix VI. 353-78.
- PMSR “Philosophy as Mankind’s Self-Reflection.” Included in C as Appendix IV. 335-41.
- VL “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity” (aka, the “Vienna Lecture”). Included in C as Appendix I. 269-99.
- Derrida:
- AT “On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy.” Trans. John Leavey, Jr. *Raising the Tone of Philosophy*. Ed. Peter Fenves. Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993. 117-71.
- DM *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981.

- E “Economimesis.” Trans. Richard Klein. *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances*. Ed. Julian Wolfreys. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1998. 263-93.
- G *Of Grammatology*. Corrected ed. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998 [1976].
- HPD “Of the Humanities and the Philosophical Discipline: The Right to Philosophy from the Cosmopolitical Point of View (the Example of an International Institution).” Trans. Thomas Dutoit. *Surfaces*, vol. 4, 1994. 5-21.
- IHOG *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*. Trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1989 [1978].
- M *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1982.
- MCF “Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties.” Trans. Richard Rand and Amy Wygant. *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004. 83-112.
- P “Passions: ‘An Oblique Offering.’” Trans. David Wood. *Derrida: A Critical Reader*. Ed. David Wood. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. 5-35.
- R “Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue – Between Two Infinities, the Poem.” Trans. Thomas Dutoit and Philippe Romanski. *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. New York: Fordham UP, 2005. 135-63.
- SM *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York & London: Routledge, 1994.
- SP *Speech and Phenomena*. Trans. David B. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973.
- TS *A Taste for the Secret*. (With Maurizio Ferraris.) Ed. Giacomo Donis and David Webb. Trans. Giacomo Donis. Cambridge: Polity, 2001.
- WD *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978.
- WEC “The ‘World’ of the Enlightenment to Come (Exception, Calculation, and Sovereignty.” *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005. 115-59.
- WM *The Work of Mourning*. Ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001.

Lyotard:

- AQ “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?” Trans. Régis Durand. Included as an appendix to PMC below. 71-82.
- D *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988.
- EPP “Emma: Between Philosophy and Psychoanalysis.” Trans. Michael Sanders (with Richard Brons and Norah Martin). *Lyotard: Philosophy, Politics, and the Sublime*. Ed. Hugh J. Silverman. New York & London: Routledge, 2002. 23-45.
- HJ *Heidegger and “the jews.”* Trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990.
- IH *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991.
- LAS *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994.
- PE *The Postmodern Explained*. Trans. Don Barry et al. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992.
- Per *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*. New York: Columbia UP, 1988.
- Phn *Phenomenology*. Trans. Brian Beakley. Albany: SUNY, 1991.
- PMC *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.
- TPM *Toward the Postmodern*. Ed. Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts. Amherst, NY: Humanity, 1999.
- UCD “Universal History and Cultural Differences.” Trans. David Macey. *The Lyotard Reader*. Ed. Andrew Benjamin. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989. 314-23. In French: “Histoire universelle et différences culturelles.” *Critique* vol. 41, no. 456, May 1985. 559-68. Another translation is to be found in PE, Chapter 3, under the title “Missive on Universal History,” pp. 23-37, which I have occasionally preferred, and which I have referenced alongside the Macey translation in some places.

## Introduction: Time(s) of Crisis

If there is a commonly shared feeling in the present time, says Claude Lefort in an essay devoted to the “imaginary of crisis,” it is that of the crisis of our times.<sup>1</sup> We could perhaps call it a crisis of the end, of the end of all things or at the very least of all things familiar or reliable, even of all things rational, moral, or responsible. We are familiar with the ongoing predictions – now, indeed, a virtual cliché of “our” times – of the end or death of “man,” humanism, the author, history, narratives, philosophy, God, ideology, “Western” or industrialized society, democracy, literature, painting, or art more generally. This apocalyptic tone, as Derrida has described it, is now perhaps the most common and pervasive of tones, especially (and possibly not entirely without reason) in the humanities. In a certain sense, of course, it is not new, and this study attends to some earlier formulations, in Kant and Husserl, of what is described in those formulations as something not very far from an impending or potential apocalypse – the threat of the end of philosophy or of metaphysics, for instance, or of the end or death of reason, morality, or science. But it is perhaps fair to say that discourses on the end have proliferated, despite – or perhaps because of – the supposed “progress” of science and technology. And we know at least a part of the reason why this might be. If the sciences have progressed, the things we consider most “human,” society, learning, happiness, the hope for peace, have not obviously followed. So perhaps we can go a little further, and suggest that this proliferation might be linked in some way to the failure of a promise, by which I mean the promise of emancipation.

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Lefort, “L’imaginaire de la crise,” *Le temps présent: Écrits 1945-2005* (Paris: Belin, 2007), pp. 915-36. This ref., p. 915.

According to Lyotard, it is this promise, encapsulated in an Idea taken in the Kantian sense, that characterizes what he calls the “grand narratives” of modernity. In such narratives, in whatever form they appear, humanity always has an end in the sense of having a goal or purpose, and that end, ultimately, is freedom (see § 1.1). Humanity is to be liberated through the free use of reason, or through the liberation of the working class, or through the development of technology and the growth of a wealth the benefits of which will be shared by all. History is thus central here, since this end is what gives history its coherence and meaning. All of history’s struggles, conflicts, disagreements, treaties and contracts are interpreted as being in the service of this end. The end, in turn, is given as being in some way *essential* to humanity, part of the very essence of human beings, and the history that leads to it appears under its name in the guise of a progressive unfolding, a linear temporal movement from ignorance to knowledge, savage nature to civilized culture, enslavement to freedom.

Such might be one sense of the “crisis of our times,” then – that this promise of emancipation has been broken. That science has made great advances in knowledge (information) but to the detriment of what was once known as learning, the work of the “spirit”; that technology has increased ease and health but only for those relative few around the globe who can afford it, while often increasing the discomfort of those who can’t; that the “intelligence” of techno-scientific development produces as many weapons and instruments of surveillance as it does vaccinations or alternative energies; that revolutions conducted in the name of the “people” have remained national in scope and often nationalist in spirit; that the idea of universal humanity has stumbled on the resistance of local and regional interests; that the promised human community has

evaporated in disasters bearing names like Auschwitz or, more recently, Rwanda. In such a state, one does not know how to go forward, or even where to go, since the promised end has turned into a mirage.

But perhaps there is another sense of crisis here, one that might be turned to more of an advantage. For does not the very structure of this Idea of a universal end already presuppose a relation to the end taken in another way? What would history be if its purposes were fulfilled, its goals attained? Would history itself not come to an end? Would it not be over? And what of the process of “enlightenment,” the project of the *Aufklärer*? Kant speaks of his own day as an age of enlightenment but not yet an enlightened age (WE 21/8:40, see below). If humanity were to reach such an age, what of the entire process of enquiry, of enlightenment, of learning itself? Kant, of course, knew better than to suggest that such an end was achievable – at least in this life (see § 2.1). But does the projection of an end taken as a goal or purpose not contain within it at least the specter of the end of the being or the process in question? Its fulfillment? Could it be that combining essentialism (the essence of man, history, reason, philosophy, painting, etc.) with a linear concept of history governed by the Idea of freedom or emancipation must necessarily announce its own death from the very moment of its birth?<sup>2</sup> One strives, in pursuing the end, toward the very thing that would bring about, indeed, the end.

So that, in a sense, the promise of emancipation harbors a kind of necessary injustice – the end of the complexity, imperfection, difference, and lack of assurance that characterizes the very movement of history, perhaps even of “life itself.” It even harbors

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<sup>2</sup> I take this suggestion from Yve-Alain Bois, who makes it with regard to painting. See his “Painting: The Task of Mourning” in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT, 1990), pp. 229-44, particularly p. 230.

a violence, since to achieve this end it must do away with singularity, disunity, dissensus, difference. There is a cost to emancipation taken in this universalist sense. Perhaps it even contains within its logic the reverse of what it aims for. To lose what is inessential or improper, what is outside of knowledge, what is savage and even *inhuman* (a term to which we shall return) – this would be to inoculate ourselves from the very things that make us most inclined to think, to dream, to hope, to paint, to respond, to be more human, to work for peace. And it is here that I would want to suggest that another sense of crisis appears, that of *krinein*, of discernment or differentiation, of judgment or decision. One judges or decides when one does not know how to proceed, when one has no pre-established procedure for going forward. Precisely, then, at a time of crisis, a moment where something must be done, and where the choice is critical, both necessary and unsure. When thought is faced with choices or decisions about the proper or improper, the essential or inessential, the singular moment or event that defies quick categorization or calculation. If the “crisis of our times” lies in part in the lost promise of emancipation, then, perhaps it also opens on to crisis taken in this second sense.

Such is the presupposition of this study, which attempts to draw the outline of a politics that would approach the first sense of crisis (the “crisis of our time”) through a commitment to the second. The two authors that inform this attempt are Lyotard and Derrida, whose works, taken both together and separately, offer a model for a thinking that can broadly be taken as political, but which nonetheless does not rely on notions of emancipation or on the linear conception of historical development or even progress that such a notion depends upon. *Time*, then, is precisely at issue here, beginning with the very idea of an “our time” but including also the organization of time through historical

narratives, and indeed the very time of decision or judgment in the moment of crisis itself. It is a question of the very possibility of judging or deciding, particularly politically or ethically, in this time, this “our time” that is meant to be characterized by crisis – but to do so without any clear sense of historical meaning or any knowledge of what is essential or proper to humanity, reason, society, even politics or ethics themselves. The question is one of the possibility, then, of judging without clear rules of procedure. Of the necessity (and not only in “our time”) of doing so. And it is this question of the conditions for the possibility of such judgment that brings this study into the orbit of transcendental philosophy.

This is why I choose to begin with Kant and Husserl, the two authors that in a certain sense epitomize a particular, transcendental approach to the entire problem of history and of philosophy – history and philosophy taken not as “givens,” but rather given as problems for thought, as problems for “today,” whenever and wherever that “today” may be. These thinkers of the transcendental are profoundly influential for Lyotard and Derrida, both through their respective bodies of work and through the traditions that they inaugurate. And yet, in their respective dependencies on the teleology of the Idea, each also comes to stand for a critical mode of philosophizing that we can call modern in Lyotard’s sense. I argue that both Kant and Husserl can be taken as critical philosophers in a sense linked to crisis, by which figure I attempt in turn to link them to Lyotard and Derrida around the issues of history, philosophy or politics taken as (critical) problems for not only “our” time, but for all time, or rather for *every* time, for each time judgment or decision is called for, each time anew. Readings of their work help to open a path to the later authors by elucidating what is meant by the Idea, the role



it is said to play in history, philosophy, or politics, and in beginning to consider whether it can indeed be seen as a solution to the problems faced by “our time” (which would include, as we will see, the very problem of saying “our time,” see § 5.1). Both Lyotard and Derrida conduct important readings of these earlier writers, and it is through these readings, I argue, that the full political and ethical import of Lyotard’s and Derrida’s respective bodies of thought can begin to be recognized.

Chapter One sets out the problem by introducing the notion of the Idea in the Kantian sense and its link to what might be called the “project of modernity.” I begin with a discussion of how this project appears to be in crisis, and describe this crisis as it appears in Lyotard and Derrida. In order to elucidate the more important parts of the tradition these latter thinkers are invoking, I then proceed to an analysis of how crisis and the Idea appear in Kant’s thought. I argue that one can read Kant as a philosopher attempting to think a crisis of his own time (the crisis of metaphysics and of an enlightenment faced with irrationalism and mysticism), and examine the role the Idea and its teleology play in key moments in that architecture that constitutes his attempt to solve this crisis, the critical philosophy itself. Chapter Two elucidates the role of the Idea in Kant’s thinking on politics and history and then examines a reworking of this historical teleology in Husserl’s historical rationalism. Husserl’s work is of particular importance for Derrida, and the themes raised there return in Chapter Five (§ 5.3). While Kant’s historical teleology attempts to downplay crisis through the regulating function of the Idea, Husserl’s invocation of the Idea comes, as it were, in the face of crisis, the crisis confronting the “European sciences.” Having laid some of the theoretical groundwork for reading Lyotard and Derrida, the final sections makes some comparisons between

Kant's and Husserl's historical teleologies, and begin to examine the way particular conceptions of finitude and infinitude operate in the logic of this teleology.

Chapters Three and Four are concerted analyses of Lyotard's and Derrida's respective readings of Kant's aesthetic writings, the aim being to show how each French author uses Kant's aesthetics to open up a certain interruption of the teleology to be found in his thinking. Chapter Three contextualizes this in terms of Lyotard's difficult and problematic notion of the "postmodern" and his thinking on history, before turning to his analyses of Kant's sublime and relating this to his reading of Freud's notion of affectivity. In each case thought is shown to have to guide itself and find its own rules in order to judge what exceeds the capacity of conscious, calculating thought. Chapter Four examines Derrida's interest in the problem of context and of framing as these appear in Kant's writings on genius and beauty. This problematic of framing or bordering is illustrated through both an analysis of the humanism that can be seen to frame Kant's discourse and through Kant's own recognition of the dangers inherent in the work of framing (a work that nonetheless remains necessary), dangers that he attempts to control by categorizing the frame as a "parergon," a feature external to the work. If the claim in Chapter Three is that there is always something that exceeds the formative powers of the mind, the claim in Chapter Four is that the very process of forming and framing is itself inherently incomplete.

Chapter Five attempts to draw out some of the political implications of these conclusions through the figure of "plural rationalities" and the invocation of a certain heterogeneity in the contemporary (perhaps "global") political sphere. Universalist conceptions of the human, so central to the Idea of emancipation, are thus criticized as

attempting to draw too firm a border around the human (which is forced to conform to very particular notions of rationality, cultural advancement, etc.), but I also link this to the “non-humanism” (I don’t say “antihumanism”) of Derrida and Lyotard, in which what is “human” is never closed off, but always open to new possibilities. Here any notion of the essence of the human subject is challenged not in the name of nihilism but in the name of plurality, difference, and the possibility of respectful dissensus. Similarly, if the historical teleology of the Idea has become suspect for these thinkers of difference, this does not preclude Derrida’s invoking a certain “Enlightenment to come” that in some sense echoes this Idea. In this new “enlightenment,” not only the Idea but reason, too, is questioned and interrogated, its fractures and bifurcations analyzed. Nonetheless, this attention to what interrupts reason comes again in the spirit not of destruction, but of openness to new possibilities, of avoiding the “death” or “end” that would await it in more traditional conceptions of progress. Indeed, the argument here is that such an end is impossible, and that this openness, this incompleteness and even incalculability, is precisely what allows for a future, one that is not programmed or even projected but which attempts to welcome what comes without subjecting it to pre-given categories. Without pre-judging it, which is to say, to judge without prejudice. This open future calls for judgment or decision in the sense that Lyotard and Derrida use these terms, and calls urgently for it. Nonetheless, I argue that the notion of crisis – taken in the first sense – is no longer sufficient for such a situation, “ours” or any other. Rather than taking this openness as a situation to be denied, resisted, or appalled by, the responsibility must be assumed to attempt new ways to define and articulate it. One must witness it and respond to it, in the name of justice and indeed, in the name of a humanity to come.

With the uprooting of concepts like “man,” “reason,” or “history” comes the attending dislocation of traditional political and ethical categories. Perhaps it is this, in fact, that is “the crisis of our time.” How to judge when the usual criteria are either insufficient or even, in some cases, unjust? And what becomes of philosophy if its traditional categories are no longer adequate to the task of addressing the problems given to thought “today,” given as problems for thinking today? It is perhaps this crisis that takes center stage in the following pages. If Kant and Husserl were extremely sensitive to the need for philosophy to respond to what is given to it as problems, my suggestion here is that Lyotard and Derrida offer models for how this tradition might be rewritten to account for the problems of “our time,” a time that would need to be sensitive to difference, plurality, heterogeneity, singularity, and all of the attending dangers and risks that such a situation produces. This would require a certain flexibility of judgment, a willingness to decide by a leap, to accept each and every now as critical – which would mean accepting the challenging and uncomfortable need for judgment, *krinein*, crisis in the second sense. Since such a need would be without end, welcoming it could well be a way of resisting crisis in the first sense.

## Chapter One

### The “Project of Modernity”: Critical Philosophy and the Kantian Idea

#### 1.1 Modernity and the “Idea in the Kantian Sense”

In a text that attempts to address the “modern” sense of time and temporality, Lyotard characterizes modernity as projective, as a “project” – by which he means, as he says, that it grounds its legitimacy not in the past but in the future (IH 68). What characterizes this modern project is a propensity not to seek a destiny in past texts or founding narratives (which would rather characterize the myth, according to Lyotard), but rather, and in all of its guises – Christian, Enlightenment, romantic, idealist, Marxist – to gaze forward to an open future, to view human history as guided, or at least guidable, according to an ideal or ultimate aim. This ultimate aim is that of emancipation, but it remains otherwise undefined, open, “a sort of void or ‘blank’” that, indeed, must be safeguarded as such (ibid.). This void or blank is freedom, which is the end, the future, toward which the unfolding of events that is human history must be seen to work.

It is in terms of this undefined but idealized future that modernity is to be distinguished from the myth, which is conceived rather as the historical ground of a society’s destiny. The myth stands as an initial declaration of what will unfold, it organizes history from a past, “prehistorical” moment, in contradistinction to this open future. Nonetheless, says Lyotard, modernity retains a “principle” in common with mythic narratives: “the principle according to which the general course of history is conceivable” (ibid.). For modernity, this history lacks a *destiny* – but it has a *destination* (*Bestimmung*), even if this destination remains, “under the name of freedom,” the open

space we have described. What this means is that the movement of history is measured in terms of this destination; it is teleological – which means, in turn, that it is open to reason, is conceived of as following its own reason. This makes it explicable. One can make sense of history in terms of its development – the sequence of its moments are shaped according to how they lead or fail to lead towards the ideal situated at the end of its narrative (ibid.). It is the task of philosophy to make this explication, to make the destination conscious and therefore possible. To open humanity up to that future.

Although this description is meant as a kind of definition of modernity for Lyotard, and thus encompasses in some general way all such projects, Kant's location here appears nonetheless to be central. In an only slightly earlier text dealing with the problematic of "universal history" in terms of cultural differences, Lyotard refers to the "modern mode of organizing time" as based on an Idea, which Idea is again that of emancipation, the Idea of freedom as a horizon – and he is clear here that when he uses the term "Idea" he means it very much in the Kantian sense (UCD 315). Modernity is, at least for the "later" Lyotard of these texts, a "mode" of thought rather than an historical epoch, and he finds examples of this mode throughout the history of Western thought. But it is clear that Kant is among its exemplars, while the Kantian Idea is a model for its projective tendency. Here's a long quote from Lyotard on how this Idea (here, specifically that of emancipation, but we can see how the Idea in the Kantian sense operates generally as an organizing principle) has played out in various of the historical "narratives" he identifies in the text on universal history (and we might note that the first of them, at least, is not obviously "modern" in an historical sense):

What we call philosophies of history, the great narratives by means of which we attempt to order the multitude of events, certainly argue this idea in very different ways: a Christian

narrative in which Adam's sin is redeemed through love; the *Aufklärer* narrative of emancipation from ignorance and servitude thanks to knowledge and egalitarianism; the speculative narrative of the realization of the universal idea through the dialectic of the concrete; the Marxist narrative of emancipation from exploitation and alienation through the socialization of labor; the capitalist narrative of emancipation from poverty through technical and industrial development. These various narratives provide grounds for contention, and even for disagreement. But they all situate the data supplied by events within the course of a history whose end, even if it is out of reach, is called freedom. (Ibid.)

Such narratives differ, produce disagreements and contestations – but they share a similar structure, organize time and the unfolding of events in a similar way. Lyotard suggests that they historicize the world, that they make the idea of an historical world possible by providing a means of narrating happenings (314). Indeed, as we have already intimated, it is as an organization precisely of time and of history that Lyotard conceives not only of this “modern” mode, but of the Idea that is its guiding principle and the trajectory it produces.

But what is the purpose of organizing and comprehending history in terms of an Idea? The goal of the narrative is one of legitimacy. These narratives attempt to legitimate not only the science and knowledge that is the subject of *The Postmodern Condition*, but also and at the same time “social and political institutions and practices, laws, ethics, ways of thinking” (PE 18). They seek this legitimacy in a *future*, a future to be accomplished, a task to be fulfilled – “in an Idea to be realized” (ibid.). The Idea legitimates practices, and it does so in virtue of being universal (this is not the same as with myth, which applies only to the people who tell the story and establish their own

original founding act). Thus, says Lyotard, the Idea “guides every human reality” and “gives modernity its characteristic mode: the *project*” (ibid., italics given).

Much will come of these themes in the pages that follow, but we should notice at the outset the relation of this projective thinking to the infinite. The Idea organizes the finite, the particular, gives it a place in a determinate and determining unfolding toward a promised future. The particular is always already “placed” within an overall structure, and it is through this placing that its opacity is countered and its contingency accommodated. The present is subsumed under the Idea of a universal history, its events given their meaning in terms of how they relate to or connect what has come “before” to what is to come “after” (but always, in modernity, in the direction of the “after”). Lyotard’s relationship to such a state of affairs is, in fact, ambiguous and difficult, as we shall see. But when he speaks of the modern project Kant is never far away – since in a sense the Kantian Idea can be seen to organize this “mode” of thinking. Or, perhaps better, it is one manifestation of this mode, but an exemplary one.

Let us stress what we have already said, that the term modernity is not meant to designate a particular epoch in the history of philosophy, but rather signifies in Lyotard an attempt to describe or pick out a particular orientation to the world, one that organizes thoughts, utterances and sensibilities under, as we have argued, the Idea of a universal history of humanity itself guided (ultimately) by the Idea of emancipation. While this begins to raise some questions about the very structure and conception of what we call “history” (questions to which we shall return), it does not preclude Lyotard from taking an historical stance of sorts with regard to the “thought and action of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,” which he describes as governed by this Idea – “in its Kantian sense”



– of emancipation (315); nor does it prevent him from suggesting that “we” who find ourselves attempting to think “at the end of the twentieth century (or the beginning of the twenty-first)” are faced with a difficult question “posed for us by the historical world” (and Lyotard is very clear that this “we” is, especially at the very asking of this question, entirely problematic (315-6; see also § 3.2 below, but the problem of the “we” for contemporary thought is in some sense central to this entire study and will continue to appear throughout)). Indeed, the suggestion is that somehow “we” (“we,” at least, who take it upon ourselves to think and write about such things) have arrived at a time in which we are now *obliged* to attempt an answer to this question, which is the following: whether this “we” can continue to “organize the multitude of events that come to us from the world” in terms of this Idea of emancipation and its attending Idea of a universal history of humanity (314). Again, the suggestion is that this question has somehow become pressing now, in the present time. Which seems to open the possibility that in some sense we (whoever “we” are) have reached a point (a stage, i.e., of history?) where we not only can but indeed must ask about this modern mode of organizing events in time – that we must ask, then, about modernity itself, and its mode of legitimating its institutions.

We will turn to Lyotard’s conception of thinking in the present time and its relation to history at the outset of Chapter 3. But let us note the gravity with which the question is posed, and posed most specifically in relation to what we have very briefly described in terms of the “project of modernity.” We might suggest in a very preliminary way that the problem Lyotard raises is one of a *crisis*, a crisis of history, a crisis of modernity, a crisis, indeed, for thought itself. Such is one sense of the term crisis: a time

of upheaval and change that requires an immediate and urgent decision, a turning point that demands to be addressed in the interests, precisely, of the passage to a certain future. But which future? And with this question we can see that this first sense immediately dovetails into another (one which may not, in fact, be separable from the first) – the moment that this first sense of crisis in turn demands, that of a judgment or a decision in the face of this upheaval, this situation in which no clear course of action, no obvious direction, can be found: the moment of crisis, then, taken as *krinein*. And it is through this “second” sense of crisis that we can begin to connect Lyotard’s thinking on this constellation of problems regarding history and time with the thought of Derrida, who invokes the notion also, in the context of a famous discussion of deconstruction and its relation to critique – including, importantly for us, Kantian critique. For Derrida claims, in the famed “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” that “[t]he instance of *krinein* or of *krisis* (decision, choice, judgment, discernment) is itself, as is all the apparatus of transcendental critique, one of the essential ‘themes’ or ‘objects’ of deconstruction.”<sup>3</sup>

There are a number of things that we should note about this statement. The first is that it comes in the context of a discussion of what separates deconstruction from analysis and from critique, critique taken here, as we have already intimated, in both a general and a Kantian sense (*ibid.*). Leaving analysis aside for the moment, we should note that deconstruction is to be distinguished from critique “in spite of appearances,” suggesting that up to a point there is a profound similarity between the two.<sup>4</sup> This connects to the second thing that we should notice: that “the apparatus of transcendental critique,” which

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” trans. David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), pp. 270-6, this ref. p. 273.

<sup>4</sup> On this point, see Geoffrey Bennington, “Almost the End,” in his *Interrupting Derrida* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 141-52.

is associated with *krinein* or crisis taken as judgment, decision, or discernment, is among the essential “themes” or “objects” of deconstruction. Deconstruction, taken here, again preliminarily, as shorthand for Derrida’s thought, is thus, to use his word, “essentially” linked with transcendental critique, and with Kantian critique more specifically.

It is not *only* linked with this critique, of course, and Derrida, in an essay largely devoted to Kant, speaks of going (through this writing on Kant) to “meet those who . . . have precisely organized their work by privileging the reference to a certain Kantian caesura in the time of philosophy” (AT 122). Such an organization, such a privileging, would clearly not be a *necessary* one, nor necessarily always desirable. But again, as with Lyotard, there seems to be a privileging of Kant in *some* sense going on here, and this right back to the early texts on Husserl, where Husserl’s use precisely of the “Idea in the Kantian sense” is much thematized (see § 2.4).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Bennington suggests that the distinction Derrida makes between critique in a general sense and critique in a Kantian sense in the “Letter” is in fact made in reference to Husserl (another transcendental critique, requiring use of the term “general”?), while what would unify both senses of critique would be exactly “the instance of *krinein* or of *krisis*.”<sup>6</sup> Or more specifically, the Idea (in the Kantian sense) *and* crisis (taken, again, as judgment, decision, etc.) would together unify what Derrida is here calling critique and taking as an essential theme of deconstruction. This would help us to suggest a way to connect Derrida’s interest in critique with some of the things Lyotard says about modernity. The Idea in the Kantian sense that so interests both of them seems to do so because of the role it plays in

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<sup>5</sup> As Bennington (“Almost the End,” p. 144) points out, right back to Derrida’s Master’s thesis on genesis in Husserl. See Jacques Derrida, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy*, trans. Marian Hobson (Chicago & London: U of Chicago P, 2003), for instance, pp. 94 ff., and especially Part IV, “Teleology: The Sense of History and the History of Sense.”

<sup>6</sup> “Almost the End,” p. 143.

regulating judgment or decision. That is, that *krisis* taken as judgment, decision, differentiation, the instance or moment of such judgment or decision, can be – and usually is – regulated or controlled by the Idea, and by the end that such an Idea projects or puts forward. Derrida too, as with Lyotard, suggests that it is just such a *telos* or teleology that makes a *historicity* possible (WEC 128).<sup>7</sup> Which again would return us to the problematic of time and of its organization, of the organization, again in Lyotard's words, of the “multitude of events that come to us from the world.”

In a text that we will devote some time to in the final chapter, “The ‘World’ of the Enlightenment to Come” (§ 5.3, but see also §§ 2.3, 2.4), Derrida explicitly links Kant and Husserl through the teleology of the Kantian Idea, and more specifically through the normative or prescriptive import of this Idea (131-2). The theoretical interest of reason is subordinated to the practical, in Husserl as well as in Kant, one implication of which is that history tends to be viewed by both in terms of a normative task, a task of reason itself. This text will require some analysis, but I would like here to note how Derrida opposes what he calls “responsibility” or “decision” to the conceptions of practical, ethical, juridical, or political reason as this reason comes out of the tradition exemplified by Kant and Husserl. There is something normative, practical, even – and indeed, especially – ethical or political at stake here, and it is connected to what he calls at one point “all the urgencies that confront us,” that confront us “today” and that press upon us in terms of “the great question of reason and of life” (145). Indeed, the very notions of the State and of “globalization” are called into question by Derrida in this passage, and precisely around this question of reason. The question is one of the relation of this

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<sup>7</sup> Though it also and at the same time makes it impossible, a problematic we will discuss in more detail in later chapters (see especially § 4.2).

reason, the reason that is unified and governed by the Idea in the Kantian sense, the reason of a certain tradition of modernity, to the urgent issues that confront “us,” today, in the techno-scientific, “globalized” world in which the State and the legal, political, juridical, and ethical norms of the modern world might be seen to be coming to (indeed) an end.

Such language sounds a lot like Lyotard’s talk of the “great questions” facing us, here, “at the end of the twentieth century (or the beginning of the twenty-first).” Let me return to that other sense of crisis, the one I invoked earlier in the context of the urgency of Lyotard’s question: that of a turning point, a moment of decision, of necessary and even urgent judgment. In both cases the point seems to be that a certain kind of thinking, the thinking that might be called, in the loosest sense, “philosophical,” is today faced with a number of urgent issues or problems (crises) that require judgment, decision, discernment (*krinein, krisis*), and that this need is somehow wrapped up with the notion of critique (particularly Kantian critique) and the organizing powers of the Idea in the Kantian sense. Which would seem to suggest that *one* way (there would surely be others) to begin to read the texts of Lyotard and of Derrida – separately but also together – would be through the rather complex constellation that appears around the “Idea in the Kantian sense,” this Idea taken as a way of organizing time, history, and events, but also as a way of organizing or guiding judgment or decision.<sup>8</sup> My intention is to try to do so around the notion of crisis – taken here both as judgment, decision, differentiation, etc., and also in terms of the *moment* of judgment or decision, in terms of the urgency of the need to judge

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<sup>8</sup> Bennington also suggests “the Idea in the Kantian sense” as a possible – indeed, “promising” – point of departure for a reading of these two writers together. See his “Deconstruction and the Philosophers (The Very Idea)” in *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London & New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 11-60, this ref. p. 58, n.64.

or decide, often in spite of a lack of any criteria for doing so. For it seems to me that through this dual aspect of crisis (which is perhaps really only two sides of the same problematic), we might not only begin to open up what in either Lyotard or Derrida is, with all the ambiguity of the term, “critical” of the Kantian project, but also what might still be called “Kantian” in the writings of either. The term “crisis” seems particularly apt given that a reading revolving around it will in turn help us to get some sense for the political stakes at work in each French author.

In order to begin to do so, however, we need to get some sense for the way the “Idea” works in Kant himself. In the rest of this chapter I want to try to lay out in some detail the “Idea in the Kantian sense” as it appears in the first and third *Critiques* respectively, particularly around the teleology that it produces or entails. In order to open up this theme of crisis from the beginning, however, I want to read what Kant says about the Idea in the context of a certain crisis, a crisis described by Kant himself and against which the critical philosophy can be seen to work. The hope is to get a sense for Kant’s own conception of the historical moment of his critical philosophy. Here a path will be laid toward the conception of history as it is conceived of in both Kant and Husserl, a reading of which will follow in the next chapter.

## **1.2 Kant and the Crisis of Enlightenment**

Human reason has a peculiar problem, Kant tells us in the very opening passages of the critical philosophy, the Preface to the first edition of the first *Critique*: it is, “in one species of its cognitions,” i.e., metaphysics, “burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems (*aufgegeben*) by the very nature of reason

itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason” (Avii). Kant is quick to tell us that reason falls into this conundrum through no fault of its own, but starts, rather, from principles the use of which are unavoidable in experience, from which it rises to ever higher ones, until it finds itself separated from experience entirely and has fallen into obscurity and contradiction. It does this, however, according to the requirements of its own nature (ibid.) – its fall is a result of both its need for higher and higher principles of unity and its inability ever to experience the highest possible unity conceivable. It cannot *not* surpass the bounds of experience, and yet once it has done so it is no longer able to know its object.

The problem is that this makes metaphysics vulnerable to speculation and flights of fancy. Without the necessity of grounding their claims in experience, metaphysicians have been able to make all manner of claims regarding the ultimate structure of reality – claims that not only defy proof (and often rationality), but are radically at odds with one another. As a result, metaphysics has become a “battlefield” of endless controversies (Aviii), an image Kant retains in the Preface to the second edition, adding that “no combatant has ever gained the least bit of ground” on it (Bxv). Once the “Queen of all the sciences” (Aviii), reason in metaphysics is constantly being halted, philosophers forced to retrace their path and start again in the face of constant paradox and failure – “even though [metaphysics] is older than all other sciences, and would remain even if all the others were swallowed up by an all-consuming barbarism” (Bxiv).<sup>9</sup> Even barbarians, insofar as they partake in reason, would, by the very nature of reason itself, be obliged to pursue such questions. Indeed, looking ahead, it is the very possession of reason that will

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<sup>9</sup> See also, for this and much of what follows, Sebastian Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), Chapter One.

lead humanity out of barbarism and into culture – away from nature and toward the end proper to human freedom (see Chapter 2). This itself is the very process of history for Kant, what gives the events that make up history their unified meaning.<sup>10</sup> But this road is not without its obstacles, as this quote and as Kant’s general tone in either Preface to the first *Critique* suggest. Reason can get stuck along the way, the path lost or, as Kant puts it in a much later passage, overgrown (i.e., by sensibility, A838/B866). It is the task of the philosopher to find this path, and to ground the use of reason in all its pursuits in a metaphysics conceived of as a “fundamental science” (Bxxiv).

Thus far, however, philosophy has failed to achieve its task, a task that, in the face of precisely these crises, has become increasingly historical in nature – by which I mean that it is only by looking back at its failures that the crisis of the present time is brought into focus and the need to reorient philosophy toward another future made manifest. The critical philosophy is conceived from the outset as a response to this failure, and therefore as a response that is historical, a response that has historical moment. Indeed, the Copernican revolution itself is couched in terms of crisis and the need for a revolutionary mode of thinking, while in the *Prolegomena* Kant speaks of the need for a “regeneration” for metaphysics “by means of a thorough and complete critique of reason” precisely now, in the time of this crisis, where “by a total dissolution of former connections, minds are in the best state to listen to several proposals for an organization according to a new plan” (367/106-7). The time is right for the critique; indeed, “there is no other means of supplying this pressing want [for metaphysical researches]” (367/107).

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<sup>10</sup> At least regulatively. We shall take the question up in more detail in the first section of Chapter 2, but we already have a hint here of what Lyotard means by the need to organize events *into* history.



We are, of course, well aware of the issues that are said to have led Kant to the critical philosophy, chief among them, perhaps, the radical advances made by modern science in the previous century and a half (epitomized by Newtonian physics), advances that created a new standard for scientific pursuit. Faced with such standards, metaphysics, on the other hand, seems clearly to have failed to live up to the promise of the Enlightenment, but remains, as we have seen, mired in controversy and conflict, its course unclear. Its credibility, and as a result the credibility of philosophy and of human reason itself, has thus become tarnished<sup>11</sup> - a theme we will return to in the context of Husserl's thinking on history. Philosophy as Kant encounters it is thus characterized by divisions and tensions – between reason and religion, between the “empiricism” of Locke and Hume and the “rationalism” of Leibniz and Wolff, between, eventually, Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment. In the words of Yirmiahu Yovel, philosophy in Kant's time faces its own antinomies, and if it is to fulfill this promise of the Enlightenment, which is the promise of the emancipation of human reason, it needs liberation from them.<sup>12</sup>

We should not lose sight of the political importance of the Enlightenment for Kant, however.<sup>13</sup> The existence of a universal reason, as is well known, is a challenge to the authority of established tradition – the ideal of individual (rational) autonomy and of the growth of knowledge are seen by Kant as ways of fostering political independence and freedom from the dominion of traditional – that is, uncriticized – sources of authority. We will return to these themes. Let us note from the outset, however, how Kant conceives of the significance of his age, which he calls the “age of criticism”:

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> See Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), p. 255.

<sup>13</sup> As Gardner also argues, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 3.

Our age is, in especial degree, the age of criticism, and to criticism everything must submit. Religion through its sanctity, and law-giving through its majesty, may seek to exempt themselves from it. But then they awaken just suspicion, and cannot claim the sincere respect which reason accords only to that which has been able to sustain the test of free and open examination. (Axi, n.)<sup>14</sup>

Not even religion escapes the rigor of criticism, the rigor of a thinking, potentially universal, that puts everything to the test of reason. The free and independent use of reason will put an end to all forms of tyranny – religious, political, even philosophical – by putting all claims to knowledge to the test and giving all rational individuals the chance to judge for themselves. To be able to judge in this way is to avoid being manipulated – “like children,” as Kant puts it in a letter to Hamann.<sup>15</sup> Humanity must attain adulthood, and it is, precisely, in this *age*, this historical moment that such adulthood becomes at the very least a possibility, at this stage that reason has reached in its own evolution. If it has faltered due to internal conflicts or inconsistencies, if it has thus opened itself up to skepticism, dogmatism and, in the later years of Kant’s life, the “irrationalism” of the likes of Hamann, Herder and Jacobi, can we not say that it is with all the more urgency that Kant feels that reason must be put back on track? It is at least clear that the problem for Kant is more than epistemological or even ideological – reason itself must be defended, its progress reestablished and its ultimate goal (that of humanity’s rational autonomy and freedom) clarified.

We will have occasion in what follows to raise suspicion about the simplicity of such an “historical” reading. Nonetheless, it allows us to open a theme: borrowing

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<sup>14</sup> See also Gardner, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Kant to Hamann, April 8, 1774, Ak. 10: 160; quoted by John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), p. 40.

somewhat from Derrida, we might suggest that for Kant the question is one of the honor of reason. This question is one that appears early in Kant, who already in the essay in 1747 on living forces speaks of defending (*verteidigen*) the honor of reason, and of reconciling it with itself and with the truth.<sup>16</sup> Such is, indeed, an interest of reason itself, a *critical* interest in more than one sense. And it is the fact that it is critical that makes this interest *modern*.<sup>17</sup> The metaphysical interest of reason is ancient, even originary with the rational itself – reason, as Kant himself says and as we have seen, is driven to inquire into the ultimate ends and bounds of being. Its critical attitude, on the other hand, the attitude that will save it from the excesses of skepticism or dogmatic metaphysics, is that of a new sovereign, a new law-giver, a judge that will preside over the court of reason and the trial not only of metaphysics, but ultimately of the use and limits of reason itself in all its pursuits. And it will do so in the name of reason itself, in its defense and in defense of its honor – in the face of crisis and against those, such as Jacobi, who advocate a turn away from reason and toward a “philosophy of faith,” as Cassirer puts it.<sup>18</sup> Kant’s admonition to the likes of Jacobi in “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” makes this clear. Let us quote it somewhat extensively, taking our lead from Cassirer:

Men of intellectual ability and broadminded disposition! I honor your talents and love your feeling for humanity. But have you thought about what you are doing, and where your attacks on reason will lead? Without doubt you want to preserve inviolate the *freedom to think*; for without that even your own free flights of genius would soon come to an end. . . .

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<sup>16</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte*, Ak. 1: 149. For a discussion of this passage in terms of the larger philosophical ends of Kant’s essay, see Jean Ferrari, *Les sources françaises de la philosophie de Kant* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1979), pp. 24-6. This latter text was pointed out to Jacques Derrida by the author himself; Derrida points it out to us in WEC 171, n.3

<sup>17</sup> I take from Yovel the distinction between the metaphysical interest of reason and the critical (and therefore modern) one; see *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Kant’s Life and Thought*, trans. James Haden (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1981), p. 368.

Friends of the human race and of what is holiest to it! Accept what appears to you most worthy of belief after careful and sincere examination, whether of facts or rational grounds; only do not dispute that prerogative of reason which makes it the highest good on earth, the prerogative of being the final touchstone of truth. Failing here, you will become unworthy of this freedom, and you will surely forfeit it too; and besides that you will bring the same misfortune down on the heads of other, innocent parties who would otherwise have been well disposed and would have used their freedom *lawfully* and hence in a way which is conducive to what is best for the world! (WO 8: 144; 147/16; 18, italics given)<sup>19</sup>

To challenge reason's place as the sole "touchstone of truth" is to be threatened with the loss of freedom, the loss of the ability to judge, critically, rationally, autonomously, for oneself. The political urgency of the critical task is here evident. Kant's goal is to restore to reason its integrity, its honor, and to restore to philosophy its mission of facilitating reason's continuing progress, which is the progress of human freedom.

We have then an historical task, if not precisely an historical goal. The telos of such a task remains fixed, and it is indeed through this figure of infinite goal or telos that Kant, as we will see, attempts to overcome the crisis of reason. And it is here, too, that the notion of time begins to become somewhat more complex. If Kant's is a time of crisis, it is also a time of criticism, of enlightenment conceived in "critical" terms, in terms of the autonomy of a critical reason.<sup>20</sup> To be "modern" in this sense means to be *out* of one's time as well as in it, to run contrary to one's time, contrary to its received ideas, to which reason must apply its critical apparatus. What has been inherited is not yet accepted; modernity in this sense is a break, but a break with what nonetheless gives

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<sup>19</sup> See also Cassirer, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Both Cassirer (p. 367) and Yovel (p. 253) associate enlightenment in Kant with a "critical conception of autonomy" (Cassirer).

it birth, a break with its own legacy.<sup>21</sup> It is not without reason that Deleuze, in the Introduction to his book on Kant, quotes from *Hamlet*: “the time is out of joint.”<sup>22</sup> The “present” is a time of conflict within itself – what is past does not receive free passage. Following Kasper Nefer Olsen, himself following Adorno, we might say that “the present” is in modernity a “point of critique,” where one must constantly *distinguish* (and let us note that Nefer Olsen here invokes the Greek, *krinein*) between what is and what is not of “the time.”<sup>23</sup> The “present” is in a sense, then, not “in” or “of” the time. This “modern” time, which is the time of critique and of crisis, is characterized by untimeliness, by separation, and by the need thus to discriminate, to “judge” in all the senses, including legal, that this word invokes in Kant. Reason has reached a stage in its development where it can, indeed, *must* be untimely, is called to be so. For its own defense, its own honor. It must be reconciled with itself, and yet in order to be so it must act as judge in its own tribunal. It must come to provide a unity to what has been fragmented. But has it not become (or remained) fragmented in aiming at its unity?

What has come before presses on critical thinking, forces reason to evaluate itself, to separate from itself in order to judge itself. For instance, as reason in pursuit of its metaphysical interest versus reason in the role of critical watchdog. According to Kant, of course, these are interests of the *same* reason – but that is as yet an assertion. They are not yet united under the banner of critical philosophy. And critical philosophy thus has a goal. As Kant famously puts it, his is an age of enlightenment, but not yet an enlightened

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<sup>21</sup> These terms, “birth,” “inheritance,” “legacy,” are not accidental, or at least not neutral. We will return to them.

<sup>22</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1995), p vii.

<sup>23</sup> Kasper Nefer Olsen, “Anesthétique – Le sublime expliqué aux amants,” *Lyotard, les déplacements philosophiques*, ed. Niels Brügger et al., trans. Emile Danino (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 1993), pp. 79-97. This ref., p. 89.

age (WE 8:40/21). Critical reason works towards what it does not yet have: its own unity, which is the unity of philosophy itself. If this end is not, in fact, the end of philosophy, it is the end of the search for its foundations, the final establishment of its borders. It is the end, too, and most importantly, of the crisis that metaphysics and philosophy more generally face in this time of enlightenment. And it is with this aim in mind that Kant invokes, in fact, an *end* in the sense of a goal, an infinite telos. What enters in this time, then, is the notion of an end that is out of time, an end that shows the task to be forever unfinished, but one that nonetheless organizes and gives order to this task. This end is thus an Idea, an Idea through which reason's path is laid out and its purpose established – if not in its unity, at least in the court of law that will establish such unity.

### **1.3 The first *Critique*: Teleology and the Idea**

But what does it mean, for Kant, to philosophize then? We can already see that philosophical thought for Kant is thought directed towards an end. In the chapter devoted to “The Architectonic of Pure Reason” in the first *Critique*, Kant argues that all our cognitions must constitute a system under the governance of reason, as only in so doing can they “support and advance [reason's] essential ends” (A832/B860). In order to become a system and support and advance such ends, however, the manifold cognitions must be unified under a single idea, “the rational concept of the form of a whole,” which idea determines *a priori* the scope (*Umfang*)<sup>24</sup> of the manifold, as well as the position of its parts one to the other (*ibid.*). The end and the form of the whole are thus contained in

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<sup>24</sup> Guyer and Wood translate *Umfang* as “domain,” but given the use of this word to translate the important term, *Gebiet*, I shall use “scope” here to avoid confusion. See below, § 1.4.

the rational concept of that end. Through the unity of the end, and the idea of that end through which all parts are seen to relate to the whole, the absence of any missing part is recognized from within our existing knowledge, while the boundaries of any new parts are determined *a priori* (A832-3/B860-1). The whole is therefore “articulated (*articulatio*),” according to Kant – it can grow, but only organically, as an animal does, adding strength to existing limbs rather than adding new ones (A833/B861).

This reference to an organism begins to give us a sense for the teleological aspect of Kant’s thought. The whole determines the relation of its parts, while the whole itself is made possible by “a single supreme and inner end” (*ibid.*). Rational systematicity is here closely related, if not equivalent, to teleological organization.<sup>25</sup> Science itself depends on this division of the whole into member parts, a division that is always in conformity with the idea (A833/B861), while reason fulfills its task by unifying particulars into systematic unities on the basis of its ideas.

Philosophy itself, as a science or body of knowledge (as opposed to an action or pursuit), is the systematic unity of all philosophical cognition. Kant calls it “the archetype for the assessment of all attempts to philosophize” (A838/B866). Philosophy in this sense is itself merely an *idea*, however, the “idea of a possible science” that has never been found and made concrete, “but which one seeks to approach in various ways until the only footpath, much overgrown by sensibility, is discovered, and the hitherto unsuccessful ectype, so far as it has been granted to humans, is made equal to the archetype” (*ibid.*). Philosophy itself, then, as a pursuit, as the *act* of thinking, seeks to fulfill an end, an end given to it through the concept of philosophy itself, even though that concept has yet to be realized. This structure is what makes Kant claim in a rather

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<sup>25</sup> Sebastian Gardner equates them in his *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

famous passage – much quoted by Lyotard, among others – that one cannot learn philosophy, but only to philosophize (A837/B865). In the absence of the concrete fulfillment of this idea in a system of unified cognitions there is no “place” one could go in order to find and learn the system of philosophy. It is rather the task of the thinker “to exercise the talent of reason” in pursuit of such a system, always in accordance with (*Befolgung*) reason’s principles, but also always with the qualification that reason has the right “to investigate the sources of these principles . . . and to confirm or reject them” (A838/B866). We will recognize here the procedure Kant calls “critique”: the investigation of the faculty of reason, conducted by reason itself, with regard to all pure *a priori* cognition (A839/B867). But we should also recognize the role that the idea of philosophy as archetype plays, guiding as it does not only this “exercise” of the talent of reason but indeed reason’s own investigations into the sources of its own principles.

What ends reason pursues obviously cannot be arbitrary, although what Kant calls the “scholastic concept” of philosophy is guilty of just such error (A839/B867, n.). What ultimately grounds the concept “philosophy,” however, is not the scholastic but rather what Kant calls its “cosmopolitan concept” (*Weltbegriff*), in which philosophy is conceived as “the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*)” (A839/B867). The philosopher is not an artist but is rather the *legislator* of human reason, signifying its boundaries and determining its proper aims. As we have observed, no such philosopher yet exists in the world, one which can claim to have equaled the archetype; nonetheless, there remains a “teacher” in this ideal philosopher, a teacher who controls and guides all pursuits of reason as “tools” in the advancement of these essential ends (*ibid.*). And although existing nowhere in the



world, the idea of this philosopher's legislation is to be found "in every human reason" (ibid.), which gives us some sense for the universal importance of this idea, and of the many attempts to pursue it.

Indeed, a cosmopolitan concept, according to Kant, is one that "concerns that which necessarily interests everyone" (ibid., n.). Though he is not, perhaps predictably, terribly generous to the Architectonic, it is helpful to note that Norman Kemp Smith (who translates *Weltbegriff* as *universal* concept) describes this concept as one "shared by the whole world" or as one that is "common to all mankind."<sup>26</sup> As opposed to a philosophy that aims merely at a certain skill or ability, we are speaking here of the essential ends of *all* human reason. Kemp Smith points us<sup>27</sup> to a passage in Kant's *Logic* where Kant makes the rather striking claim that philosophy in its "higher" conception is directed not at mere skill but at *utility* or *usefulness* (JL 24/537).<sup>28</sup> If one asks of the use of philosophy, its final aim, we must say that it has utility, it is useful, and that this usefulness has world consequences. Knowledge must contribute to the ends of human reason; indeed, it must serve these ends. Philosophy in this higher conception is thus "a doctrine of wisdom," while the philosopher is not a master of the *art* of reason, but, again, its *legislator* (ibid.). Philosophy in its cosmopolitan sense, under the idea of its world significance, does not play with reason as an artist plays with forms, but gives it its laws according to the law of reason's own essential ends.

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<sup>26</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason,"* 2<sup>nd</sup>, revised ed. (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Prometheus, 1999 [1923]), p. 581, n.1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., n.2.

<sup>28</sup> The term "utility" comes from the translation of Kant's logic by T. K. Abbott, *Kant's Introduction to Logic and his Essay on the Mistaken Subtlety of the Four Figures* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1963), see p. 14; but Kant uses similar language in the Preface to the second edition of the first *Critique*, e.g., at Bxxv. J. Michael Young gives yet another version of *Weltbegriff* when he translates it as "'worldly concept'" (JL 23/537).

The essential ends that Kant speaks of here and in the Architectonic are not yet the *highest* end, of course, of which there can be only a single one. Even all essential ends are subordinated to this final end (*Endzweck*), while this final end “is nothing other than the entire vocation of human beings,” the philosophy of which is moral philosophy (A840/B868). We shall have to discuss this presently. Nonetheless, we can already get a sense for the teleology that might be “underlying” even the first *Critique* and its claim that “Everything grounded in the nature of our powers must be purposive and consistent with their correct use” (A642/B670),<sup>29</sup> including, as we know, even the transcendental ideas of reason themselves, provided their significance is properly understood (A643/B671). Even though they can cause error and confusion through misunderstanding and misuse, and thus lead us far from the land of truth, these ideas, as reflected in the title of the second part of the Appendix, “On the final aim of the natural dialectic of human reason,” nonetheless have a positive use that serves reason’s ultimate purposes (A669/B697). We are again given an example of some of Kant’s “underlying teleological assumptions” at work here.<sup>30</sup>

Let us consider such assumptions a little further. Reason, considered as a faculty with its own logical form of cognition, has a task. Its task, ultimately, is to unify experience into a totality, the “collective unity” of all possible experience (Prol 328/70). It does so, according to what Kant calls its “ascending function,” by moving from conditioned objects to the conditions from which these objects derive (KRV A330-2/B386-8). Each conditioning rule must have its rational grounding, must be derived

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<sup>29</sup> See Bernd Dörflinger, “The Underlying Teleology of the First Critique,” *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress, Memphis 1995*, vol. I, ed. Hoke Robinson (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1995), pp. 813-26.

<sup>30</sup> See Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, revised, enlarged ed. (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2004), p. 437 for reference to one such assumption.

from a higher principle, and it is reason's function to provide this unity, to organize the data of the understanding into this series of broader and broader grounding principles.<sup>31</sup> Given that the condition of each conditioned has its own conditioning factors, however, reason is here threatened with an infinite regress, a regress that if permitted to run its course would prevent reason from ever achieving its end. The task of reason must be brought to a conclusion, which means that it must reach the end of this chain of conditions, that is, it must reach "the *totality of the conditions* for conditioned objects, which is the same as to say that [reason] must refer to an *unconditioned* totality."<sup>32</sup>

In the shift from the chain of conditions to their totality, we shift from reason's logical use to its transcendental or "real" use (see A299/B355). Kant describes the "logical maxim" of reason in a famous passage at the end of the Introduction to the Dialectic: "[T]he proper principle of reason in general (in its logical use) is to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed" (A307/B364). This maxim becomes a *principle* of pure reason only if it is assumed that whenever the conditioned is given, "the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned," is also given – that is, that the unconditioned series of conditions is "contained in the object and its connection" (A307-8/B364).<sup>33</sup> Thus the very principle of the unity of experience finds its origin in reason, whose transcendental concept of the totality of conditions for any conditioned thing, which totality is made possible only through the unconditioned, "contains a ground of synthesis" for whatever is conditioned (A322/B379).

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<sup>31</sup> Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, p. 311.

<sup>32</sup> Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 217, italics given.

<sup>33</sup> See also Allison, p. 312.

Which brings us back to the idea, and more specifically to the role the idea plays in the Kantian philosophy. The concepts that reason produces on its own, without the input of the understanding, form a system of transcendental ideas that do for reason what the metaphysical deduction of the categories did for the understanding.<sup>34</sup> It is well known of what this system is comprised. Since there are only three species of inference by way of which reason can arrive at cognition from principles (i.e., three forms of syllogism), there will be three corresponding “dialectical inferences” by which reason ascends to the unconditioned (A333/B390). Kant reasons thus:

Now what is universal in every relation that our representations can have is 1) the relation to the subject, 2) the relation to objects (*Objecte*), and indeed either as appearances, or as objects of thinking in general. If we combine this subdivision with the above division [i.e., the division of the species of dialectical inference into three], then all the relation of representations of which we can make either a concept or an idea are of three sorts: 1) the relation to the subject, 2) to the manifold of the object in appearance, and 3) to all things in general. (A333-4/B390-1)

All transcendental ideas, having as they must to do with the “unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions in general,” thus fall under three classes or groups: that of the absolute unity of the thinking subject (the soul); that of the absolute unity of the series of conditions of appearance (the world); and that of the absolute unity of the condition of all objects of thought in general (God) (A334/B391).

Whether or not Kant has truly “deduced” these three ideas from the three forms of syllogism, or rather, as Kemp Smith argues, they have really been obtained “through combination of the unique concept of the unconditioned with the three categories of

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<sup>34</sup> Gardner, p. 218.

relation,”<sup>35</sup> what is clear is the role they play in providing unity to the fragments of experience. What the ideas themselves represent does not fall within the realm of possible experience. Their “objects” are conceivable but not knowable; the ideas cannot become concepts of real and knowable objects without our falling into transcendental illusion. They are rather ideal, and Kant even invokes Plato and his use of the term “idea,” using a word we have seen already: for Plato, says Kant, ideas are “*archetypes* of things themselves, and not, like the categories, merely the key to possible experiences” (A313/B370, my italics). In Plato, too, ideas come “from the highest reason (*höchsten Vernunft*)” and not from “mere” experience, and it is through this “highest” reason that human reason partakes in them (*ibid.*). Experience is to be organized according to these archetypes, which in fact come to “account for the actual,” as Kemp Smith puts it.<sup>36</sup>

Plato found these ideas primarily in the practical sphere, where experience falls short of attaining the true model of notions such as virtue (A314-5/B371). Again we see the work of the archetype here: “we are all aware that when someone is represented as a model of virtue, we always have the true original in our own mind alone, with which we compare this alleged model and according to which alone we estimate it” (A315/B371-2). Possible objects of experience may serve as examples, but never as archetypes, since no individual or action could ever attain adequately to what the pure idea of virtue contains. Nonetheless, this does not mean that this pure idea is something chimerical. Indeed, it is only by comparison with this idea that we are able to make judgments of moral worth or unworth at all (A315/B372).

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<sup>35</sup> Kemp Smith, *Commentary*, p. 450. See also Allison, p. 318.

<sup>36</sup> *Commentary*, p. 448.

We shall return to Kant's interest in pursuing further this Platonic line of thought with regard to the moral sphere, but let us also note in the context of Kant's discussion of Plato the presence of certain types of *natural* existences that also appear to depend on the idea:

But Plato was right to see clear proofs of an origin in ideas not only where human reason shows true causality, and where ideas become efficient causes (of actions and their objects), namely in morality, but also in regard to nature itself. A plant, an animal, the regular arrangement of the world's structure (*presumably thus also the whole order of nature*) – these show clearly that they are possible only according to ideas; although no individual creature, under the individual conditions of its existence, is congruent with the idea of what is most perfect of its species (as little as a human being is congruent with the idea of humanity that he bears in his soul as the archetype of his actions), nevertheless these ideas are in the highest understanding individual, unalterable, thoroughly determined, and the original causes of things, and only the whole of its combination in the totality of a world is fully adequate to its idea. (A317-8/B374-5, my italics)

We cannot experience the whole of nature, nor can we experience all that is contained in the idea of a species through a single individual of that species (not even with regard to the human). A plant, an animal, even the regular arrangement of the world's structure are "possible only according to ideas." This means that there are both features of the world and some objects within it that cannot be accounted for in terms of the concepts of the understanding.<sup>37</sup> Even with regard to organisms themselves Newtonian mechanism leaves us short. Such mechanistic relations cannot aid us in dealing with the purposive features of organisms.<sup>38</sup> This idea of nature as organized in terms of purposive, unified

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<sup>37</sup> J. D. McFarland, *Kant's Concept of Teleology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1970), p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

wholes of course becomes the subject of the third *Critique*, but again we find here Kant attempting to address the shortcomings of experiential understanding in terms of the idea.

Which is not to say that the ideas of reason are constitutive for knowledge – we know that to mistake these ideas for real objects is to succumb to transcendental illusion. Such illusion is, in fact, unavoidable, but it can and must be kept from misleading us (Prol 328/70). The legitimate use of reason consists therefore in *regulating* the understanding by directing it towards a unified point:

[The transcendental ideas] have an excellent and indispensably necessary regulative use, namely that of directing the understanding to a certain goal respecting which the lines of direction of all its rules converge at one point, which, although it is only an idea (*focus imaginarius*) – i.e., a point from which the concepts of the understanding do not really proceed, since it lies entirely outside the bounds of possible experience – nonetheless still serves to obtain for these concepts the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension. (A644/B672).

Reason brings unity to knowledge through the ideas, it takes “the spatio-temporally and causally unified field of experience” provided by the understanding and organizes it into a field of unified *knowledge*.<sup>39</sup> Just as the understanding organizes the manifold of sensory input into a coherent experience, so reason works on the understanding’s judgments to create the unity of a system.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, reason *demands* such unity, according to Kant (A305/B362). That doesn’t mean that this unity is demanded of objects themselves, of course – not as yet, at any rate. This demand is merely a “subjective law of economy” that allows the concepts of the understanding to be brought under more unified conditions of use (A306/B362), and thus allows for explanation to go

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<sup>39</sup> Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 221.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

to work by connecting given appearances into types, types into rules or laws, and so on.<sup>41</sup> As Deleuze puts it, using a term that will prove important to us, the transcendental ideas form the “higher horizons,” outside of possible experience, that “reflect and contain the concepts of the understanding.”<sup>42</sup> They orient conceptual experience by providing the framework within which to place each particular event or thing – and they do so *a priori*, making particular experience possible precisely through this orienting action.

What reason seeks is the “**systematic** in cognition, i.e., its interconnection based on one principle” (A645/B673, emphasis given). This Kant calls the “unity of reason,” claiming that it “always presupposes an idea, namely that of the form of a whole of cognition” (ibid.). We should attend to this structure, since it is similar to that of philosophy to its *Weltbegriff*. Kant argues that this idea of the form of the whole of cognition “precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and contains the conditions for determining *a priori* the place of each part and its relation to the others” (ibid.). That is, the idea of the whole, just as with the idea of philosophy itself, organizes its parts in terms of itself, so that the parts are subordinated to the idea of the whole that precedes them. As Sebastian Gardner puts it, “the parts derive from the whole rather than the whole being a mere sum of the parts.”<sup>43</sup> As an organizing principle, then, the idea plays a very specific role, subordinating the particular parts into what we might not go too far wrong by calling an *organic* unity. The goal here is not to gather understanding’s cognitions into a merely “contingent aggregate,” but to seek or postulate “a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws” (A645/B673). Again, to hearken back to Kant’s language in the chapter on the Architectonic, cognitions contribute to the

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<sup>41</sup> Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, p. 310.

<sup>42</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 222.



strengthening and growth of the whole and its ends *from within*, “like an animal body,” rather than adding limbs and distorting that’s body’s proportions (creating a monster, we might say).

All of which leads John McFarland to argue that Kant’s treatment of the ideas in the *Critique of Pure Reason* discloses his “evident conviction that the highest form of systematic unity to which knowledge can be brought is *organic* in type.”<sup>44</sup> We shall explore below the implications of this for Kant’s later treatment of teleology; for now let us point out that Kant is here concerned with a theoretical unity, and to remind ourselves again that the ideas are not meant to disclose the true nature or state of the knowable world. Their role, we know, is purely regulative, the unity that reason seeks here being a only a *projected* unity, and one, indeed, that is given “only as a problem (*Problem*)” (A647/B675). As a principle of pure reason, the totality of conditions contained in the idea of the unconditioned retains its validity not as “an **axiom** for thinking the totality in the object as real, but as a problem (*Problem*) for the understanding” (A508/B536, emphasis given). Indeed, this totality is “given as a problem” – *aufgegeben* (ibid.). Which means that the unconditioned and the systematic unity that it attempts to signal or represent are *tasks* for thought, tasks that *never come to an end*. Reason makes a demand, the demand for the greatest unity possible with regard to the manifold of cognitions and the principles of reason itself, even if this unity is not demanded of the objects with which thinking is concerned (A305-6/B362). But this demand, while always heeded, must also be constant, continually made anew, since its ends, in this world at any rate, will never be fulfilled.

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<sup>44</sup> *Kant’s Concept of Teleology*, p. 38, italics given.

This theme of task is prevalent in Kantian thought. Indeed, the entire critical project can be seen as a task given to philosophy by transcendent metaphysics.<sup>45</sup> The Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Analytic of the first *Critique* have shown that the objects of knowledge are conditioned in part by the human mind, thus establishing negative limits to what we can know.<sup>46</sup> Things-in-themselves are beyond our reach. However, as Kant puts it, this consciousness of our ignorance is not the end but rather “the proper cause to arouse” our further inquiries (A758/B786). Kant uses the image of a “geographer” of human reason (with regard to Hume, A760/B788), but we might just as well speak of mapmaking, of a kind of cartography not only of the land of truth, but of its borders, its boundaries. At issue for this geographer or cartographer of reason is the establishment of the proper scope (*Umfang*) of the sum total of all possible objects of cognition – such a domain is indeed the *horizon* of this totality, and is called by Kant “the rational concept of unconditioned totality” (A759/B787). We cannot have experience of such a horizon, but nonetheless “all questions of our pure reason pertain to that which might lie outside this horizon or in any case at least on its borderline” (A760/B788).

At issue, then, is the establishment of the *positive boundaries* of the domain of reason. The ideas of reason give us this task, for although we can be sure by the end of the Transcendental Analytic that we cannot know things as they are in themselves, we learn in the Dialectic that we cannot refrain from inquiry into the ultimate nature of the object of those ideas (a point Kant also makes in the *Prolegomena*, 351-2/92). It is impossible to stop at experience – reason demands that we attempt to inquire, if not

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<sup>45</sup> Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 212.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

necessarily beyond the circumference of the knowable, at least into the nature of that boundary line. Kant uses the term “bounds” in the Conclusion to the *Prolegomena* to describe this positive boundary: as opposed to limits, which are merely the negations of an incomplete quantity, bounds “always presuppose a space existing outside a certain definite place and inclosing it” (352/93).<sup>47</sup> Our reason, says Kant, “sees in its surroundings a space for the cognition of things in themselves,” and even though it recognizes that we cannot have determinate concepts of these things, this space that is “outside” of the realm of experience is nonetheless presupposed (ibid.). Metaphysics leads us towards these bounds, but not arbitrarily – rather, it is “stimulated thereto by the nature of reason itself” (ibid., 353/93). It is the transcendental ideas that point us in this direction. Seeking and determining the bounds of the use of reason “is the end and the use of this natural predisposition of our reason” (ibid., 353/94).

We should pause, however briefly, over this notion of a “natural predisposition” of reason. Kant speaks in the *Prolegomena* of the generation of metaphysics as the result of “an original germ, wisely organized for great ends” (ibid.). Metaphysics “is placed in us by nature itself” and is quite disparate of any “arbitrary choice” or “casual enlargement” of what he calls “the progress of experience” (ibid.). We will encounter this notion of a “germ of nature” further in our discussion of teleology in the third *Critique* and elsewhere. But we should note that Kant’s discussion of the “geographers of human reason” in the Doctrine of Method suggests a similar historical necessity to the development or progress of metaphysics toward the proper comprehension of its bounds. The *dogmatic* use of reason, the first step in its progress, is reason’s “childhood,” while the second step – not named according to the figure of maturation – is the *skeptical*

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<sup>47</sup> See also Gardner, pp. 212-3.

(A761/B789). The third step, which constitutes “the mature and adult power of judgment” is not only necessary but familiar to us:

[This third step] has as its basis firm maxims of proven universality, that, namely, which subjects to evaluation not the *facta* of reason but reason itself, as concerns its entire capacity and suitability for pure *a priori* cognitions; this is not the censorship but **critique** of pure reason, whereby not merely **limits** but the determinate **boundaries** of it – not merely ignorance in one part or another but ignorance in regard to all possible questions of a certain sort – are not merely suspected but are proved from principles. (ibid., emphasis given)

The Critical philosophy thus has a place in the progress of a development; its task is *historical*. This sense of the critical philosophy as the “mature and adult power of judgment” leads us readily enough to Kant’s famous claim in the essay on Enlightenment that Enlightenment is humanity’s maturation or emergence from its “self-incurred minority (*Unmündigkeit*)” (WE 35/17). The Critique takes its place in this process of maturation – it is not the end of such a process, but it perceives the end, it has it in its sights, as it were. And it is conscious of this place.

Discussing this essay, Foucault, indeed, cites this conscious sense that Kant has of the historical significance of the Critical project.<sup>48</sup> Foucault sees Kant’s definition of *Aufklärung* as a description of an “exit” or a “way out” that, according to Foucault, signifies a new way for philosophy to reflect on its own present – Kant sees a difference between his present and the past in this quest for an “emergence” from self-incurred minority.<sup>49</sup> This difference demands a new (philosophical) response, indeed, a new philosophy. The Critical project and reflection on history meet in Kant’s conception of

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<sup>48</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” trans. Catherine Porter, in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), pp. 303-19.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 305.

*Aufklärung*, the consideration of which connects, “closely and from the inside,” the significance of the Critical philosophy with respect to knowledge in general, a reflection on history, and an analysis of Kant’s own time, which time is not only the time of the writing of the Critique but indeed the reason for doing so.<sup>50</sup> What is interesting for Foucault in this sense of *Aufklärung* as an issue for “today” is that it provides philosophy with a motive for a specific task.<sup>51</sup> The Critical philosophy is a response to this task. Conceived of in this way, we can see that this task is not contained simply in philosophy’s *Weltbegriff*, but that a development toward the recognition of this idea is necessary. Indeed, Kant says of philosophy’s cosmopolitan idea that, though it has always grounded the term “philosophy” (A838/B866), it has until now lain “like a seed” in reason (A834/B862), and is glimpsed at this moment “only after we have long collected cognitions haphazardly like building materials and worked through them technically with only a hint from an idea lying hidden within us” (A834-5/B862-3). Technically as opposed to architectonically, that is (A833/B861). It is clear that Kant sees the order and systematicity that Critical thought brings to the products of reason as, in Sebastian Gardner’s words, “the culmination of a long history of attempts to articulate the idea of philosophy.”<sup>52</sup>

Is there is a necessity to this unfolding of a seed? A *historical* necessity? Are its various moments, as with Hegel, contained within it? It is at least not entirely un-Hegelian, in the sense Hegel gives to philosophical investigation when he says in the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 323.

Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* that the owl of Minerva begins its flight only at dusk.<sup>53</sup> According to Kant's description, the idea comes to organize this history afterwards, after it has begun to be glimpsed and we are able to see, in light of it, the true nature of what has come before, to see all earlier attempts to philosophize both in terms of their inadequacy to the idea itself, and in terms of their contribution to its eventual unfolding. This image of a seed appears throughout Kant's writings, but given our present discussion we should certainly recall his use of it in the essay on Enlightenment. There, *Aufklärung*, "the propensity and calling to think freely," is itself described as the seed for which nature itself "cares most tenderly" (WE 41/22). If the Critical philosophy is a response to the task that the present, the "today" that Kant encounters in late-eighteenth century Germany, presents to thought, it again takes up its place in a necessary unfolding – perhaps even an organic unfolding. Enlightenment itself becomes philosophy's task, which means that Enlightenment as an historical *demand* is what guides the thinking of the Critique itself. The Critique, somewhat surprisingly, appears to be necessarily historical and historically necessary. As Onora O'Neill puts it, Kant's age, an age of enlightenment but not yet an enlightened age, "is, in two senses, a *critical* stage in a long historical process."<sup>54</sup> It has a *telos* (to subject reason and philosophy in general to critique, to get them on the right track) and it has a place within a *telos* (the achievement of enlightenment, even if such an end remains only an Idea).

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<sup>53</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> Onora O'Neill, "The Public Use of Reason," *Political Theory*, vol. 14, no. 4 (Nov., 1986), pp. 523-52. This ref. p. 536, my italics.

Foucault is right, then, I think, to argue for the importance of this text with regard to both the three *Critiques* and to Kant's historical writings.<sup>55</sup> It allows us to see at least two "teleologies" at work in the Kantian philosophy, both already at work in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. On the one hand, the idea gives form to experience, to the philosophical project itself – particular cognitions are organized *a priori* by the idea into an organic structure, the parts always subordinated to the (idea of the) whole. But on the other hand, the idea exists as an infinity toward which philosophy must strive, an end or goal that regulates but also conditions philosophy's task. One may well be reminded here of the sense of *telos* that Husserl takes up when he says that "being human is teleological being and an ought-to-be" (PMSR 341). We shall have occasion to consider this claim of Husserl's in more detail below (see Chapter 2), but its proximity to this Kantian idea, as we shall see, is not accidental. For Kant at least, however, philosophy's task is not only nor even primarily to describe how the world *is*. Ultimately its end, even the end of thought in its theoretical mode, is to arrive at a unity conditioned by the idea, and in so doing to strive toward the emancipation of humanity from its intellectual – but also, as we shall discuss in more detail below, political and moral – minority.

#### **1.4 The third *Critique*: Nature, Freedom and Judgment**

For Kant, however, reason must be unified. Theoretical reason, which we have been for the most part discussing, is set off by Kant from practical reason in the Preface to the second edition to the first *Critique* (Bix-x). That *Critique*, we know, is primarily concerned with establishing the proper bounds of theoretical, broadly scientific, knowledge. But we have already seen that even here the ultimate or final end of reason

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<sup>55</sup> "What is Enlightenment?" p. 308.

(*Endzweck*) is announced to be moral (A840/B868). And indeed, this too has been indicated from the Preface, at least to the second edition, when Kant claims that the “positive and very important utility” of this critique of theoretical reason is to ensure that it can offer no obstacles to reason in its practical, moral use, when this practical use of reason “unavoidably extends itself beyond the boundaries of sensibility” (Bxxv).

Nonetheless, we must not consider there to be two different faculties of reason. Kant refers to reason as a “perfect unity” in the Preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Axiii), and argues in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that the requirement that reason’s principles and affirmations not contradict one another is “the condition of having reason at all” (KPV 120/236).<sup>56</sup> So that while Kant rather famously provides us with an account of two different aspects of reason, it is essential to the ultimate ends of reason itself that these two different aspects of its interest be reconciled into a unity.

In terms of the legislation of human reason, Kant says that this legislation has two objects: nature and freedom (A840/B868). We know that in the realm of nature, reason leaves it to the understanding to fulfill the theoretical or speculative interest of reason and legislate over experience, while in the realm of freedom it is reason itself which does the legislating.<sup>57</sup> It is philosophy’s task to bring the two together, uniting the natural law and the moral law, the realm of nature pertaining to all that *is*, and the realm of morality pertaining to all that *should be* (A840/B868). While the first *Critique* has dealt mainly with the first realm, nature, and the second has addressed freedom, Kant nonetheless admits in the second Introduction to the third *Critique* that there exists “an immense gulf”

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<sup>56</sup> See also Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 320.

<sup>57</sup> See Deleuze, *Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, p. 10.



between them, almost as though “they were two different worlds” (KU 175-6/14-5). Since the concept of freedom is actualized in the world of sense, it must be possible to think of nature as at least amenable to the possibility of our achieving the purposes we set for ourselves according to the laws of freedom. There must, therefore, “be a basis *uniting* the supersensible that underlies nature and the supersensible that the concept of freedom contains practically” (176/15). Though the concept of this basis does not cognize it theoretically or practically (and therefore, as a concept, does not have a domain (*Gebiet*) of its own), such a concept nonetheless makes possible a transition in our way of thinking (*Denkungsart*): “from our way of thinking in terms of principles of nature to our way of thinking in terms of principles of freedom” (ibid.).

The problem is introduced by Kant early on in the second Introduction, in the famous description of philosophy’s “topology.” In the second section, entitled *Vom Gebiete der Philosophie Überhaupt*, Kant divides the range within which *a priori* concepts have application, that is, “the range within which we can use our power of cognition according to principles, and hence do philosophy” (174/12). When referring concepts to objects without considering whether or not cognition of such objects is possible, we say that these concepts have a *field* (*Feld*),<sup>58</sup> that part of this field of possible objects in which cognition is possible is a *territory* (*Boden*) for the relevant concepts and for the cognitive power such cognition requires; that part of this territory over which our concepts legislate is a *domain* (*Gebiet*) for such concepts and the cognitive powers pertaining to them; while empirical concepts, because they do not legislate but instead are produced according to law, do not have a domain in nature, but only a residence or abode

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<sup>58</sup> Pluhar translates this as “realm.”

(*Aufenthalt*) (174/12-3).<sup>59</sup> Considered as a whole, our cognitive power has two domains, one constituted by the concepts of nature and one by the concepts of freedom, since our cognitive power “legislates *a priori* by means of both kinds of concept” (174/13). Philosophy’s division between the theoretical and the practical thus proceeds according to these two domains of legislation. Nonetheless, when we consider philosophy as a whole, we must view it also to have a domain in this more narrow sense. At least, philosophy has a “territory on which its domain is set up and on which it *exercises* its legislation,” either theoretical or practical, and this territory (or perhaps, domain) “is still always confined to the sum total of the objects of all possible experience, insofar as they are considered nothing more than mere appearances” (ibid.). This is the domain over which understanding is able to legislate through concepts of nature, but it is also the domain in which practical reason, which can only legislate according to the concept of freedom, must instantiate its actions. Which is why Kant says that the understanding and reason thus have two different legislations over “one and the same territory (*Boden*) of experience” (175/13).

Nonetheless, the two domains do not come simply to form one domain under the rule of philosophy. This is because neither the concept of nature nor the concept of freedom can provide us with theoretical cognition of its object as a thing in itself. The concept of nature provides us with theoretical cognition of the objects of nature, but only as mere appearances, while the concept of freedom allows us to present freedom as a thing in itself, but not in intuition (175/14). Which means that “there is a field (*Feld*) that is unbounded, but that is also inaccessible to our entire cognitive power” – what Kant

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<sup>59</sup> See Rudolf A. Makkreel, “Reflection, Reflective Judgment, and Aesthetic Exemplarity,” *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, ed. Rebecca Kukla (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 223-44, p. 228; Geoffrey Bennington, “R.I.P.” in *Interrupting Derrida*, op. cit., pp. 61-75, pp. 69ff.

calls the “field (*Feld*) of the supersensible” (ibid., t.m.). It is this realm that we occupy with ideas that assist us in our theoretical and practical pursuits. But since we can never arrive at theoretical cognition of it, it must remain forever separated off from the domain of the understanding.

Philosophy, then, even though it has a “general domain” that in some sense incorporates those of understanding and reason, is a divided state. Its domain is two domains, and these domains are heterogeneous. The unity it demands, then, a unity under a final (ultimately practical) end, has yet to be properly achieved.

In the next section of the Introduction, Kant discusses the faculty that is meant to mediate between these divided powers. The Critique, says Kant, assesses what our cognitive powers can accomplish *a priori*, with the express goal of placing these powers within the boundaries of their proper use, indeed, of establishing their legitimacy, their lawfulness (*Rechtmäßigkeit*) (176/15). That which lacks its own legislation and therefore lacks a domain of its own nonetheless finds a place here “if it contains principles that by themselves are not fit for either theoretical or practical use” (176/15-6). That higher cognitive power which lacks such a domain, and yet which nonetheless contains *a priori* its own principle, is judgment. Kant calls it a “mediating link” between understanding and reason (177/16). Its principle, though perhaps merely subjective, would be one by which a search for laws is possible. Because this principle would be neither practical nor theoretical, it would lack a domain of its own, but it might have a *territory* such that “none but this very principle might hold in it” (ibid.).

But this is not all. Judgment may be linked further with “a different ordering of our presentational powers,” one that seems, moreover, “even more important” than that

involving judgment and the family of higher cognitive powers (177/16). According to Kant, all of the soul's capacities or powers can be reduced to three: the cognitive power, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and the power of desire (ibid.). The cognitive power is legislated to *a priori* by the understanding, the power of desire, by reason. Now, says Kant,

between the cognitive power and the power of desire lies the feeling of pleasure, just as judgment lies between understanding and reason. Hence we must suppose, at least provisionally, that judgment also contains an *a priori* principle of its own, and also suppose that since the power of desire is necessarily connected with pleasure or displeasure . . . judgment will bring about a transition from the cognitive power, i.e., from the domain of the concepts of nature, to the domain of the concept of freedom, just as in its logical use it makes possible the transition from understanding to reason. (178-9/17-8)

There are thus at least two bases for considering judgment to be the mediating factor between the other cognitive powers, one "logical," the other based on the powers of the soul – though the second is in some sense more basic and essential than the first, or at least, appears to be "even more important."

The distinction, as Lyotard suggests at the outset of the *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, is somewhat enigmatic (LAS 4). But it is at the very least difficult to see at first glance what it is that Kant is trying to accomplish here, except that it involves a connection between judgment and the feeling of pleasure and displeasure such that, by a parallel or analogy with the other powers of the soul and their respective legislating faculties, we may suppose a) that judgment has its own *a priori* principle; and b) that through the connection between the feeling of pleasure/displeasure and the power of desire judgment might again be found to provide the hoped-for transition between the

domain of the concepts of nature (cognition) and the domain of the concept of freedom (desire). To follow Lyotard a little further here, we might note that the mediating factor is at the “logical” level called judgment, but that at the level of the powers of the soul this mediator is called the feeling of pleasure and displeasure (ibid.). Again, we will explore the implications for Lyotard of this association of judgment and feeling in what follows, but let us for now attend to the fact that it is through this notion of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure that the aesthetic is brought into the thematic of the unification of philosophy, as is also made clear in the famous table that Kant puts at the end of the Introduction (KU 198/38).

We can see at any rate, that judgment is meant to “cross” between understanding and reason. Its territory, to jump ahead only a little, is the diversity of forms of empirical nature, a diversity which, in its reflective mode, it attempts to unify into a systematic whole (179-80/19). That is, it moves from nature as it is made possible by the legislation of the understanding to the idea of nature as an organic unity. This sense of the idea of nature as a unified whole might hearken us back to the Dialectic of the first *Critique*: though it could only ever be an analogy, the uniformity of conceptual experience allows for a transition to the idea of an intelligent designer or creator that has organized nature systematically. We might even consider the systematic unity of empirical principles to be based on an analogy with our own understanding and the categorical principles with which it legislates.<sup>60</sup> We move, then, from nature as it is empirically given to the idea of its unity in terms of purposes.

We must not consider judgment’s principle to be empirical, however. When judgment legislates *a priori* it does so only when it is judging reflectively, that is, when

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<sup>60</sup> As McFarland does, *Kant’s Concept of Teleology*, p. 75.

the particular is given and judgment seeks the universal for it (179/18-9). Reflective judging is contrasted with determinative judging, in which judgment subsumes a particular under an already given universal. When judgment is determinative it operates under universal transcendental laws that are given by the understanding, and Kant describes it as “only subsumptive” (179/19). It follows a law already marked out for it *a priori* and therefore has no need to devise one for itself. When judgment is reflective, however, it lacks this law. As we have already noted, the contrast here is between the laws of the understanding, which “concern only the possibility of nature as such,” and the diversity of forms of empirical nature, which might be seen as “so many modifications as it were of the universal transcendental concepts of nature,” but which nonetheless remain undetermined by these laws (*ibid.*). These forms require laws too, but since they are empirical they remain contingent for human understanding. Which means that if they are to be called laws it will only be through the application of a principle of the unity of all that is diverse, a principle that gives them as necessary in spite of the fact that such a unity could never be known objectively from nature itself. Reflective judgment, says Kant, “is obliged to ascend from the particular in nature to the universal,” and therefore it requires a principle, which it cannot borrow from experience, precisely because it is to be the basis for the unity of all empirical principles under higher though still empirical principles, and hence is to be the basis that makes it possible to subordinate empirical principles to one another in a systematic way. So this transcendental principle must be one that reflective judgment gives as a law, but only to itself: it cannot take it from somewhere else (since judgment would then be determinative); nor can it prescribe it to nature, because our reflection on the laws of nature is governed by nature, not nature by the conditions under

which we try to obtain a concept of it that in view of these conditions is quite contingent.

(180/19)

Reflective judging, then, requires a principle by which it prescribes to the diversity of nature a unity that has the force of a law, though this is not a law that legislates over nature. Nature is a territory for reflection, but cannot be a domain, since indeed it is nature itself that governs our reflection upon it, and not vice versa. But equally this law does not come from the understanding. Reflective judgment gives it only to itself.

Kant defines this principle in the following way:

since universal natural laws have their basis in our understanding, which prescribes them to nature (though only according to the universal concept of it as a nature), the particular empirical laws must, as regards what the universal laws have left undetermined in them, be viewed in terms of such a unity as if they too had been given by an understanding (even though not ours) so as to assist our cognitive powers by making possible a system of experience in terms of particular natural laws. (180/19, taking out one of Pluhar's interjections, which manages to split the "as if")

Of course, we are not to assume the actual existence of such an understanding; we see the famous figure of the "as if," *als ob*, at work here. Again, this principle is one given by reflection only to itself, in order that it might bring the particulars it encounters under a universal law. It does not act entirely independently, however. It is called upon to assist the cognitive powers, to help provide the unity that makes a system of experience possible. Experience of nature would be impossible without such a principle, which gives order to the contingency of nature such that what is experienced in its particularity conforms to the universal laws that ground its possibility.

The form that the things of nature have according to judgment's principle is *purposiveness* – nature appears as if it accorded with the purposes of a higher understanding. In other words, says Kant, “through this concept we present nature as if an understanding contained the basis of the unity of what is diverse in nature's empirical laws” (180-1/20). The purposiveness of nature is thus the “special *a priori* concept” that finds its origin in reflective judgment (*ibid.*). That this concept is transcendental is made manifest by a *need* – reflection's principle tells us not how we judge, but how we *ought* to, in order to bring unity to the diversity of experience (182/22). It therefore contains nothing empirical, but rather describes “the one and only way in which we must proceed when reflecting on the objects of nature with the aim of having thoroughly coherent experience” (184/23). That such a principle is necessary in order to have such experience says nothing about objects themselves, of course, but is rather an expression of our need to grasp (*fassen*) an order in nature so that the principles of understanding might be applied over the diversity of its material (185/25; see also OD 250). Judgment thus prescribes this principle to itself, it is “both *source* and *referent* of its own normativity.”<sup>61</sup> This is what Kant calls “heautonomy” (186/25). This self-referentiality has the status of *right* – its rational justification is the fact that judgment gives it to itself “as a condition of the possibility of its self-appointed task” to bring unity to nature.<sup>62</sup> We need to find universal principles, and reflection's principle allows us to think of nature as harmonizing with that need (186/26).

Although we will put off discussion of the aesthetic until the following chapters (3 and 4), it is easy enough to see that the pleasure we feel in the purposiveness that is

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<sup>61</sup> Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001, p. 41.

<sup>62</sup> Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, p. 41.



characteristic of the judgment of taste (though not, as we shall see, the sublime) is connected to the suspension or “relief” of this need – for a brief moment we feel a harmony with nature that is judged purposive and thus pleasurable at least for the cognitive powers. Indeed, Kant even points out that any empirical discovery that allows us to unite heterogeneous empirical laws is enough to produce pleasure, and suggests that though we no longer feel pleasure at “our being able to grasp nature and the unity in its division into genera and species that alone makes possible the empirical concepts by means of which we cognize nature in terms of its empirical laws,” such a pleasure “was no doubt there at one time” (187/27). But in either case, the point is that “judgment bids us proceed in accordance with the principle of nature’s being commensurate with our cognitive power” (188/28), and that any “discovery” of this commensurability (even if it is only felt subjectively) is pleasurable insofar as our goal or aim (*Absicht*) of seeking this order is achieved (see 187/27).

Let us return to the “gulf” between understanding and reason. Their domains, we have seen, are cut off from each other. But we have seen also that if the sensible cannot in any way determine the supersensible, the opposite, as Kant himself makes clear in the final passages of the Introduction, is possible (195/36). That is, freedom conceived of as free causality has its effects in the sensible world. Kant is well aware of the conundrum this produces:

It is true that when we use the word *cause* with regard to the supersensible, we mean only the *basis* that determines natural things to exercise their causality to produce an effect in conformity with the natural laws proper to that causality, yet in accordance with the formal principle of the laws of reason as well. (ibid., italics given)

We have no insight into how this accord between the laws of nature and the laws of freedom might be possible; nonetheless, we must presuppose the condition under which such an accord is possible in order to direct our intentions into the world in the form not of what does exist, but in terms of what *ought to* (195-6/36). That is, we must consider the world to be amenable to our purposes (ultimately, indeed, to our final purpose, *Endzweck*). It is thus through the need to move from the supersensible to the sensible that the “bridge” between understanding and reason is constructed.<sup>63</sup>

It is judgment’s principle of the purposiveness of nature that makes possible this transition from a theoretical to a practical lawfulness (196/36-7). Through this principle we are able to “cognize the possibility of [achieving] the final purpose (*Endzweck*), which can be actualized only in nature and in accordance with its laws” (196/37). It does so by providing nature’s “supersensible substrate” with the possibility of being determined (though not cognized) by the intellectual power; reason, however, provides determination to this same substrate through its *a priori* practical law (*ibid.*). Which means that the supersensible is cognized as possible, and it also means that nature might thus be compatible, within its lawfulness, with supersensible causality. By comparing the order of nature with the purposes of a higher order intelligence, judgment’s principle allows for the possibility – purely practical – that nature operates in a way that is analogous to, and perhaps therefore in consonance with, reason’s purposes.

Bearing in mind that our final end is moral, and that this final end is what judgment’s principle allows us to consider possible, we can see just how far this principle is meant to take us. Given that the ultimate end of reason is not knowledge of the world

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<sup>63</sup> Which perhaps makes it a “one-way” bridge, then. See Bennington, “R.I.P.” p. 72.

but rather to will the highest good,<sup>64</sup> philosophy's end is considerably furthered through the principle of the purposiveness of nature. So far, however, we have been discussing judgment solely in terms of the unity of philosophy as a system. In order to fully work out the implications of this for the broader teleology at work in Kant's thought, we need now to pursue further this final, moral purpose, and to examine its significance in the political and historical realms, as well as the role it plays in terms of the very ends of humanity itself. We shall take up this theme in the next chapter, and then turn to an exploration of the way this idea "returns," as it were, within the confines of a second discourse on the theme of crisis, a discourse that also claims to be transcendental – that of Husserl.

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<sup>64</sup> See Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 322.

## Chapter Two

### Historical Teleology in Kant and Husserl

#### 2.1 Politics, History, and Morality in Kant

In his prize essay on the progress of metaphysics, written in the year 1791, Kant claims that there is a “practical-dogmatic” principle available to humanity that, quite apart from the inability of theoretical reason to ground the concept of development in nature, nonetheless permits humans to consider a “moral-teleology” to be at work in the world (PM 307/394). We have seen enough by now to know that Kant is not speaking here of morality in a new light; not one, at any rate, that would go against the teachings of the *Groundwork* or the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Rather, the “teleology” at work here brings in the suggestion that there might be moral development in the world, that is, that history can be seen to have a moral dimension. As Michel Despland has claimed, this idea seems to place history as a philosophical problem between the second *Critique* and the third.<sup>65</sup> And indeed Kant himself in certain passages in the appendix to the “Critique of Teleological Judging” discusses the historical development of humanity in moral terms, as we shall see.

We should remind ourselves, of course, that for Kant what matters in morality is that the will be determined solely by the law of reason and not by any external, material considerations. A free will, as he puts it (and we have seen this), “must find its ground of determination in the law, but independently of the material of the law” (KPV 30/29) in order for one’s action to be deemed moral. All humans partake in reason and as a result

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<sup>65</sup> See Michel Despland, *Kant on History and Religion* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 1973), p. 10.

all possess the ability to follow this “legislative form” (ibid.), that is, to recognize and affirm the moral law independently of their personal inclinations. And it is only the law in itself, as it appears to a rational being, that constitutes “the preeminent good we call moral” (GW 401/56).

Two things are important for us here. One, the absence of anything empirical in the moral, the irrelevance of all subjective inclinations other than those towards the moral good for its own sake, all of Kant’s talk about autonomy and all of his associations of freedom with the noumenal, serve to keep the moral sphere at a remove from the phenomenal, natural world in which history unfolds, and this in spite of the fact that one’s actions nonetheless take place there. And two, it is an essential component of Kant’s moral philosophy that all humans, precisely as a result of their capacity to reason, not only be considered as capable of morality, but, very famously, as “ends in themselves” and never as mere means to ends (GW 428/78-9). So we know that morality, at least in terms of individuals and their respective relations to the moral law, is not teleological in the sense that it aims at anything particular in the world; nor can it be something that “develops” in any way, at least not in the sense that we might become more (rationally) capable of it through time, or that our capacity for moral action is only to be reached after considerable time and effort. If each and every human being already possesses the capacity to act according to the moral law, morality cannot be anything that is “in the making” at a historical level.

This gives us some sense for the difficulties that arise when we begin to read Kant’s works on history. At the outset of the “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” for instance, Kant argues that history is concerned with giving

an account of human actions in the world of phenomena, in the hope that “if [history] examines the free exercise of the human will on a large scale, it will be able to discover a regular progression among freely willed actions” (UH 41). The regular progression we are to hope for from such a study would reveal “a steadily advancing but slow development of man’s original capacities” (ibid.). That is, in spite of the seemingly selfish, vain, malicious, and destructive motives humans have for their actions, Kant wants to claim that we might nonetheless be justified in expecting “a regular process of improvement” (52) in the state of human affairs. The word Kant most commonly ascribes to this progression is, of course, “enlightenment.” We should recall now that the much-celebrated “minority” that Kant speaks of in the paper on *Aufklärung*, by which Kant means that the inability to make independent use of one’s own understanding, without influence from another, is *self-incurred* when the individual fails in this independent use out of cowardice or laziness. According to Kant, this is the case with all people in the “age of enlightenment” in which he finds himself (see 40/21), but only because nature, as he puts it, “has long since emancipated them from other people’s direction” (35/17). That is, we have arrived at a stage in which all individuals, rather than a chosen few, possess at least in potential the ability to guide themselves – which seems to indicate that they haven’t always had this ability, and in fact, that it is only after nature had emancipated them that they have reached this ability. Kant speaks of nature too in the “Idea for a Universal History,” arguing for the possibility that history might reveal that humans, despite seemingly being engaged in their own selfish pursuits, are nonetheless “unwittingly guided in their advance along a course intended by nature” (41),

a course that would turn their conflicts, disagreements and antagonisms into the very ground for civil society and the universal administration of justice (44-5).

All of which appears to give the sense that history is a description of the teleological advancement of humanity towards morality out of nature and its selfish, sensible urges – or at least, towards the properly rational behaviour that would seem to be requisite for morality over against the natural. And, indeed, that it is even doing so according to the goals of nature itself. When Kant speaks of a principle of moral-teleology in the world, he seems firmly to locate this “development” or “progress” of humanity in the moral-practical realm. And when we begin to consider the future that Kant argues we may hope for out of such a history, we see the culmination of this “natural-historical” development in a prospect that appears very similar to what Kant called in the *Critique of Practical Reason* the summum bonum, the highest good. To consider history as the progressive unfolding of a plan of nature, says Kant in the “Idea for a Universal History,” we have ground for great hope,

For such a plan opens up the comforting prospect of a future in which we are shown from afar how the human race eventually works its way upward to a situation in which *all the germs implanted by nature* can be developed fully, and in which man’s destiny can be fulfilled here on earth. (52-3, my italics)

We should be very clear that Kant is not arguing that we could ever know that such a plan is at work – here this plan is presented, according to him, merely in a speculative mode, as an attempt at approaching history from a philosophical point of view. In the third *Critique* the idea of history as a teleological unfolding of humankind towards an ultimate end (*letzter Zweck*) that is in some sense consonant with nature will appear as a reflective,

regulative idea,<sup>66</sup> but in no way could such an account of history ever have the status of objective knowledge in the critical philosophy. Nonetheless, Kant argues that unless we view human history, in all its bloodiness, viciousness and severity, as guided ultimately by a rational aim, one that leads us ever so slowly towards a perfected state of being, then humankind must remain “a constant reproach to everything else” (53). And the price for such a negative conception is loss of hope for this world: “Such a spectacle would force us to turn away in revulsion, and, by making us despair of ever finding any completed rational aim behind it, would reduce us to hoping for it only in some other world” (*ibid.*, *my italics*). We shall return to this see-sawing between this world and an “other world,” but notice that what is stake here for Kant is the locus of future hope – can we hope for humanity’s improvement in this world, or must we await redemption in another?

One can, at any rate, see why Yirmiahu Yovel is tempted to claim that Kant’s conception of the highest good undergoes a change at some stage in Kant’s work, going from the supersensible, transcendent “other world” of the first two Critiques to a highest good in this world, materialized, as it were – infinitely distant but nonetheless at some level of creation.<sup>67</sup> I think there is something different about this good; however, we would do well to be cautious here. Emil Fackenheim is no doubt right that there are good critical reasons to resist making Kant’s conception of the historical process simply a

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<sup>66</sup> See Rudolf A. Makkreel, “Differentiating Dogmatic, Regulative, and Reflective Approaches to History in Kant,” *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Conference*, Memphis 1995, vol. I (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1995), pp. 123-37.

<sup>67</sup> Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, *op. cit.*, p. 72. Yovel claims the change comes “from the third *Critique* on,” which would exclude the *Idea*, published in 1784, four years, indeed, before the second *Critique*. But Yovel is concerned to explain the concept of the highest good as a duty, while the hope of an “earthly” fulfilment of human destiny in the *Idea* contains no reference to duty and thus presumably carries less import for him.



corollary of the doctrine of the summum bonum.<sup>68</sup> Fackenheim gives two reasons for this caution, the first being that the link between morality and nature postulated by the doctrine of the highest good requires no seeking of evidence for such a link such as we might be tempted to see in Kant's positing of a kind of fulfillment of human destiny on earth in writings like the *Idea*. The second reason, perhaps more central here, is connected to the fact that the doctrine of the summum bonum is closely related to the postulation of the immortality of the soul. Since the achievement of the highest good is only possible through holiness, and this is never found in a sensuous rational being such as humans are, the highest good only becomes a practical possibility on the supposition of the soul's immortality, which allows the "personality" of the rational being to progress infinitely towards its goal (KPV 122 ff./128 ff.).<sup>69</sup> If the highest good is now to be conceived of as in some sense "worldly," then the danger is that there can be no hope of any human beings ever attaining it except the (theoretical) "final" generation, which, put into historical terms, means that all generations prior to this final generation are means to that generation's end, rather than ends in themselves – a violation, we know, of one of the fundamental concepts of Kantian morality.

As Fackenheim points out, Kant is well aware of this problem. Which means that to do him justice we must keep a certain distance between the core of Kant's moral doctrine and the claims made in the name of historical ("moral") teleology. Nonetheless, Kant does bring the two realms very close together, and perhaps in no more pronounced a fashion as in the "Critique of Teleological Judgment" in the third *Critique*. There he both

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<sup>68</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, "Kant's concept of History," *Kant-Studien*, vol. 48, No. 1, 1956/7, pp. 381-98. See p. 392, n. 29 for what follows.

<sup>69</sup> See also Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1960), p. 267.

maintains the independence of the moral law and connects it to the determination of a final purpose:

The moral law is reason's formal condition for the use of our freedom and hence *obligates us all by itself, independently of any purpose whatever as material condition*. But it also determines for us, and a priori, a final purpose, and makes it obligatory for us to strive toward [achieving] it; and that purpose is *the highest good in the world* that we can achieve through freedom. (KU 450/339; the first italics are mine)

There *is* a shift, then, in the notion of the highest good, although not in and of itself. At issue here is the highest good as confined to this world. It is obviously not trivial, however, since it is one that it is our duty nonetheless to strive toward. But what would the highest good of this world be? To begin to find an answer to this we should perhaps turn to §87, "On the Moral Proof of the Existence of God."

There Kant says that human beings, insofar as they are considered in terms of their supersensible freedom, are the only beings in nature that also transcend it (435/323). They possess a "teleological" causality, i.e., one directed towards purposes, and these purposes they are able to set for themselves. Most purposes are nonetheless conditioned by the laws and structure of the natural world, but the law according to which humans must determine these purposes is presented by humans themselves, and presented as unconditioned, "independent of conditions in nature, and yet necessary in itself" (ibid.). Human existence itself, then, "has the highest purpose within it" and humans can subject all of nature to this purpose, while never considering themselves "subjected to any influence of nature in opposition to that purpose" (ibid.). Which leads Kant to the rather startling conclusion that human beings are the "final purpose of creation" (ibid.). If we are to consider nature as organized teleologically, that is, as organized into a hierarchy of

mutually subordinated purposes, then human beings complete the chain of purposes (in the natural world) in virtue of their ability to legislate unconditionally. And through this unconditional causality humans set before themselves (or perhaps, *ought* to set before themselves) their highest purpose: the highest good in the world (ibid.).

It is important to remember that humans occupy this lofty position only in terms of their status as moral subjects possessing supersensible freedom. It is only through the use of pure practical reason that humans transcend in any way their sensible natures. So we can start to see why this highest good in the world is so strongly connected to morality. Kant says that there are two conditions under which humans as rational beings can set themselves a final purpose under the moral law, one subjective, the other objective. The subjective condition is happiness, but this in turn is subject to the objective condition, which is that humans must be in harmony with the law of morality itself (450/339). Kant calls these two conditions “requirements” that must be fulfilled in order that the final purpose enjoined on us by the moral law be achieved (450/339-40).

Achieving this final purpose is a “practical necessity” that demands that we apply ourselves to the task. We are obliged by the moral law itself to “apply our forces,” in Kant’s words, to the attainment of this purpose (450/340). However, this practical necessity to work toward the highest good possible on earth through freedom is limited by the fact that the physical world is subject to natural causal laws. The split between the noumenal realm and the phenomenal world of course remains. What Kant calls “mere natural causes” are not necessarily – nor even conceptually – commensurate with the idea of this final purpose (ibid.). Subject to these causal laws ourselves insofar as we are sensible beings, there is no way to reconcile the pure mechanism of the physical world

with the moral goal, no way to conceive of these causal mechanisms as lending themselves to the attainment of the ultimate human purpose. The theoretical and practical worlds do not meet. The only way for us to set ourselves this final purpose, then, is to assume a moral cause of the world, i.e., God, who would give to the seemingly indifferent, amoral natural processes and laws a divine – and therefore moral – ground (ibid.). If the world were the product of a creator who designed it such that its laws worked in conformity with humanity's final end, then to toil towards that end would not be a vain enterprise, no matter how far off it might be.

There is, then, what Yovel calls a “gap” between how the world is and how it ought to be, and he conceives of our attempt to close this gap through our striving towards the highest good on earth as humanity's historical *task*.<sup>70</sup> Which is to say that this striving is what gets historical development going, as it were – look at human history and you will find the struggling of humanity towards this end. But it is important to note that for Kant, this historical process is not characterized first and foremost by reasoning action. Rather, violence, war in particular but also lack, disharmony, disunity, selfish behaviour and self-serving political leaders, all are the mechanisms that drive humanity onward, that make them work towards bettering their condition only because of the terrible condition into which their own nature has put them. If reason is at work it isn't moral reason (not initially, at any rate). If this striving is our task, it isn't immediately evident that its grounding concerns were – or perhaps are – moral ones.

And how to reconcile another oddity in the Kantian conception of historical development, namely, the role that nature plays on our advancement? In a famous passage from the third Critique Kant claims that in spite of the fact that humanity is “lord

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<sup>70</sup> Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, p. 78.

over nature” in virtue of its ability to set its own purposes based on reason, it nonetheless must be “prepared” by nature itself in order to be a final purpose (431/318-9). Which leads to the seemingly contradictory claim that it is “nature’s ultimate purpose” to direct humans to culture, which in turn is meant to produce in rational beings such as ourselves “an aptitude for purposes generally,” and from this general aptitude to forming purposes in such a way that we are acting freely (431/319). This is not quite to suggest that it is nature that makes us free from nature (according to Kant only we humans can do that), but it is close, especially when we consider that the “culture” that is relevant to us as moral beings is what Kant calls “the culture of discipline” (as opposed to the culture of skill), which is meant to consist in the “liberation of the will from the despotism of desires, a despotism that rivets us to certain natural things and renders us unable to do our own selecting” (432/319).

Such a nature could surely not be the mechanistic realm of phenomena that is the subject of theoretical enquiry. And indeed, it cannot be, for in our discussions of history and the teleological development of humanity in nature we are in a reflective, regulative mode of judging, rather than in the determinative mode that constitutes knowledge. To find an answer more in keeping with this regulative thinking, we must turn to the First Supplement to “Toward Perpetual Peace,” which is devoted to the subject of the guarantee of perpetual peace. There Kant describes nature – the guarantor of this peace – as “the great artist . . . from whose mechanical course purposiveness shines forth visibly” (PP 360-1/331). This is not the mechanistic nature of theoretical cognition, then, but rather a nature that is causally purposive, exhibiting “the profound wisdom of a higher cause,” i.e., providence (ibid. 361-2/331). Kant says that although we cannot cognize the

artifices by which such a nature produces concord by means of the very discord between human beings, and does so even against their will (360-1/331), we can nevertheless “add it in thought . . . by analogy with actions of human art” (362/332). Though we are now in the essay on “Perpetual Peace” we are very much in the language of the *Critique of Judgment*, where reflective, regulative judging – that is, teleological judging – is characterized by the “as if,” the reasoning by analogy that adapts a regulative idea (such as that of a moral creator) to a specific context (here, the natural world).<sup>71</sup> Now, in perhaps the most famous of Kant’s ponderings on a possible human future, we have a similar appeal to analogy: we must view the painful and discordant struggle of humanity evident in history as if it is guided by an ultimately moral purpose toward perpetual peace.

It is true, however, that “Perpetual Peace,” unlike the “Critique of Teleological Judging,” is concerned as much if not more with politics than with morality. Rudolf Makkreel has argued that Kant is therefore much more prone here to “dogmatic” claims about history than the more critically careful reflective judgments that are the subject of the latter section of the third Critique.<sup>72</sup> And indeed, Kant uses the term “dogmatic” in the very context of his discussion of nature as providence in “Perpetual Peace,” claiming that the representation of the mechanisms of nature as harmonious with our moral end is dogmatic “with respect to the concept of the duty of perpetual peace and putting that mechanism of nature to use for it” (362/332, italics given). But clearly we cannot dissociate morality entirely from this discussion. It is true that the ultimate federation of states that Kant describes in this work is a political aim, but he also argues that it is only

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<sup>71</sup> See Makkreel, “Differentiating . . .” p. 124.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126

through this federation that the harmony of politics with morals is possible (385/350). The two, politics and morality, are closely connected for Kant; indeed, he even goes so far as to claim that the state has its existence as a moral being (344/318). This can only be in virtue of the fact that it is the result of a particular society of human beings, of course, whose moral existence it receives as it were by extension. But nonetheless, political structures cannot be indifferent to morality, even though it is also the case that being constrained by legislation to be a good citizen does not guarantee that one is or become a morally good human being (366/335).

The dogmatism that is in play in our moral-teleology, then, may well play a role in the political/legislative function of founding a peaceful federation of states, but this cannot be separated from the fact that it is itself the rightful condition that is compatible with the freedom of states (385/350), and that it is this freedom that is the unconditional duty of respect for the rights of human beings (385/351). Which I only want to push far enough to insist upon the moral interest underlying the very notion of perpetual peace, and thus to a sense of both moral urgency and freedom.

We have already seen how the third *Critique* can be seen as an attempt by Kant to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical philosophy, indeed, how Kant's text encourages such a reading. But perhaps there is a hint as to how to bridge the gap also between politics and morality, as we see Kant attempting, somewhat ambiguously, in "Perpetual Peace"? This bridging would see history as the attunement of our desires and efforts as they appear in the socio-political realm to the demands made upon us by morality – not in order to produce moral subjects, since moral possibility (indeed, its very demand) is ever present in rational beings such as ourselves, but rather to produce a

system of states that will best respect and reflect this inherent value, as well as provide the conditions for the public use of reason as cosmopolitans.

But let me make a qualification about the end. As sensible beings we know that for Kant we can never in this life attain complete morality. Which, when applied to the idea of perpetual peace seems to suggest that such an ideal can never ultimately be reached – the gap between politics and morality, as Kant seems to suspect at certain junctures throughout “Perpetual Peace,” can never fully be bridged, at least not in any way that will produce the only peace really worth the name – one that cannot end and thus does not represent a mere cessation of hostilities. As Geoffrey Bennington has argued, one might even wonder what any such peace might look like, given that without conflict the meaning of peace itself becomes questionable.<sup>73</sup> Kant seems to suggest as much when he claims that the doing away completely of borders between states could just as easily lead to the same kind of despotism as that from which refuge is sought in the first place (PP 367/336), that is, that the fulfilling of the ideal of perpetual peace is a conceptual impossibility for this world. The fact that Kant stops at the concept of a peaceful federation of states, rather than the doing-away of states all together, ought to make us cautious, at any rate. What appears to matter to Kant is that we have reason to think that such an ideal is possible, that it gives us a reason to continue to respond to the demands of morality. As Lewis White Beck reminds us, moral actions, precisely in that they are expressions of freedom, are absolute beginnings each and every time – which means that the future of humanity is precisely not dictated by the empirical past, but is

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<sup>73</sup> See Geoffrey Bennington, “The Frontier: Between Kant and Hegel,” *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London & New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 259-73. See also his “Derridabase” in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. G. Bennington (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993), p. 257.



rather, the work of human beings.<sup>74</sup> Whatever we may say about history, the *future* remains open. Kant, for all of his forward looking teleology, is well aware of a demand, a moral demand, but also, perhaps, a political demand, that is always and ever present, now. We will have more to say on this subject, but in any event such a notion returns us to a question that continues to return, the question of task. In the next section of this chapter I would like to explore this notion of task in terms of the historical setting of philosophy itself, which we will do via a consideration of the entire problematic of teleology and task in terms of another form of transcendental philosophy: the phenomenological one.

## 2.2 Husserl, History and the Crisis of Philosophy

If I attempt, then, to situate Husserl within this problematic, I hope the reasons for doing so will become clear in what follows (particularly in the final chapter, see § 5.3). But we have already seen that Husserl considers human being to be teleological and “an ought to be” (§ 1.3). The context of this claim is a famed series of writings from the end of his life organized around a theme that continues to provide a background for these considerations: the theme of “crisis,” and that of a crisis, first and foremost, for philosophical thought.<sup>75</sup> In no better place, indeed, is the theme of crisis more explicitly brought out than through the thought of Husserl, and this is not simply fortuitous for my purposes, as we will see.

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<sup>74</sup> Lewis White Beck, “Editor’s Introduction” in Immanuel Kant, *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), pp. vii-xxvi. This ref. p. xxvi.

<sup>75</sup> I will leave aside here considerations over whether or not the theme of crisis can be seen to be a “leitmotiv” throughout Husserl’s oeuvre. One should look at R. Philip Buckley’s “The ‘Crisis’ as *Leitmotiv* of Husserl’s Thought,” chapter 3 of his *Husserl, Heidegger and the Crisis of Philosophical Responsibility* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer, 1992), for an account of how this theme might be seen as a “driving force” throughout Husserl’s work from beginning to end. Buckley’s work as a whole has been very helpful to me in formulating what follows.

But let us return, first, to the theme of the task of philosophy. The philosopher has a task, a “life-goal” as Husserl puts it, one that is put to the philosopher by him or herself: “universal science of the world, universal, definitive knowledge, the universe of truths in themselves about the world, the world itself” (PMSR 335). Such a task, we know only too well, is difficult: experience can be illusory, relative – even communal experience cannot escape this relativity, the fact that no truth is indubitable. And yet, says Husserl, the idea of truth in itself is meaningful for human beings, it “raises – or is called to raise – man to a new level in a new historical development [*Historizität*] of human life, a historical development whose entelechy is this new idea and the philosophical or scientific praxis belonging to it” (336). We must not be put off by philosophy’s past failure to achieve its task, nor, indeed, by the difficulty of the task itself. The idea of truth in itself, of the “universe” of such truths as that towards which philosophy must aim, calls humanity on to a new historical stage. Human being (which for Husserl is rational being, reason being the “specific characteristic of man”) is being that is “forever becoming,” both individually and, because individual-personal being correlates to communal-personal being, communally (338). Human life, human reason, is thus progressive, historical, it “proceeds in stages of self-reflection and self-responsibility” (ibid.). The idea of philosophy as the truth in itself, its task conceived of as coming to “know the objective by recognizing it within the phenomena” and determining it “through objective concepts and truths” (336), the idea, then, of a “universally, apodictically grounded and grounding science,” comes to represent “the driving force of life for the highest stage of mankind” (338). In light of the reflections by Lyotard with which we began the last chapter, we might note that its goal has a

particularly Kantian color: it is autonomy, “a personal autonomy” and “an all-encompassing autonomy for mankind” (ibid.).

Indeed, we should attend briefly to this connection between the development of human reason on the one hand, and human autonomy and responsibility on the other. For Husserl, philosophy is “*ratio in the constant movement of self-elucidation*” (338, Husserl’s emphasis), the ultimate aim of which is “the ultimate self-understanding of man as being responsible for his own human being” (340). In “Philosophy as Mankind’s Self-Reflection” this responsibility is described in terms of the realization of human being in its “apodictic freedom” (ibid.). Humankind understands itself here as rational, understands “that it is rational in seeking to be rational” and that “this signifies an infinity of living and striving towards reason” (341). Such a claim is more than just descriptive; indeed, it is here, in this “apodictic *telos*,” that Husserl’s understanding of human being as an ought-to-be resides. It is descriptive, surely: in order to be human, the human *as* human can only be satisfied with this reason, a reason that (again invoking the specter of Kant) does not divide itself into theoretical, practical, or aesthetic, but is unified through “self-understanding according to a priori principles” (ibid.). But humanity also *ought* to achieve this reason, it is “called” to its new historical level through the idea of universal, definitive knowledge, the truth in itself. Humanity ought to set this unified rationality as its goal, its task, and not only, as in this short text appended to the *Crisis*, for the sake of an apodictically grounded science. In the opening passages of the *Crisis* itself, Husserl makes clear that the implications of this rationality reach right into culture and society as a whole when he invokes with admiration “that much-abused Age of Enlightenment” and its “zeal for a philosophical reform of education and of all of humanity’s social and

political forms of existence” (C 10 – though we will see that this is not an unconditional approval). Indeed, the Renaissance, which inaugurated the “revolutionary change” that brings the Enlightenment about, takes as its model the free inquiry and independent criticism characteristic of ancient thought, which, Husserl says, saw philosophy’s task as having the broadest (cultural, societal, political) significance:

According to the guiding ideal of the Renaissance, ancient man forms himself with insight through reason. For this renewed “Platonism” this means not only that man should be changed ethically [but that] *the whole human surrounding world, the political and social existence of mankind, must be fashioned anew* through free reason, through the insights of a universal philosophy. (Ibid. 8, my italics)

We shall have to return to the prescription invoked here through these words, “should” and “must,” but it is clear that Husserl is not simply describing the relation between a certain historical development of reason and the task philosophy has given itself. The task itself, the idea of philosophy, that which guides it and which calls humanity to raise itself to a new level of rational self-understanding, is also, and indeed, preeminently, normative.

Nonetheless, as the location of these quotes suggest and as we well know, the sciences, and through them European culture itself, are in a crisis. It is this crisis that Husserl is attempting to describe in these opening passages of his final work. After the initial success of the new scientific approach to the world brought about by the Renaissance, and in spite of the continuing successes of the natural sciences, the European sciences nonetheless find themselves out of touch with human concerns, lacking meaning. Husserl speaks of an “inner dissolution” of the ideal of universal philosophy, of a “collapse in the belief in ‘reason’” (ibid. 12) – a reference that should

remind us of similar concerns for Kant in the crisis of Enlightenment rationality (see § 1.2). It is a crisis of reason for Husserl, too, which means a crisis in meaning, since “it is reason which ultimately gives meaning to everything that is thought to be, all things, values, and ends – their meaning understood as their normative relatedness to what, since the beginnings of philosophy, is meant by the term ‘truth’” (ibid. 12-3). It is a loss in the faith of reason, a loss of faith in reason’s becoming manifest in the world.

But how has this happened? What kind of crisis does Husserl mean when he speaks of the “crisis of European sciences” and how does he think it has come about? We find a hint in the famed “Vienna Lecture,” where Husserl speaks of the crisis as resulting from an “apparent failure of rationalism” (299). The sciences are in a crisis because reason appears (although, ultimately, *only* “appears”) to have failed in its task – a theme that should remind us of Kant’s own motivations regarding the establishment of the critical philosophy. On the one hand, according to Husserl, the natural sciences have made great advancements through treating nature mathematically and objectively; but they have also distanced themselves from the ultimate questions that are, as Husserl puts it in the main text of the *Crisis*, “decisive for a genuine humanity” (C 6). The “positivistic concept of science” characteristic of Husserl’s time has “dropped all questions which had been considered under the now narrower, now broader concepts of metaphysics, including all questions vaguely termed ‘ultimate and highest’” (C 9). Interestingly, such questions contain the “problem of reason” (ibid.) – by ignoring or doing away with such questions in favor of a science dealing only with immediate sense data and matters of fact, positivism has rendered science incapable of raising the very question of reason itself. And this means that science is incapable of raising the very

question of the meaning of the world. As a result, science is lost in its own world, in its own realm of inquiry, indifferent to and irrelevant for the needs of the pre-scientific life-world.<sup>76</sup> It has therefore lost any *meaning* for the non-scientific world; but what's worse, it has also – in what is really one and the same gesture – lost touch with its own foundations.<sup>77</sup> Naturalistic science taken as positivistic science has lost any sense for the impetus in which it finds its origins – we might say that it has lost any sense for its task. There results, then, in Rudolf Bernet's words, an "insuperable separation (*krinein*) between scientific and non-scientific concerns."<sup>78</sup> Again, let us note in passing the Greek, *krinein*, here glossed as separation, which might also be differentiation, division. The present is in crisis because it is divided between the scientific world view and the non-scientific one. A division presents itself to contemporary culture. It will fall to philosophy to try to bridge this separation, try to suture the cut or wound, to take an image we will see in Derrida in the context of a discussion of Kant's aesthetics (see Chapter 4). The natural sciences too are in a crisis, then, and in two senses: *internally*, in the sense that science itself has lost any sense for its own purpose, which means that it has lost any sense of its own meaning; and *externally*, in that it has lost any meaning for everyday life, or at least that what meaning it has for everyday life is not immediately apparent.<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, the *human* sciences have also lost touch with their purpose, and in a way consonant with the positivistic prejudices produced through the successes of the natural sciences. The task of the human sciences is to investigate human structures

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<sup>76</sup> Rudolf Bernet, "Presence and Absence of Meaning: Husserl and Derrida on the Crisis of (the) Present Time," *Phenomenology of Temporality: Time and Language* (Pittsburgh: The Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, Duquesne University, 1987), pp. 33-64. This ref. p. 54.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Buckley, *Husserl, Heidegger and the Crisis of Philosophical Responsibility*, p. 24.

and accomplishments, to inquire into the meaning of cultural or historical formations. That means that they take as their subject not external, objective nature, but human subjectivity, what Husserl calls spirit (*Geist*). It is here that questions regarding the meaning of life for human subjectivity reside; however, given the domination of what Buckley calls the “nature-scientific paradigm,” these sciences fail in their task of considering the meaning-giving subject that creates history and society *as* spirit or subjectivity, and instead try to “objectify” this subject by concentrating purely on the “facts” of its condition.<sup>80</sup> Husserl describes this in the Vienna Lecture in terms of abstraction – the natural sciences successfully abstract from everything subjective in order to investigate nature purely as nature, nature considered objectively; when the human sciences attempt this, however, they lose sight of the very “subject” (in both senses of the word) of their inquiry (see VL 271-2). This conundrum explains the continual failure of the human sciences as compared with the natural sciences. Giving in to the prejudices of positivism, the human sciences employ a methodology specifically designed to abstract from the spiritual realm that is their focus.

Again, two things seem to fall out of this adapting of the human sciences to the methodology of the natural sciences: on the one hand, the subject is separated off from its very subjectivity and treated as an object in the way that natural science treats nature as an object; on the other, any aspect of human subjectivity that *cannot* be treated this way, that is, any aspect of the subject that cannot be taken strictly as fact, is excluded from human-scientific discourse.<sup>81</sup> We see again the separation of the concerns of the pre-scientific life-world (which seeks answers to ultimate questions that precisely do not

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<sup>80</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>81</sup> Buckley, p. 14.

concern “facts” normally conceived) and scientific discourse. Here the human sciences, the very sciences that are meant to inquire into such questions, to inquire into the relation of human beings to their world and into the meaning that this world takes on for human subjects, fail in their task. There is a separation (*krinein*) between human experience as a meaningful activity, and the sciences (both natural and humanistic) whose task is to provide understanding and knowledge. Husserl even goes so far as to claim at the outset of the *Crisis* that public opinion, especially since the war, has turned against science as a pursuit that “has nothing to say to us,” and that this attitude is even one of hostility in the “younger generation” (C 6). Faith in the scientific enterprise has been lost.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, Husserl agrees with the general sense that “the European nations are sick” (VL 270), even if not for precisely the same reasons. What’s more, this sickness has broad-reaching implications. The loss of faith in science is paralleled by a general malaise in philosophy, which, according to Husserl, “threatens to succumb to skepticism, irrationalism, and mysticism” (C 3). Again we should note the similarities to the historical context described by Kant in the prefaces to the first *Critique* and in the *Prolegomena*. Here too philosophy is in crisis, although here it is positivism that is to blame, since the focus on facts that the positivistic sciences demand has rendered the questions philosophy deals with non-scientific and irrelevant. But although the causes have changed, we are still close to the concerns of Kant in the Prefaces to the first *Critique*, including, up to a point, the language: once the “queen” of the sciences, metaphysics has been, to use Husserl’s word, “decapitated” (C 9). Philosophy has thus

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<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, Kant too invokes the young when he speaks of the “young people hungry for knowledge” that will benefit from the efforts of his *Critique* (Bxxxix).



lost confidence in itself, lost faith in its pursuits, and runs the risk of giving up on its ancient goals and tasks.<sup>83</sup>

Philosophy, however, is not purely a victim here, any more than it is with Kant. We shall see that the positivistic sciences and their “sin” of objectivism,<sup>84</sup> i.e., of treating all objects of scientific inquiry purely *as* objects, in a certain sense come out of the idea of philosophy itself. And it is through this connection of philosophy to the crisis of reason that we return to our inquiry into the relation between teleology and the task of thought.

Indeed, the question for Husserl is precisely one of philosophy’s goals or tasks, goals or tasks that have somehow been lost or forgotten. We have not missed the fact that for Husserl the sciences that are in question are quite specifically the *European* sciences, a designation which indicates for him a certain pedigree, a specific history. These are sciences born with Greek philosophy, born in a more or less specific time and place. Which is not to say that they are simply geographical. Europe here designates, rather, an idea or concept; with the birth of Greek philosophy is born an *idea*, the idea of universal science, a “science of the universe, of the all-encompassing unity of all that is” (VL 276). We recall the task philosophy gives to itself as Husserl describes it at the outset of “Philosophy as Mankind’s Self-Reflection.” Philosophy seeks a single, unified science, universal knowledge, “the universe of truths in themselves about the world” (335). It thus seeks an ultimate unity, “the world in itself” (ibid.). The idea of such a world, of the world grasped in unified, objective understanding, was born in ancient Greece and becomes the ultimate task and goal of philosophy understood as universal

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<sup>83</sup> See Buckley, p. 20.

<sup>84</sup> The term is Buckley’s, p. 25.

science. Indeed, it is, ultimately, the *problem* for philosophy, its task, though this task, as we shall see, needs clarifying, since the world as a problem has been forgotten by modern philosophy.<sup>85</sup>

Nonetheless, this task is what guides philosophy, which is thus “the title for a special class of cultural structures” (VL 276), i.e., the systems of ideas and laws that make up philosophical and scientific discourse. These structures are historical, they follow a specific historical movement, a movement that itself tracks a “European supranationality” aiming at “an infinitely distant normative shape” (ibid.). The idea of the world understood in this way, the idea of philosophy as universal science, is thus the telos of all philosophical, scientific inquiry. This goal represents the “constant directedness toward a norm” of individual persons, the philosophers and scientists who go about their individual tasks; and yet in virtue of being members of the scientific community and in laying down universal norms through their work, this directedness becomes manifest throughout nations, and indeed, throughout that conglomeration of nations that constitutes Europe as a whole (ibid.). Which is why we might say that the collection of what Husserl calls ideal objects extends beyond philosophical or scientific laws and systems to cultural objects more broadly, which objects – works of art, religious rituals, social or political institutions, even common beliefs and prejudices – can be said, “in another philosophical terminology,” to occupy the realm of objective spirit.<sup>86</sup> Though the spirit of philosophy understood in this universal sense, the sense of the search for “unconditioned truth” (VL 278), may not be present in each individual, it inhabits all “in

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<sup>85</sup> See David Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1974), pp. 120 ff.

<sup>86</sup> Bernet, “Presence and Absence,” p. 43.

the form of a necessary course of development and spreading of the spirit of norms that are valid for all” (276).

This means that the science that was born in ancient Greece and named philosophy institutes nothing less than “a new sort of humanity,” one which strives toward the *unconditioned*, which shakes off the shackles of its finitude, its finite goals and interests, and “lives towards poles of infinity” (277). This is a familiar theme, one we have already encountered, in what is only a slightly different key, in Kant. For Husserl it begins with the discovery of infinity, when “natural man” learns to overcome the finitude of nature through idealization (292-3). When Husserl speaks of “the *teleology* in the historical becoming of philosophy” (C 70, emphasis given), this teleology is thus conceived of in terms of the birth of this idea, the idea of universal, unconditioned truth as a task or goal philosophy sets itself to achieve. All philosophical or scientific endeavor inherits this idea, along with an entire tradition of previous attempts to fulfill it. This is precisely what makes any theory of knowledge *historical*. All facts of culture, whether those of “the lowliest culture of necessities” or those of “the highest culture (science, state, church, economic organization, etc.)” involve what Husserl calls the “coconsciousness” that they are produced through human activity, and that they thus have a history, a historicity (OG 370). Traditions are inherited, indeed, “the whole of the cultural present, understood as a totality, ‘implies’ the whole of the cultural past” (371). The impulse born in Greece inaugurates a tradition, then, on to which layer after layer of meaning become sedimented through the course of time. But this sedimentation does not proceed entirely randomly or accidentally. Looking back over this tradition enables us to discern a movement, a movement toward philosophy conceived as universal science, to

discern and indeed to measure the movement “from latent to manifest reason” that was “inborn,” as Husserl puts it, as European civilization’s telos with the birth of Greek philosophy (C 15). This idea of philosophy is the measure, indeed, of this movement, an “idea in the Kantian sense,” as Derrida puts it, “the infinite idea (in the Kantian sense) of an infinite task as *theoria*” (WEC 125).<sup>87</sup>

The theory of knowledge, then, must become an historical task (OG 370).<sup>88</sup> Why? Because the sciences, as we know, are in crisis. Only by an “inquiry back” (*Rückfrage*) into philosophy’s original goals can we come to an understanding of philosophy as whole, an understanding, then, of science and its tasks such that its meaning can be returned to it, and its relation to humankind made explicit. For indeed, philosophy is the science of reason, and it is reason that is in crisis. It is reason that must be defended, the belief not only in the possibility of universal knowledge, but in the possibility of such a knowledge having meaning, indeed, providing the norms for all of humankind. True human being is rational being, which is, as Husserl puts it, “being toward a *telos*” (C 17) – and it is philosophy that realizes such being. Philosophers, he claims rather famously, are “functionaries of mankind” (*ibid.*); they are responsible for bringing about this true human being. And yet they are also in despair. Such a task appears impossible. Science has lost its meaning, philosophy founders in skepticism or struggles to find its way on the coattails of the natural sciences, cut off from its essential

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<sup>87</sup> Though I quote here the paper delivered by Derrida in 2002 and published in 2003 (in English in 2005) his interest in the “idea in the Kantian sense” as it appears in Husserl goes back to his earliest writings, as we have already seen at the outset of Chapter 1. See, for instance, IHOG and “‘Genesis and Structure’ and Phenomenology” in WD, pp. 154-68.

<sup>88</sup> See also David Carr, “Husserl’s *Crisis* and the Problem of History,” Chapter 3 of his *Interpreting Husserl: Critical and Comparative Studies* (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: Nijhoff/Kluwer, 1987), pp. 71-95. This ref. p. 83.

questions and operating on a model inappropriate to its aims.<sup>89</sup> If philosophy – and thus, humankind, or at least, humankind insofar as it embraces the idea of “European” science – is to survive with its roots intact (C 15), it has to inquire back to “the primal establishment” of its goals (71), it has to get back in touch with its idea, and come to terms with its (proper) telos. Philosophy is no longer a question simply of problems, then. Philosophers must turn to history if they are to understand themselves as philosophers and understand what philosophy itself is to become, what it *must* become through them.<sup>90</sup>

Thus, Husserl tells us in the Vienna Lecture that he wishes to do something which seems highly inappropriate for his time (and, pointing ahead, we might note that the same could be said of ours): to save the honor of reason, to save the honor, even, of a certain “enlightenment” (VL 289). We have seen that reason has fallen into disrepute; Husserl’s goal is to save its honor in spite of the failures of objectivism and the despair and skepticism underlying the existential philosophies of the likes of Heidegger and Jaspers.<sup>91</sup> Husserl readily admits, as we have seen, that the European crisis has its roots in a failure of rationalism, a “misguided rationalism” (VL 290). What is interesting here is Husserl’s suggestion that this failure of rationalism is somehow inherent also to reason itself, that reason is somehow susceptible to the failures of which it has hitherto been guilty.<sup>92</sup> Husserl says that it “belongs to the essence of reason” that philosophers come first to understand and work at their task “in an absolutely necessary one-sided way,” that a

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<sup>89</sup> See Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History*, p. 134.

<sup>90</sup> See the fragment “Denial of Scientific Philosophy. Necessity of Reflection. The Reflection [Must Be] Historical. How is History Required?” appendix IX of C, pp. 389-95, this ref. p.391. Also, Carr, *Interpreting Husserl*, p. 83.

<sup>91</sup> See David Carr’s “Translator’s Introduction” to C, pp. xv-xliii, this ref. pp. xxv ff., for reference to Heidegger’s and Jasper’s *Existenzphilosophie* as a motivating factor of Husserl’s *Crisis*.

<sup>92</sup> See Derrida, WEC 126-7, for this suggestion, to which we shall return.

“one-sided rationality” is thus a necessary danger of the philosophical enterprise (291). Indeed, in the initial stages this is not even an error – the “straight and necessary path” philosophers must take blinds them at the outset from seeing the multiple sides of their task (ibid.). The path of philosophy, then, “passes through naïveté,” says Husserl, a naïveté that is “unavoidable as a beginning stage” (292).

This naïveté, at least as it has manifested itself in Husserl’s time, is named “objectivism” in the “Vienna Lecture.” It remains naïve because it remains one-sided, reducing all subjective human being to the laws of physical causality. It has forgotten its subjective origins, the fact that even objective science presupposes a researching subject grounded in a surrounding life-world (295). In a strange way, the problem resides in the “discovery” of infinity itself, and in the overcoming of the finitude of the natural world though idealization:

Nature, space, time, become extendable *idealiter* to infinity and divisible *idealiter* to infinity. From the art of surveying comes geometry, from the art of numbers arithmetic, from everyday mechanics mathematical mechanics, etc. Now without its being advanced explicitly as a hypothesis, intuitively given nature and world are transformed into a mathematical world, the world of the mathematical natural sciences. (293)

Such ideal objects are obviously essential to the progress of science, but they also pose a danger, that of “completely sacrificing the concrete foundation of sense in the life-world to scientific abstraction.”<sup>93</sup> Through such abstraction the scientist him or herself, the “working subject,” is forgotten (295) – along with the ends, values and norms with which the individual inquirer works. The creative act of constitution runs the risk of being

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<sup>93</sup> Rudolf Bernet, “On Derrida’s ‘Introduction’ to Husserl’s *Origin of Geometry*,” *Derrida and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 139-53, this ref. p. 147.

covered over by the inquirer's own idealizations (see IHOG 118, incl. n.). There is, at the very least, a tension between the finitude of the subjective origin of ideal objects and the infinitude of those objects themselves in what Derrida calls their "iterability and their necessarily technical structure" (WEC 127). Indeed, it is the very progress itself of the sciences that produces this tension, since the universality that such sciences seek threatens to "cover over or consign to forgetting their historical and subjective origin" (ibid.).

The solution to such a forgetting is, as we know, to return to the knowing subject in a way that will overcome the naïveté of objectivism. In fact, this return to knowing subjectivity is instituted in part by Kant (although the gesture is Cartesian), and Husserl praises "the German Idealism proceeding from Kant" for being "passionately concerned with overcoming this naïveté" (VL 292; C 99). Nonetheless, Kant's transcendental philosophy does not go far enough, but remains caught in objectivist presuppositions, the most important perhaps being the presupposition of the surrounding, scientifically described world, taken uncritically by Kant as valid (C 103 ff.).<sup>94</sup> Kant failed to grasp the ultimate sense of the Cartesian *ego cogito* and thus failed to develop "the manner and method of an analysis of consciousness."<sup>95</sup> His thought remains rooted in the natural world described by positivist science.

We have not, however, left Kant behind here, and nowhere is this clearer than when Husserl describes the potential "danger point" of the relation between reason and philosophy. For here, says Husserl,

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<sup>94</sup> See also Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History*, pp. 130 ff.

<sup>95</sup> Edmund Husserl, "Kant and the Idea of Transcendental Philosophy," trans. Ted E. Klein, Jr. and William E. Pohl, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 3, Fall 1974, pp. 9-56, this ref. p. 15.

we must certainly distinguish between philosophy as a historical fact at a given time and philosophy as idea, as the idea of an infinite task. Any philosophy that exists at a given historical time is a more or less successful attempt to realize the guiding idea of the infinity and at the same time even the totality of truths. (291)

We might well think here of Kant's conception of the idea of philosophy as an "archetype for the assessment of all attempts to philosophize" (A838/B866; see §1.3). We have, on the one hand, philosophy as a finite historical fact, a particular attempt at a "science of the world" (to keep to the language of Husserl). But the "world" in this sense, a *transcendental* sense as Husserl says, is an idea, an infinite idea, ultimately *only* an idea lying at infinity.<sup>96</sup> For Husserl there is a danger lurking between these two conceptions of philosophy, this science of reason that is, therefore, the science of a "higher human nature" (VL 291). To return (not without reason!) to Derrida, the danger lies in the interplay of the finite and the infinite, "between the factual finiteness of [philosophical reason's] determined figures and the idea of its infinite task" (WEC 126). We must not conceive of reason as having reached its goal in objective science, must not be so naïve as to think that it has shown, in objectivism, that it is unable ever to fulfill the promise made with the birth of Greek philosophy. Objectivism is superficial, inadequate to the task – but the task itself remains. Rather than embracing the objectivist prejudices against ultimate questions or giving way to the despair of skepticism, what is required is a renewed, more highly developed and sophisticated return to subjectivity, to subjectivity as a *problem*. For Husserl this means, of course, a turn to transcendental phenomenology. But what should lead us to such a conclusion is a renewed attention to what has been lost: the task of philosophy conceived as the infinite universal science of

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<sup>96</sup> "Kant and the Idea of Transcendental Philosophy," p. 45. Husserl emphasizes "transcendental."



the world. The crisis of reason, the crisis of philosophy itself, results from what is only an apparent failure of reason – it is a kind of hasty conclusion drawn too quickly from the results of this one-sided objectivism. Philosophy must turn to history, then, but to history in the very specific sense of the uncovering of an original idea, an idea given as the task of philosophy. To return to a theme we found also in Kant, we might note that history in this Husserlian sense of an uncovering of origins is also at the same time a return to a renewed *future*. But one must bear in mind here the finitude and factuality of particular philosophies if one is not to lose sight of the infinite idea, the infinite task of philosophy itself.

Let us hold off, for the time being at any rate, discussing the many difficulties raised by this Husserlian attempt to return to origins, to return to an original, intuitive presence of an ideal content – for instance, the idea of philosophy. We shall have occasion to come back to it. For now we should focus on the idea of philosophy's task as a way out of the crisis, on the *meaning* that the idea of truth in itself has for human beings, according to Husserl. It is the idea that raises humanity to new levels of historical development, that prevents stagnation, whether in the form of a shallow objectivism or of a reactionary irrationalism. It provides the horizon of a future, an infinite future – it evens out the rough edges of history by giving what we might call, referring back to what we have seen in Lyotard, a certain “rhythm” to the unfolding of the past. Which is not to accuse Husserl of his own naïveté. He is, as we have seen, aware of the potential conflicts of reason. To escape the crisis we must look beyond the finitude of our own circumstance, to measure the thought of our time against the idea of truth in itself, the totality of truths about the world, an infinite totality. We are drawn both “back,” then, to

the idea of philosophy born in ancient Greece, and “forward,” towards the infinite measure that is the horizon of thought.

For Husserl the crisis of European sciences, but also, ultimately, of European culture, is one of meaning, or more properly, of meaninglessness. Human beings are beings with ends, values and norms; that is, they are reasoning beings. Reason, then, must be our subject matter (see VL 296). The crisis is a result of a loss of meaning; the way out of the crisis is through a return to the infinite idea that gives meaning back to humanity’s intellectual and cultural endeavours. *Ratio* must come to terms with itself, which it cannot do while it privileges objective nature and covers over the role its own norms, values and ends play in the course of its inquiries. The *ratio* in question for a transcendental phenomenology is one that does not deny the existence of the inquiring subject, nor does it leave aside the ultimate questions rendered meaningless by the “old rationalism.” On the contrary:

The *ratio* presently under discussion is nothing other than the spirit’s truly universal and truly radical coming to terms with itself in the form of universal, responsible science, in which a completely new mode of scientific discipline is set in motion where all conceivable questions – questions of being and questions of norm, questions of what is called “existence” (*Existenz*) – find their place. (VL 298)

In order to achieve such a science, however, we must understand the “teleology of European history,” to comprehend Europe as a *concept*, the concept of “the historical teleology of the infinite goals of reason” (299). Only in this way are we able to understand the crisis as one produced by this misguided rationalism, and to see the failure of reason as only the *appearance* of failure. The risks are great, however. Either “Europe” (and can we continue to think of Europe solely as a concept here?) remains

“estranged from its own rational sense of life” and continues its fall into barbarity through hostility toward the spirit; or reason itself must prevail over naturalism and put itself back on the (infinite) road toward “a great and distant future for man” (299).

Reason must begin in a one-sided fashion, even if this one-sidedness, as a necessary beginning point, runs the risk of obscuring the birth of its task. Indeed, we might well say that the work of specialization *requires* this forgetting of the infinite. Reason, then, must overcome its own one-sidedness, must find a way to get past the narrowness of its own beginning. Can we say, then, as Derrida suggests in a paper we have in fact been tracking throughout this discussion, that reason itself is what “throws reason into crisis” (WEC 127)? Might there be a certain *necessity* to this crisis, the crisis of a reason that begins of necessity in finite configurations, and which thus runs the risk of forgetting the infinity of the task that governs it?

### **2.3 Reason, History, and the Idea**

Does reason, for Husserl, lack the kind of “excess” Kant is concerned about in attempting to define its limits in the critical philosophy? At first glance there certainly doesn’t appear to be any sense in Husserl that reason, if unregulated by the rigors of critical philosophy, will exceed its bounds, that in answering to a demand for the unconditioned it runs the risk of entering into unjustified metaphysical speculation. Indeed, as Ricoeur argues, given that it is the very essence of humanity, reason has a significance that goes beyond a critique of cognition: reason “covers the whole field of the culture whose indivisible project it is.”<sup>97</sup> Rather than running the risks of transcendental illusion if left

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<sup>97</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2007 [1967]), p. 157.

to its own devices, reason “ties the sense of man to the sense of the world.”<sup>98</sup>

Nonetheless, there is a danger in this essential forgetting, and a danger that appears to be inherent to reason itself. Indeed, does not the Idea (in the Kantian sense) that is invoked by Husserl at key moments in his thinking, on history and elsewhere as Derrida will argue, play the role – as it does in the Kantian philosophy – of guiding teleologically reason’s development, in order to keep it within the bounds of its proper task? Is the crisis itself not the result of an excessive one-sidedness of reason? And does the Idea not come to regulate this one-sidedness, to orient philosophy, to get it back on the path that is proper to it? Philosophy taken as a task, as an Idea in precisely this sense, as the infinite goal of the totality of truths, itself reveals the need for a certain regulation of reason – or at the very least, suggests that reason is open to crisis. Philosophy as an Idea remains, as we have seen, separate from all concrete attempts to philosophize. It orients these concrete attempts, as the Idea of the totality of truths (infinite, unconditioned) regulates any finite and conditioned thinking. It operates as a *horizon* for thought, as Derrida suggests in “The ‘World’ of the Enlightenment to Come” (for instance, 128).

Insofar as every actualization of this task of philosophy is nothing more than an attempt at realizing the infinite Idea, each poses a danger to that Idea in its very incompleteness. This is what Ricoeur calls the “drama” of the Husserlian philosophy of history. Every actualization of the task of philosophy threatens the infinite Idea with burial, with forgetting: “every actualization of the task threatens the loss of the task. Likewise, all success is ambiguous” (158). Galileo epitomizes this ambiguity in that he both rediscovers the Idea, but only does so insofar as he mathematizes nature and thus opens the way for objectivism. Perhaps, then, a certain risk of *illusion* remains. Ricoeur

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. See also C § 5.

suggests as much when he claims that the “ambiguity” and the “risk” of this actualization of the infinite task of philosophy “are not without reference to the power of illusion, which, according to Kant, pertains to the very vocation of reason” (158). Of course, Husserl regarded the “illusion” in question here as positivism, not speculative metaphysics. And according to Ricoeur he goes beyond Kant by “orienting the conflict between the unrealizable aim and the realized work – a conflict at the very heart of the human enterprise – in the direction of a historical drama” (ibid.), a drama that would be enacted in reason’s “becoming-rational” (157). But Husserl’s historical rationalism does suggest that the development of reason is not itself without its dangers and pitfalls. The one-sided rationality that is the cause of the crisis, as Husserl himself says, can also be thought of as belonging to the very essence of reason (VL 291).

In his invocation of the Idea, Husserl not only aligns his thought with Kantianism, but, following Kant himself, with the Platonic *eidos* also. We could even see this as what is indirectly invoked in Husserl’s reference to Greek philosophy and thus to the concept of Europe in general. For Ricoeur, this link with Plato is at the center of what he calls Husserl’s “*rapprochement*” with Kant. For Plato, according to Ricoeur, the Idea was both “the indivisible principle of intelligibility” and “the principle of obligation and of action.”<sup>99</sup> It unified and organized the field of objects and provided grounds for duty and practical activity. Reason, the power to seek and grasp the *eidos*, is “always the demand for total order,” in virtue of which it develops both “an ethic of speculative thought and of the intelligibility of ethics” (ibid.). We have seen how the Ideas of reason work in a similar way in Kant. Distinguished from the concepts of the understanding, which work to organize phenomena in the immediacy of intuition, the Ideas work regulatively to

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<sup>99</sup> Ricoeur, *Husserl*, p. 157. Hereafter I will cite page references to this work in the text.

satisfy reason's demand for totalization, even if this demand is, indeed, unachievable.

The Ideas of reason operate regulatively to provide the basis for both speculative and practical thought. According to Ricoeur, reason as Husserl uses the term (by the time of the texts that constitute the *Crisis*, at any rate) is to be seen in terms of this line of thought. He identifies five traits gathered under the heading of reason in the *Crisis*. Although we have already alluded to most of them, let me run through them briefly in order to establish more fully the relationship of reason to history and to crisis, and to draw out implications it will become our interest to interrogate in Chapter 5.

Very quickly, then: (1) Reason is not simply a critique of cognition, but rather has the task of "unifying all the signification activities, speculative, ethical, aesthetic, etc." (157). Such a task is of course infinite, and its implications are far reaching. Reason takes on a "total character" that gives it "an existential accent" in the texts that make up the *Crisis*. We have seen Husserl's concern here with the "questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence," questions that "demand universal reflections and answers based on rational insight" (C 6). Thus does reason tie the sense of man with the sense of the world – provided philosophy recalls its task. If reason is here conceived of as "the very essence of humanity" (157), this is because it not only makes possible the very conception of humanity, but also the conception of the world (taken as a horizon for intentional consciousness – but I leave aside here the complexities raised by Husserl's conception of "life-world"). (2) In addition, reason is, as we have seen, dynamical, a "becoming-rational" or the "coming of reason to itself" (ibid.). This again introduces a "futurity," so to speak, a need to interrogate and critique reason with an aim toward this future rationality. Such an interrogation or critique would be a part of

this very becoming-rational itself. (3) Reason also takes on “an ethical accent” (158); it becomes a question of *responsibility*, the responsibility, for instance, that humanity has for its own human being (PMSR 340). We have suggested this also, and it is a continuing theme for Derrida with regard to both Husserl and Kant. This “ethical accent” gives a certain urgency to Husserl’s philosophy of history, to his understanding of human being – an “ought to be,” as we have seen. But it also raises political questions, particularly given the situation Husserl found himself surrounded by in the years he wrote the texts of the *Crisis*. We will return to this below. (4) The link with ethics is what introduces the dramatic character Ricoeur speaks of and that we have just discussed, that the infinite Idea can be buried, forgotten, or otherwise lost. Such a danger is dramatic because of the high stakes involved. This is the “risk of history,” where philosophy becomes an “open struggle between an understanding of the task as infinite and its naturalistic reduction,” between transcendentalism on the one hand and objectivism on the other (158).

With the fifth trait, we return to the privilege of a certain conception of Europe. According to Ricoeur, the infinity of reason’s task, its movement toward realization, the responsibility it has for doing so, and the risk of this movement (a movement that is history itself) all lead Husserl to a particular concept of “man,” one in which humanity is seen as the correlate of its infinite Ideas (*ibid.*). Thus the “image of the dawn” that Husserl claims characterizes the earliest stages of Greek philosophy, followed closely by “the correlative discovery of long-familiar man as the subject of the world,” a subject related to itself and to the totality of being through its reason (PMSR 338-9). What the Greeks introduce is a universality, and when they do so they give philosophy the task of

transforming all of humankind. Their “life-interest” is “cosmological” (280), the essentially new community of scientists and philosophers that together aim at bringing about *theōria* as an infinite and common task extends beyond national boundaries. Husserl speaks of a “supranationality” that arises with Greek philosophy and that characterizes Europe; the infinite ideals aimed at by the philosophical community are national, but they extend beyond national borders also: “ultimately they are infinite ideals for the spreading synthesis of nations in which each nation, precisely by pursuing its own ideal task in the spirit of infinity, gives its best to the nations united with it” (289). The task is divided, but it remains one (*ibid.*).

This is what distinguishes Europe – it is in possession of a “discovery,” that of the universal sense of “man.” The Idea of European philosophy is an Idea of universal humanity. Reason is the specific characteristic of this universal human being (see, for instance, PMSR 338), and it is Europe’s accomplishment to have discovered this. This is how the concept of Europe is able to exceed the geographical region whose name it invokes. Europe’s uniqueness lies not in any regional privilege but precisely in the universality of its Idea, in its recognition of a responsibility that covers all humanity.<sup>100</sup> Thus with the birth of Greek philosophy is also born a universal *responsibility*. This universality is humanity’s higher nature, but to be achieved it requires a “genuine philosophy,” one that will set this “genuine humanity” on the road to its realization (VL

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<sup>100</sup> See Ricoeur, p. 152. Of course, as we will argue much later, this Idea by its very name remains essentially linked to this geography, and thus to a certain privileging of the “European” tradition, that tradition which discovered and to some extent holds the key to humanity’s “higher nature.” We might remind ourselves of Kant’s claim in the “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmological Purpose,” precisely in the context of another invocation of Greece, that Europe is the continent “which will probably legislate eventually for all other continents” due to the “regular process of improvement in the political constitutions” one finds in its history (UH 52). The point for both Lyotard and Derrida would be that the Idea of a universal emancipation is linked to a European telos. In a discussion to which we shall return (Chapter 5), Derrida points out how Kant’s “cosmopolitical” text thus remains at the same time the most “eurocentered” (HPD 11). The same must also be said of Husserl’s philosophy of history.



291). We have seen this. We return to it here in order to stress this “cosmological” view. If, as Ricoeur argues, Husserl comes to history through the consciousness of crisis (151), his solution to this crisis comes through the invocation of a universal task and an invocation of reason that takes the form of an infinite struggle to “humanize man” (160).

These are themes to which we shall often return in what follows (see particularly §§ 3.1, 5.1). But let us note here the urgency of this struggle of reason, not forgetting the political and personal situation Husserl found himself in during the years he wrote the texts that make up the *Crisis*. As Derrida reminds us, it is imperative to recall the rise of Nazism and European fascism if we are to hear what Husserl said in those years just prior to the second World War (WEC 129). Not only are the European sciences in crisis, but European humanity also. But a crisis of European humanity must therefore be a crisis of humanity in its entirety, a crisis of inhumanity, of the forgetting of the task of becoming-rational, and thus a forgetting of the task of becoming human. This need to strive toward humanity in a sense epitomizes the historical Idea. Let us note that in this striving (toward the Idea of philosophy and thus of reason; or toward the Idea of a “higher” humanity) two things appear to be at the very least suggested by Husserl, and indeed by any such teleology: human beings are not yet (fully) rational, and thus they are not yet (fully) human. Husserl would no doubt not want to commit himself to either position, and we know that Kant would reject both propositions outright (though we have also noted a certain tension in Kant’s thinking on history in this regard). But a normative call towards betterment, completion, fullness, seems to be an essential aspect of history taken as a teleological striving.

What inaugurates such considerations for Husserl, in a certain sense the ahistorical philosopher par excellence, is the awareness of crisis.<sup>101</sup> It is a crisis of European culture, and as such it produces doubt in this culture – “a grave doubt on the ladder of history,” as Ricoeur puts it (151). The question immediately becomes one of the *humanity* of this culture, of the direction this humanity is taking. In a gesture close, in its way, to that made by Foucault in his discussion of Kant’s Enlightenment essay (see § 1.3), Ricoeur argues that the question such doubt raises is both a question *of* history, and a questions *in* history: “Where is man going? that is to say: What is the sense and the goal for us, we who are humanity?” (ibid.). It is nothing less than the question of humanity itself. In a sense we could suggest (and I will continue to endeavor to do so throughout what follows) that this question remains a point of “crisis” even for how philosophy, ethics, and politics are thought “today.”

#### **2.4 Opening to Crisis: The Idea and Philosophy**

Invoking Ricoeur one more time, we can see that the Idea in the Kantian sense mediates between consciousness and history for Husserl (145). But a problem arises, for how can transcendental phenomenology, whose motto has been “Zu den Sachen selbst!”, concern itself with the Idea in the Kantian sense, which by definition must be of something for which there can be no experience? As Derrida argues in his introduction to Husserl’s “Origin of Geometry,” Husserl never takes the Idea in the Kantian sense *itself* as the subject of a phenomenological description (137). And this is not an accident. The Idea “cannot be given in person, nor determined as evidence, for it is only the possibility of

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<sup>101</sup> With, perhaps, some help from Heidegger, but as it does not seem essential to Husserl’s thinking here, we shall leave the question aside.

evidence and the openness of ‘seeing’ itself; it is only *determinability* as the horizon for every intuition in general” (138, italics given). The “principle of all principles” and the “archetypal form of evidence” for Husserlian phenomenology are “the immediate presence of the thing itself ‘in person.’ Implicitly that means: of the phenomenally defined or definable thing, therefore the *finite* thing” (137-8, italics given). The Idea is rather an *infinite* opening, what Derrida calls in “Genesis and Structure” “the irruption of the infinite into consciousness” (WD 162).<sup>102</sup> Every time Husserl speaks of the Idea in the Kantian sense, Derrida argues there, the presence of a “*Telos*” or “*Vorhaben*,” of an “infinite theoretical anticipation” is indicated (167). This anticipation or (in Derrida’s text on the “Origin of Geometry,” for instance) “protention” signifies the “presence” (but is it, in fact, a “presence” in the classical phenomenological sense?) of a kind of rupture, an indefinite deferral that is the very opening of possibility itself. It is true that Husserl argues that the Idea is self-evident phenomenologically, that it has an ideal essence.<sup>103</sup> But it is also true that there can be no adequate determination of the content of such an Idea.<sup>104</sup> Ricoeur argues that the Idea as it appears in Husserl simultaneously implies two things: totality and openness (98). In a sense Derrida invokes both when he argues that the evidence that the Idea provides is of “an essential *overflowing* of actual and adequate self-evidence” (WD 167, my italics). This “overflowing” of what is given in self-evidence is essential because the Living Present of consciousness can only orient itself

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<sup>102</sup> This is not just confined to the Idea of philosophy as a historical task, but is the case any time the Kantian Idea is invoked. For instance, in *Ideas I*, where Husserl invokes it in the context of apprehending the entire stream of mental processes as a unity, an Idea which, he argues, is “an absolutely indubitable givenness” even if this unified stream must, of course, remain unattainable. The Idea organizes “the total flux of lived experience,” animates and unifies what Derrida calls “an indefinite protention” of the Living Present of consciousness (IHOG 136, see also n.). See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht/ Boston/ London: Kluwer, 1982), § 83, pp. 197-8.

<sup>103</sup> *Ideas I*, p. 166.

<sup>104</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 198.

through this infinite anticipation that links any now both to what has come before and to what will follow. To what *must* follow, given the infinity of the task. With the texts of the Crisis at least, the Idea becomes, indeed, the very *project* of phenomenology, its condition of possibility.<sup>105</sup> But if it makes phenomenology possible, it is only “by overflowing its system of self-evidences or factual determinations, or by overflowing this system as phenomenology’s source or end” (ibid.). This would mean that in a certain sense it is also the condition of phenomenology’s *impossibility*, a structure common in Derrida’s thought and periodically referred to as “quasi-transcendental.” We shall return to it (see Chapter 4). But here we should note the ambiguous but necessary role the Idea plays here, being neither inside the system or structure of phenomenology, nor entirely outside of it. Derrida argues that phenomenology ends up being “stretched” between the finite and the infinite, between, on the one hand, “the *finitizing* consciousness of its *principle*” and on the other, “the *infinetizing* consciousness of its final *institution*” (IHOG 138, italics given). There are important consequences in all this for phenomenology, for if the Idea “is the basis on which a phenomenology is set up in order to achieve the final intention of philosophy” (141), and if there can be no phenomenological determination of the Idea, then “*phenomenology* cannot be grounded as such in itself, nor can it *itself* indicate its own proper limits” (140, italics given).

We are nearing a problem that will link this discussion with Kant, and indeed with the entire tradition of what tends to get called, no doubt somewhat hastily, “western metaphysics.” Let us begin by citing a well-known passage from “The Ends of Man” in

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<sup>105</sup> In “Genesis and Structure,” Derrida claims that the “historico-teleological” route into phenomenology “cannot be a route among others” because the eidetics of history “embraces the totality of beings” (WD 165). It is as a question of time and temporalization that Derrida approaches the Idea in his reading of this motif in Husserl (and elsewhere).

which Derrida takes up again the themes we are developing.<sup>106</sup> Derrida is here discussing Husserl's critique of empirical anthropologism, rather famously arguing that, in spite of appearances, this critique itself only really makes way for what he calls there a "transcendental humanism" (M 123). This transcendental humanism is linked to the teleology that governs the Husserlian conception of history. Humanity is that being "to which the transcendental *telos* – determined as Idea (in the Kantian sense) or even as Reason – is announced"; "man as *animal rationale* . . . designates the site of teleological reason's unfolding, that is, history" (122). Given that Husserl's historical rationalism sees transcendental phenomenology as "the ultimate achievement of the teleology of reason that traverses humanity," Husserl is said not to counter or oppose but rather to "revive and restore" what Derrida calls "the jurisdiction of the founding concepts of metaphysics" (123).<sup>107</sup> This is to say that by placing his thought on a historical continuum with an entire tradition of European philosophy, Husserl's discourse, despite its criticisms of anthropology, nonetheless takes up and redeploys the most basic metaphysical concepts, those such as "presence," for instance, or that of "man." These are important concepts and we shall return to them; but among the metaphysical concepts Derrida argues "form the essential resource of Husserl's discourse," one in particular comes to stand out. In Husserl's thought, says, Derrida:

the concept of *end* or of *telos* plays a decisive role. It could be shown that at each stage of phenomenology, and notably each time that a recourse to the "Idea in the Kantian sense" is necessary, the infinity of the *telos*, the infinity of the end regulates phenomenology's

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<sup>106</sup> I am here following Geoffrey Bennington, who points us in the direction of this passage. See particularly his "Deconstruction and the Philosophers (The Very Idea)," in *Legislations*, op. cit., pp. 11-60, particularly pp. 36 ff.

<sup>107</sup> At the outset of Chapter 5 we will briefly consider this same "revival and restoring" as it appears in Hegel, when we will more firmly link all of this to the discourse of humanism Derrida is concerned with there.

capabilities. The end of man (as a factual anthropological limit) is announced to thought from the vantage of the end of man (as a determined opening or the infinity of a *telos*). Man is that which is in relation to his end, in the fundamentally equivocal sense of the word. Since always. The transcendental [ i.e., moral] end can appear to itself and be unfolded only on the condition of mortality, of a relation to finitude as the origin of ideality. The name of man has always been inscribed in metaphysics between these two ends. It has meaning only in this eschato-teleological situation. (Ibid., italics given)

We see the well-known play on the two senses of “end” that Derrida distinguishes in this essay, a distinction to which we shall return (§ 5.1). For now let us focus on the interplay between finitude and infinitude at work here. Finitude is the origin of ideality. How can this be? Let us recall that ideal objects, for instance, the objects of geometry (although ultimately all cultural objects are ideal objects, as we saw in § 2.2, and Husserl will include all the elements of language also, for reason which will become clear), all ideal objects, then, have objective existence, “the existence of what is there for ‘everyone’” (OG 356). Nonetheless, they are to be distinguished from real objects, which are “imprisoned by their empirical surroundings,” located at a particular point in space and time and only fully graspable by a subject located in this same empirical locale.<sup>108</sup> The existence of ideal objects, by contrast, is “peculiarly supertemporal” – such an object is available to all people over all ages (OG 356), regardless of empirical conditions. Their objectivity is “ideal” (ibid.), according to Husserl, and in *Ideas I* he explicitly associates these “ideal essences” (essences with which the geometrical concepts that are his focus there deal) with the Idea in the Kantian sense (§ 74). And indeed, the structure of the ideal object appears very similar to that of the Idea, in that there is a distinction to

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<sup>108</sup> Bernet, “Presence and Absence of Meaning,” p. 42.

be drawn between the “spiritual form” of the ideal object and any spatio-temporal embodiment of it (OG 357). This is not to suggest, of course, that as with any instantiation of the Idea (for instance, the Idea of philosophy taken as an infinite task) any sensible utterance or inscription of the ideal object is inherently insufficient. On the contrary, it belongs to the objective being of ideal objects “that they be linguistically expressed and can be expressed again and again” (ibid., n.). Nothing is lost in their being expressed; their unique quality is that they can be repeated infinitely.<sup>109</sup>

Since they do not depend on the experience of any individual empirical subject, we can say that ideal objects are thus “objects at their best.”<sup>110</sup> They have a kind of ideal form of presence, since they are universally and omnitemporally valid. However, this also creates an ambiguity. Given their status as ideal essences, ideal objects can only be instantiated or realized in a real object (say, a written text). This raises a question about their apparent self-sufficiency. As Bernet, who points out this problem, puts it:

Thoughts need linguistic signs to be expressed and communicated, laws need to be written down in a universally available codex, religious faith needs to be celebrated in public ceremonies, political decisions need to be promulgated, etc. This need of assistance by real objects is what makes ideal objects also helpless, impotent, suitable for abuses and open to crisis, despite their distinctive presence.<sup>111</sup>

Bernet frankly admits his indebtedness to Derrida in this text, and indeed cites § VII of Derrida’s Introduction to Husserl’s “Origin of Geometry” at the end of this passage.

There Derrida points out the ambiguity of this situation, this being “open to crisis” and its

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<sup>109</sup> This is why Husserl claims that the ideal objects of geometry are identically the same in each embodiment – the Pythagorean theorem “exists only once, no matter how often or even in what language it may be expressed” (357).

<sup>110</sup> Bernet, “Presence and Absence,” p. 42.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., pp. 43-4.

relation to the present crisis of the European sciences. To be “absolutely ideal,” according to Derrida, an object “must be freed of *every* tie with an actually present subjectivity in general” (IHOG 87, italics given). The original insight of the first geometer is not yet an ideal object – it must proceed to objective constitution, and to do so it needs language. *Speech*, on the one hand, will free the object from individual subjectivity; but it cannot produce the “persisting existence” that such objects must have, their “continuing-to-be,” as Husserl puts it, “even when no one has [consciously] realized them in self-evidence” (OG 360). This is why Husserl introduces here the “important function of written, documenting linguistic expression,” that “makes communications possible without immediate or mediate personal address;” such expression “is, so to speak, communication become virtual” (ibid. 360-1). It is this virtuality that allows the original sense to be continued in a tradition, to be carried infinitely over time. But it is also this virtuality that opens meaning to crisis, since it does not guarantee that the original insight be reawakened. This original insight or sense can be lost, forgotten – as we have seen above. This means that this virtuality has an “ambiguous value,” according to Derrida: “it simultaneously makes passivity, forgetfulness, and all the phenomena of *crisis* possible” (IHOG 87, italics given).

The possibility of writing thus becomes the possibility of crisis also. A crisis of *meaning*, which, as Derrida puts it in “Signature Event Context,” “is always linked to the essential possibility of writing” (M 319). And again in *Speech and Phenomena*: “The moment of crisis is always the moment of signs” (81). What’s more, this openness to crisis is not accidental – it belongs to the very structure of writing (and, indeed, to any iterable sign, including public ceremonies and gestures, as Bernet argues). Again we see



the suggestion of a necessary risk associated with the becoming-rational of the Husserlian historical telos. Writing opens the possibility of the infinite repeatability of ideal objects, but it also makes possible their forgetting and covering over. But are we not then back at Kant's problem here, the problem of an essential finitude that prevents humanity from ever achieving (in this world at least) the infinite ideal? And if we are, is this really a problem for Husserl, or does it not rather justify the urgency of his call to reclaim the task of philosophy and get reason and reasoning humanity back on the path to the realization of a genuine humanity?

But this problem of repeatability or iterability is not limited to the written sign – according to Derrida, it is a condition of *all* meaning in general. And as we will see, this has profound effects for Husserl's entire historical project – and for the entire problematic of history and crisis more generally. Let us turn to *Speech and Phenomena*, where Derrida makes the rather startling claim that the death of the speaker is a structural necessity of any utterance of the expression "I am." To begin, we should note that the attention to this utterance of the "I" is of course not arbitrary. Not only does this "I" have a certain privilege in Husserlian phenomenology, but it is central to an entire tradition of metaphysics inaugurated by the Cartesian *cogito*. In *Speech and Phenomena* the "I" is described, in more or less Husserlian terms, as the "zero-point of the subjective origin" of the here and the now (94). Still invoking Husserlian language, Derrida says in *Of Grammatology* that in speech this subject "affects itself and is related to itself in the element of ideality" (12). The assumption Derrida is referring to here, an assumption he claims to find at work throughout the entirety of western metaphysics, is that the subject is immediately present to itself in the moment of speaking, exemplified here in saying "I

am.” In Husserl’s case, according to Derrida, this assumption can be shown to be present through attention to Husserl’s distinction between expression (*Ausdruck*) and indication (*Anzeichen*) made in the *Logical Investigations*. Indication is empirical; it is a sign but in itself it has no meaning, no *Bedeutung*. A flag is the sign of a nation, the Martian canals could be signs of intelligent life, fossil vertebrae indicate the existence of prediluvian animals (LI I/§2, 270).<sup>112</sup> All of these things have what Husserl calls an *indicative relation*, they “motivate” us to move from the perceived thing to the belief that another thing or state of affairs exists (ibid.). But insight and knowledge regarding the ideal content of the connections made is, according to Husserl, “quite excluded” from this relation (§3, 271-2). This is what makes Derrida claim that the indicative sign is nondiscursive (SP 17). It can indicate another thing or state of affairs, but it lacks the necessity of relation that obtains in, say, logic or mathematics. One is never absolutely sure that the indicative sign really indicates that which it is assumed to indicate.

Expressions, on the other hand, are meaningful signs (LI I/§5). They are the instances or parts of speech intended to communicate a meaning. Derrida describes them as having a kind of purity, they are purity of meaning (SP 20) because they always suppose “the ideality of a *Bedeutung*” (18). It is expression that is linked to ideality – and ideality, meaning, originates in the subject. Addressing the difficulty that the French language allows for no obvious distinction between *Zeichen*, “sign” (in French: *signe*),

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<sup>112</sup> It is true that one can, as Rudolf Bernet does, make a separation between “natural signs,” such as fossil vertebrae, and “non-lingual artificial signs,” such as flags; but in the *Logical Investigations* these are both called “indications” by Husserl, and the distinction has no effect on the argument in Derrida that we are about to follow. If this situation is complicated by Husserl in certain texts written in 1914, Bernet himself not only points them out but shows that these changes do not alter the fundamental contours of Derrida’s claims – on the contrary, “his main charge is given new evidence” by them. See Rudolf Bernet, “Husserl’s Theory of Signs Revisited,” *Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition: Essays in Phenomenology*, ed. Robert Sokolowski (Washington: Catholic U of America P, 1988), pp.1-24. See especially pp. 3 ff., 24.

and *Bedeutung*, “meaning” (*signification*), Derrida suggests that the German *bedeuten* could be defined (if not precisely translated) in terms of the French “*vouloir-dire*,” “meaning” but literally “want to say.” When the subject expresses him or herself about something, this person “*means or wants to say [veut dire] something*” and an expression “likewise means or ‘wants to say’ something” (18). This is at least helpful in trying to understand the distinction, since Husserl describes the expressive sign as originally communicative: “a speaker produces it with the intention of ‘expressing himself about something’ through its means” (LI I/§7 276-7). An expressive sign, then, expresses an internal state of affairs, the subject’s inner mental life. It expresses a sense, as opposed to being a sign that might be said – a little loosely given Husserl’s language here – to “stand in” for something else, whether intentionally or not.

We may perhaps perceive readily enough that indication will be subject to all kinds of errors that will be an essential part of its dependence on a facticity that forbids any certainty.<sup>113</sup> We will never be absolutely sure that an indication indicates exactly what we think it does. But expression too has limitations. In communication, what it is that one wishes to express remains something forever hidden from the intuition or lived experience of another (SP 22). In addition, the “ideal content of the meaning and spirituality of expression are here united to sensibility” through the use of signs (*ibid.*), to the empirical, factual world in which contingency and error are always possible. The external, outside world contaminates the purity of expression. This is why Husserl will in fact argue that in most cases expression is irretrievably intertwined with indication (§7). In expressing myself, I have need of indicative signs if I am to communicate what it is I want to express. In order to preserve the purity of meaning, then, Husserl has to seek a

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<sup>113</sup> Bennington, “Derridabase,” *op. cit.* pp. 64-5.

mode of expression that does not depend on indication. This he finds in solitary speech. In solitary speech, or soliloquy, there is no need of indication because there is no need for the subject to go outside of him or herself: “the relation to a certain *outside* is suspended” (SP 22, italics given). But only to a *certain* outside. In soliloquy I do not have to communicate with others, I do not have to indicate my meaning. But in order to have meaning, in order to mean (*bedeuten*), I must still intend an ideal outside, the outside of an ideal object (32). But I do so without passing through the sensible world. There is no need for indication because the mental states that I express are immediately experienced by me in the very moment of speaking them (LI I/§8, 280).

In Husserl, then, the object of the uttered “I” is realized immediately for the one who is speaking in the moment of the utterance (see SP 94). In this sense, *presence* is epitomized, the self-presence of the knowing subject, which is also an immediate presence, the subject grasping itself in the immediacy of the instant, *now*. This links Husserl’s thought with an entire tradition of metaphysics, the famed “metaphysics of presence,” which indeed is to be found right back to Plato, according to Derrida. But more immediately it links it to what Derrida calls “the great rationalisms of the seventeenth century” (G 16). Rousseau in some sense exemplifies this tradition for Derrida because it is he who first thematizes the reduction of writing in the modern era (17, 98). But in keeping with our interest in this speaking “I,” let us note the obvious fact that it is Descartes who inaugurates this particular, “subjective” turn of the tradition:

Between the overture and the philosophical accomplishment of phonologism (or logocentrism), the motif of presence was decisively articulated. It underwent an internal modification whose most conspicuous index was the moment of certitude in the Cartesian cogito. Before that, the identity of presence offered to the mastery of repetition was

constituted under the “objective” form of the ideality of the *eidōs* or the substantiality of *ousia*. Thereafter, this objectivity takes the form of *representation*, of the *idea* as the modification of a self-present substance, conscious and certain of itself at the moment of its relationship to itself. (G 97, italics given)

This is obviously linked to the privileging of the *voix* in the western metaphysical tradition, a privileging with which Derrida is rather famously concerned.<sup>114</sup> From Descartes to Husserl, the structure of this privilege of the voice is linked to what Derrida calls “auto-affectation,” the subject immediately affecting itself in the instant of speech. In this structure, *logos*, according to Derrida,

can be infinite and self-present, it can be *produced as auto-affectation*, only through the *voix*: an order of the signifier by which the subject takes from itself into itself, does not borrow outside of itself the signifier that it emits and that affects it at the same time. Such is at least the experience – or consciousness – of the voice: of hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak [*s’entendre-parler*]. That experience lives and proclaims itself as the exclusion of writing, that is to say of the invoking of an “exterior,” “sensible,” “spatial” signifier interrupting self-presence. (98, italics given)

We will return to this figure of “auto-affectation” and the role it plays in certain of Kant’s texts in Chapter 4. But let us note its presence in Husserl also. If writing remains open to crisis, the voice appears to avoid this crisis in the moment of speech. There is no external, sensible contingency to interrupt the purity of meaning. Derrida identifies what he calls “an unfailing complicity” in Husserl between idealization and speech (SP 75). Outside the world the ideal object is “*nothing*” (Derrida italicizes this “nothing”); nonetheless, in each instantiation it must remain the same. If it is to avoid the openness

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<sup>114</sup> This privilege obviously goes back to Plato and the *Phaedrus* – linking, again, the “entirety” of metaphysics starting at the very least with that “landmark” (G 97) text. But we should note that Descartes marks a “modification” in the development of this privilege.

to crisis identified with writing, it must therefore be “constituted, repeated, and expressed in a medium that does not impair the presence and self-presence of the acts that aim at it, a medium which both preserves the *presence of the object* before intuition and *self-presence*, the absolute proximity of the acts to themselves” (76). The name of this medium is the voice, “an element whose phenomenality does not have worldly form” (ibid.). My words are “alive” when I speak because they do not appear to leave me, they do not fall “outside of my breath”; they are at my disposition “without further props” (ibid.). Speech is seen here as a “life-giving act,” a “*Lebendigkeit*,” associated with the animation of the signifier and “the soul of language” (77). It is, in language that clearly links it with the passage from *Grammatology* just quoted, “pure auto-affection, the operation of hearing oneself speak,” which reduces the bodily and encounters no resistance in any physical object (79). In this it is opposed then to writing, which is rather associated with, as we have seen, again, in the above quote, exteriority, sensibility, and, importantly, *death*. Writing is finite, and if speech in the now of the living-present is not exactly infinite, the unity of sound and voice that permits the voice to appear in the world as pure auto-affection “is the sole case to escape the distinction between what is worldly and what is transcendental” (ibid.). It links to the infinite, from the world.

The now as source-point is central to this auto-affection, and it is of course essential for phenomenology’s “principle of principles.” This, in turn, guarantees the privilege of the present. But tensions immediately go to work. The present must here be taken as the form of all experience, which thus gives it a kind of universality, “the universal form of all experience (*Erlebnis*), and therefore of all life” (53). This immediate now point is essentially linked with being: “The present alone is and ever will

be” (ibid.). Being is thus “presence or the modification of presence” (ibid.). Derrida invokes what he calls “the presence of the present as the ultimate form of being and of ideality” (53-4). But in the purity of this immediate link with ideality, all that is worldly, including all empirical aspects of my life, must be *transgressed*. Ideality is pure only if all “empirical existence, factuality, contingency, worldliness, etc.” (54) is bracketed.<sup>115</sup> My empirical existence has no bearing on the present taken as the universal form of existence or of “transcendental life,” since this universal form “concerns no *determined* being” (ibid., my italics). Thus, “the relationship with *my death* (my disappearance in general) . . . lurks in this determination of being as presence” (ibid.). The possibility of my disappearance must be experienced in the very institution of the present taken as the condition of possibility for any experience. The present *is*, whether or not I am around to experience it. My individual presence to myself, taken as experience, is thus essentially linked with the present taken as the form of experience – that is, with a present that exceeds me. When I say, with Descartes, “I am,” this must be experienced as an “I am present,” *I am here, now*. Indeed, in the initial stages of the *cogito* in the *Meditations* (in a passage to which we shall return in discussing Lyotard, § 3.4), Descartes even suggests that before God can be shown to justify the belief in continuous existence Descartes can *only* be sure that he exists in the moment of thinking: “I am; I exist – this is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking; for perhaps it could also come to pass that if I were to cease all thinking I would then utterly cease to exist.”<sup>116</sup> Descartes is aware of the radical finitude of this thinking instant – this is indeed precisely what leads him to

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<sup>115</sup> We will encounter a strange similarity with Kant’s judgment of beauty when Derrida invokes a kind of “*epochē*” at work in the judgment of taste. See § 4.2.

<sup>116</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, third ed., trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 2<sup>nd</sup> Meditation, 19/27.

search for and posit a God that will unify the discrete moments of time into a coherent unity, much as the Idea functions to unify and organize historical time in Kant and Husserl.<sup>117</sup> The argument here, as we will see, is that these discrete moments in fact cannot quite remain discrete, and this *from their very beginning*, so that even the very utterance of the “I am” itself “presupposes the relationship with presence *in general*, with being as presence” (SP 54, my italics). Presence in general is an ideal condition that must be met in order for me to experience myself in the moment of speaking the “I am.” The appearance of this “I” to itself in the “I am” “is thus *originally* a relation with its own possible disappearance” (ibid., my italics), a relation with that which must exceed it as its condition of possibility. Therefore, “*I am originally means I am mortal*” (ibid.).

The origins of ideality lie in this mortality, in this finitude. One cannot say “I am” without saying “I am mortal.” This means that determining my being in Cartesian terms as *res cogitans* is only possible from the place of finitude, a kind of ordinary “response” to the fact that this being-there is, in my particular case, temporary. This brings us, at last, back to Derrida’s claim in “The Ends of Man” that finitude is the origin of ideality. What’s more, this is linked to the entire problem of inscription and the written sign. The appearance of the word “I,” even in solitary speech, must function as an ideality in order to have meaning at all. It too must keep its sense even if my empirical presence is eliminated or otherwise modified (95). Indeed, Descartes’ very *cogito* enters the philosophical tradition only in this way:

When I tell myself “I am,” this expression, like any other according to Husserl, has the status of speech only if it is intelligible in the absence of its object, in the absence of intuitive presence – here, in the absence of myself. Moreover, it is in this way that that the *ergo sum* is

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<sup>117</sup> See Derrida’s “Cogito and the History of Madness” in WD, pp. 31-63.



introduced into the philosophical tradition and that a discourse about the transcendental ego is possible. (Ibid.)

Again we see this logic go to work. It is only in the possible absence of the speaking subject that the expression “I am” means anything, because it can only mean anything on the condition that it be possible for it to be reiterated infinitely. This means that the “I am,” rather strangely, is not as necessarily connected to the speaking subject as it would at first appear – that the subject, in speaking the “I am,” links rather onto a system or economy of meaning that it neither chooses nor controls. A system, indeed, that in some sense *constitutes* it in allowing the formulation of a subject in the moment of the “I think” or “I am.” This leads Derrida to the claim that the statement “I am alive” must be “accompanied by my being dead, and its possibility requires the possibility that I be dead; and conversely” (96-7). Contrary to what Husserl claims with regard to solitary speech (and by extension, speech in general), the “anonymity of the written *I*,” that is, its inscriptability and the possibility of its infinite repetition, is the normal situation for anything to have meaning, to mean, *bedeuten* (97).

We should note that the repetition which casts the purity of this self-presence into doubt is also necessary to it; the presence of the ideal object and the self-presence of the transcendental ego are only possible as a result of the possibility of repetition.<sup>118</sup> The infinite is only announced to thought through the finite. Out of my mortality I think the infinite; I can only think of what is infinite as that which goes on beyond me. But the infinite is what allows for the desire for absolute presence, for the present to constitute itself as a now – it is what makes it possible for me to think my own mortality as what is over against it. This is precisely why each time the element of presence is under threat,

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<sup>118</sup> Bennington, “Derridabase,” pp. 68, 116.

Husserl can and must rescue it through recourse to the Idea in the Kantian sense (see SP 9). But this also means that the present is always divided in the very moment of its constitution. The two, infinite and finite, are complicit with each other. We have not, then, simply returned to another version of Kant, in which an essential finitude prevents humanity from reaching the Ideas it nonetheless must aim towards. Each makes the other possible, while also making its ultimate realization or presence impossible. The finite ruptures the infinite from within, interrupts progress to the Idea, brings the transcendental crashing back into finitude.<sup>119</sup> This “crisis” is necessary and inevitable. But the infinite also disrupts the present, the particular moment, through the infinite movement of repetition. Each is constituted in terms of the other in an interweaving, an *economizing*, that Derrida will, in fact, call *differance*.

We will return to this term in Chapter 4, but let us briefly note the role it’s playing here. The entire structure of “essential distinctions” that Husserl sets up are, according to Derrida “purely teleological” (101). They are structured by and organized around the ideal value of the Living Present, a value that is ideal because it is constantly deferred through the movement of ideality itself. It is deferred, indeed, through the movement of *the Idea* itself: “As the ideal is always thought by Husserl in the form of an Idea in the Kantian sense, this substitution of ideality for nonidentity, of objectivity for non-objectivity, is infinitely *deferred*” (100, italics given). The differance Derrida is discussing here is the movement of this deferral, the deferral of the possibility of distinguishing between the infinite ideal and the finite, the nonideal. Given that the deferral is infinite, as infinite as the Idea in the Kantian sense, one might think that this differance, too, is infinite. But here we must recall the role that death plays in this

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<sup>119</sup> Bennington, “Deconstruction and the Philosophers,” p. 44.

movement. The appearing of the ideal as infinite differance, as we have seen, “can only be produced within a relationship with death in general” (102). The “infinite differing of presence” can only appear through a relation to my death (ibid.). As infinite differance only appears in this relation, its appearance is itself finite (ibid.). As Derrida famously puts it: “The infinite differance is finite” (ibid.). This is a notoriously difficult passage, but the argument seems to be that the movement of deferral in the infinity of ideality is constantly interrupting itself through this relation to death. “Death,” as Derrida puts it in the *Grammatology*, “is the movement of differance to the extent that that movement is necessarily finite” (143). Differance is what makes the opposition between presence and absence possible: “Without the possibility of differance, the desire of presence as such would not find its breathing-space” (ibid.). Presence taken as the telos of meaning-giving acts, then, as the telos of speech or of transcendental phenomenology, depends on the possibility of the constant deferral of that presence. Thus, “this desire carries in itself the possibility of its non-satisfaction. Differance produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible” (ibid.). Anything infinite, including differance, depends upon an “originary” relation to finitude, on the articulation of infinity that pushes it out from mortality and must constantly draw it back in again. The movement of differance is a movement only until death (see ibid.). The infinite is inherently incomplete, it carries within it the trace of finitude, the trace of its dependence on finitude. It cannot become whole, totalized, because it cannot escape the finitude of its being announced.

Husserl’s “essential distinctions” are thus caught up in an aporia, one that results from the strange logic of this teleological structure. Speaking now of the substitution of

ideal for subjective (i.e., fluctuating or momentary) content in an expression, Husserl concedes in the *Logical Investigations* that while “ideally speaking, each subjective expression is replaceable by an objective expression which will preserve the identity of each momentary meaning-intention,” it is necessary to recognize that “such replacement is not only impracticable . . . but that it cannot in the vast majority of cases, be carried out at all, will, in fact, never be so capable” (§ 28, 321). To say that each subjective expression could be replaced by an objective one is to assert that everything can be known “in itself” and is thus open to “objective determination” (ibid.). But Husserl admits not only that we are “infinitely removed from this ideal,” but that any attempt to describe a subjective experience in unambiguous and objective fashion “is always plainly in vain” (322). The “unambiguous objective expression” is thus “an inaccessible ideal” (SP 101). But this means that the possibility of *distinguishing* between expression and indication, ideal and nonideal, subject and object, is always infinitely deferred, since these must be seen as ideal distinctions. If in principle, *de jure*, these distinctions are claimed to hold, *in fact, de facto*, the two sides of each opposition are irrevocably intertwined. This is what prompts Derrida to claim that, “*de facto* and *realiter*,” these distinctions “are never respected, and Husserl recognizes this” (101).

But this produces a paradox. Given that this unambiguous objective expression is an ideal, it is the ideal which is the condition of possibility for making the very distinction between it and subjective expression. All of Husserl’s “essential distinctions” are possible only through reference to the ideal, governed by the logic of the Idea in the Kantian sense. But if this ideal were ever reached, these very distinctions would disappear: “*de jure* and *idealiter*” these distinctions “vanish, since, as distinctions, they

live only from the difference between fact and right, reality and ideality” (SP 101).<sup>120</sup>

They could only be separated out on condition that ideality became, precisely, factuality – in which case there be no distinction to make. Without the difference between fact and right, the real and the ideal, there can be no distinction, for instance, between indication and expression, since this distinction depends upon a difference (between empirical facticity and pure ideality) that *itself* would disappear if the Idea were ever attained and the totality comprehended as a whole. Pure objective determination would be the *end* of subjective experience, at least in the sense of an experience that is singular, ambiguous, indeterminate, finite. The very situation in which these distinctions would (ideally) hold is rather the situation in which they would no longer appear at all. The ambiguity of the “end” Derrida play on in “The Ends of Man,” to which we earlier alluded and to which we shall return (§ 5.1), is obviously evident here: to attain the end (in the sense of purpose or goal) is to reach the end (in the sense of termination or death). This is, perhaps, another way to articulate the problem of how infinite differance can be finite. “The infinite is only ever announced or promised in the finite. The end is the end only to the extent that we don’t reach the end. The end would be the end of the end.”<sup>121</sup>

Let’s try to flesh this out just a little. The play of differance can no more reach its “end” than can anything else. It appears only in a finite relation, a finite system – in an *economy*, say, an economy of meaning. And yet (and we will return to this when we discuss the problem of the frame in Chapter 4) neither can this system be purely and simply finite, since it depends on an inherent openness, on an essential supplementation, for the very movement or play that allows for the circulation of meaning. No system can

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<sup>120</sup> For all of this, see also Bennington, “Deconstruction and the Philosophers,” p. 41.

<sup>121</sup> Geoffrey Bennington, “Almost the End,” *Interrupting Derrida* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 141-52. This ref. p. 152.

be “totalized,” as Derrida puts it in “Structure, Sign, and Play,” but the “nontotalization” he wishes to speak of is not the result of an essential finitude that always simply sees the ideal relegated to the empirical. Rather, any system or field is *infinite*, but this is not so much because it “cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse” (WD 289). It is rather due to the very nature or structure of the field itself. Any system or field is constituted by *play*, the play of difference that we have already noted, the play of substitution that we will see later on. Contrary to the classical notion that the infinity of a field is due to its inexhaustibility, Derrida does not understand field or structure here simply as something too large for the finite human mind or finite discourse to comprehend. Rather, “there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions” (ibid.).<sup>122</sup> This lack is not precisely an absence, but rather the movement of never-quite-complete self-identity we have seen in the play of difference itself, which is the movement *between* presence and absence, ideal and nonideal, finite and infinite that we have been attempting to track here. On the one hand, such play can never come to an “end,” since it is what motivates the field of discourse, the economy of meaning of a particular system. Its end would be the end of that which it motivates or permits. On the other hand, this play is *only* a play in terms of the particular system or field in question, in terms of the play, for instance, between finite and infinite in a history of philosophy that views truth and meaning in terms of a privileging of presence. And so it is *also* and at the same time finite, it works in a certain system or economy, a certain context. Another way to put this is that it is infinite in a “discontinuous fashion,” which is how Derrida describes it elsewhere (R 153). Its two

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<sup>122</sup> See also Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard UP, 1986), pp. 179-80.

poles, finite and infinite, cannot close on one another, or close each other off. If it is a movement within a particular system or economy, therefore, it nonetheless cannot be *contained* within this economy, as we will see in Chapter 4. So while it could not be infinite, is always open to the interruption and discontinuity that brings it back into the finitude of a now, its very play also ensures that the context in which it works is not a “saturable” one, not one that can be absolutely determined (R 153; M 310). It remains open in its very structure, an openness that is both an opening to the infinite *and* the very interruption of infinite progress. We can begin to see, then, that the interrupted progress towards the telos of the infinite Idea is at the same time an *opening* of the field enclosed by that Idea, an opening to other contexts, other fields.

That differance is nonetheless the play of elements within a particular structure or discourse is what allows Derrida to suggest in the section of “The Ends of Man” quoted above that the name “man” only has meaning within the “onto-theo-teleological” metaphysical system he outlines there. We shall return to this, but let us note it. But it should also be clear that, as this play, differance is itself neither (really) a word, nor is it a concept (M 3). It is, in fact, nothing, no thing, because it is only the play of difference (with an ‘e’) between signifiers, between elements of the system. This is also why it does not derive from the category of being, and thus is neither present nor absent (6). In a sense, then, we can follow Len Lawlor’s suggestion that, even as “early” as *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida is already moving away from the question of being towards the question of justice.<sup>123</sup> What concerns Derrida here is the interplay of finite/infinite that both allows and disallows the Husserlian “essential distinctions” to appear, an interplay

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<sup>123</sup> Leonard Lawlor, *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2002), p. 6.

that is itself nothing more than this movement and therefore nothing for an ontology. This links to justice because, as we shall see in Chapter 5, the question of justice for Derrida is one that exceeds ontology. Justice exceeds all calculation and condition (WEC 149) and thus “has to be distinguished not only from law, but also from what *is* in general” (TS 21, italics given).

It is of course no accident that we have taken this turn toward justice, since this brings us into the orbit of ethics and politics. I will say something more about this momentarily. But in order to orient ourselves a little with regard to Husserl’s historical rationalism, let us try to give some hint as to what all of this might mean for the notion of crisis. The crisis that Husserl identifies is a crisis of philosophy, and this means a crisis of reason. The European sciences are in crisis because reason itself has been thrown into crisis. Husserl’s solution is for reason to rediscover its infinite task, to return it to its telos, to get it back on the road towards producing a “genuine” and universal humanity, which is a rational humanity. Such a solution depends upon presence, on the way that the ideal objects of science and philosophy are to be made present and on the return “to the original, intuitive presence of these ideal objects.”<sup>124</sup> Because this is a historical crisis, however, it also depends on the present coming to an understanding of itself in the present time.<sup>125</sup> Coming, that is, to the *correct* understanding of itself, which means understanding itself in terms of its infinite task. The crisis is historical, as is its solution. But if the pure presence of the living present is constantly deferred through the movement of repetition or iteration that constitutes ideality, and if at the same time the teleology of the Idea in the Kantian sense, the Idea through which Husserl always thinks ideality (SP

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<sup>124</sup> Bernet, “Presence and Absence,” p. 42.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-3.



100; see also IHOG 134-5) is always interrupted through a necessary fall back into the contingency and finitude that themselves make this very teleology possible, then not only will Husserl's solution to the crisis fail, but we might even begin to wonder if this entire movement, given its necessity, can be called a *crisis* at all. This would have a profound effect on how one views history, the history of reason and its pitfalls and shortcomings first and foremost. And it might also suggest that Husserl's proposed solution to this crisis is not only insufficient to its own task, but, as Bernet suggests, that it might make matters worse.<sup>126</sup>

Such will be our suspicion, following Derrida, in Chapter 5. The Idea, in both Husserl and Kant, forms a unified horizon that grounds theoretical endeavor and practical action. It organizes time and gives coherence to (finite) experience – from the place of infinite. This is even necessary – Derrida goes so far as to claim that there would be no language, no science, no technology and even no experience in general without ideality (WEC 143). If it is the case, however, that this principle, this organizing teleology, *cannot but* be interrupted, then perhaps this openness to crisis, a part of the structure of reason itself, demands another approach.

But let us note that with this interplay between finite and infinite we have not simply returned to Hegelian dialectics. The Kantian Idea is a “leap to the infinite” (IHOG 134), an opening or rupture for any finite structure (WD 160). It is not the continuous unfolding of Spirit in its journey to absolute self-knowledge.<sup>127</sup> One cannot move dialectically from finite experience to the Idea of the unity of all possible experience, for what are the steps that would take us from conditioned experience to the

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<sup>126</sup> “Presence and Absence,” p. 42.

<sup>127</sup> Indeed, the play of differance undermines the very notion an “absolute” in this sense, since differance, this no thing, divides the absolute from within, as the infinite is divided by finitude.

unconditioned? One cannot move from the conditioned to the unconditioned without a leap. Such a leap is not dialectical; it is excessive, it exceeds the possible in order to try to turn back around and embrace it in its entirety. Given the role the Idea plays in his thought, then, we might suggest that the excess of reason so prevalent in Kant is perhaps not entirely absent from Husserl also. To invoke an author to which we shall soon return, and whose thought is close to Derrida's here, Lyotard refers to "the *Streben* of reason" in Kant, "the zeal that pushes thinking beyond the limitation of infinitely deferred time" (Per 7). Such a *Streben*, such a striving or zeal, is suggested in the very structure of the Kantian Idea, as it goes beyond and tries to unify the totality of possible experience from "outside" of this totality, as it were. It is in a sense *necessarily* irruptive – in its striving for the unconditioned reason exceeds the very progress it is meant to organize and govern. Hegel's Absolute would be one arrived at through a gradual unfolding; the Idea is projected through a kind of excessive gesture of thought to overtake itself. Given what we have seen from Derrida, we must also recognize that this excess contains within it absence, difference (with an 'e'), deferral, and even death. But again, this difference is not *derived* from a more primordial unity, a simple act of negation, even if neither Kant nor Husserl want to draw this conclusion. It is true that Kant cannot resist privileging thesis over antithesis in the antinomies, in the name of "architectonics" (WEC 120); and that Husserl refuses to draw the conclusions to which his own account of ideality should have led him (SP 97 ff). Instead, death becomes a mere external contingency in the infinite movement of temporalization (IHOG 137). But the problem of difference, of alterity, of absence, remains. What is at stake in the externalization of death, in its exclusion as a factual contingency in reason's triumphant journey to completion in the

Idea? In this “pushing” of “death and the other to the outside of the solitary life of the soul”?<sup>128</sup>

Here enters the entire problem of ethics and politics, then – and it is a complex one. Let us begin to broach it in terms of history. On the one hand, if there can be no unifying telos or goal, a universal goal for all humanity, what will become of ethics and politics? To invoke again the questions Husserl is asking, and is right to ask, in the face of the crisis of European humanity in the years between the world wars, we can put the problem this way: how is one to know, evaluate, and measure the direction that humanity is taking, if one has no standard or measure with which to calculate? If the telos is taken from history, do we not run the risk of taking all *meaning* from history also, and thus, all truth and all political responsibility (Phn 129)? How is one to *decide*, what becomes of *judgment*, ethical and political first and foremost? This is a very common objection to the thought of both Derrida and Lyotard (among others, of course) – whatever is meant by the term “postmodern,” it is very often accused of lacking any robust ethics or politics, or worse, of engaging in a kind of “deconstructive play” that undermines the very notions of ethical or political responsibility. Enough has been written in recent years to counter at least some of the force of these accusations, and I will follow some of that writing in what follows. But I want to put this problem in a very particular way. One way to formulate this entire problematic is in terms of the *world*, of what constitutes the world, what role its history plays in this constitution, and of what direction this world is taking and ought to take. We are not talking, of course, about the world of the natural sciences, but about the world taken, precisely, as an Idea in the Kantian sense, the “world” that is the subject of the Kantian and Husserlian discourses (Phn 63). It is the Idea of this world

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<sup>128</sup> In the words of Lawlor. See *Derrida and Husserl*, p. 180.

that orients philosophy taken as an historical task, as well as a normative one. And in turn it orients practical thinking, ethical and political judgment. The stakes, then, are obviously high. But if this is not the “world” of the natural sciences, it is also not (or at least not obviously) the “world” that is invoked in the term “globalization,” the earth taken as a sphere, the sphere that is undergoing a gradual unification – technological but also cultural – which can be described in objective or at the very least objectifying terms. Such a term implies a kind of homogenization, a leveling – as though there were only one sphere, more or less open to observation and interpretation in the process of a more or less progressive unification. The “world” we are concerned with here is the world, rather, of the human (and perhaps not only the human), the world of signs and symbolic orders, of institutions and of (partially) shared meanings, the world of thought and of philosophy, of philosophy taken, indeed, as a human, that is, a *cultural* endeavor, such as both Kant (CJ § 83; UH 44) and Husserl (for instance, the “communal cultural spirit” born with Greek philosophy, VL 277; see also Phn 123) describe it. Nonetheless, the way of conceiving this world today is perhaps different to the way that either Kant or Husserl, for all of their differences (and I don’t wish to downplay these differences), thought of it. The problem of the “world” that confronts thinking today is that it is both in process and multiple. Any socially, culturally, historically constituted world must in fact be *plural*, as plural as the societies and cultures and histories that form it. Which means that thinking “this” world today, thinking *the world* presents new problems for whatever will constitute “philosophy.”

The teleology that governs human being, for these authors of “transcendental idealisms and rationalisms” (WEC 128), itself turns upon the infinite. Such a teleology

makes a historicity possible (ibid.). But it does so according to a singular Idea, the Idea of a singular “world.” This teleology, then, is not innocent. It produces a very particular history. But if, as Derrida suspects, this Idea in fact cannot hold, that progress towards its fulfillment is always open to the crisis of interruption, so that the road that humanity ought to take becomes unclear, opens onto alternative routes, can wind into cul de sacs or vanish into paths that lose themselves in the undergrowth, then the problem of what ought to be, the demand of judging or deciding what ought to come, cannot in fact be relegated to an infinite future. The problem becomes one of choosing which path to take now, in the “present” taken as present time. One can see the interruptive play we have been following in Derrida as a demand made upon thought in the immediacy of the present. One can thus see deconstruction, in its very interest in this interruption, as a thinking of and for the present.<sup>129</sup> This does not mean that this present comes to any purer a “presence” than any other. It would mean, on the contrary, that thought, “philosophy” (but we will have to become clearer on what this word will mean in such a circumstance), would be returned, again and again, to the continuing demand to reaffirm the passage, to judge or to decide again, in a way that would not be confined to or governed by the universality of a single Idea of the world. Such would be the demands made on thinking in the face of “globalization” or “*mondialisation*” – to think the “world” in such a way that philosophy is forced always to begin again. This will not perhaps remove our thinking so far from that of Husserl, who we recall invokes at the outset of the *Cartesian Meditations* the “radicalness of the beginning philosopher.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Bennington, “Deconstruction and the Philosophers,” p. 44.

<sup>130</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht/ Boston/ London: Kluwer, 1950 (1999)), p. 5.

Very preliminarily, let me suggest that such would be the task of philosophy in the face of a crisis it cannot escape – the need to begin again and again, radically.

In a perhaps somewhat strange way, then, this teleology and the prescription that underlies it will guide us, in both their Husserlian and Kantian forms, throughout what follows. For it is possible to suggest, preliminarily at least, that, like Husserl and Kant, Lyotard and Derrida are responding in a certain sense to a crisis, perhaps to more than one. Indeed, such a crisis would even be one of reason – perhaps even a crisis of “philosophy” taken in its broadest sense. But it also the case that the moment of *krinein* or of crisis in their works tends in a direction that is also very different to that of either Kant or Husserl. What I will want to try to show is the way that this moment, very similar in each, tries to account for a robust sense of political and ethical responsibility in a way that is both attentive to a reason that is susceptible to breaks, interruptions, and even crises; and that is respectful of a plurality of worlds. If there is a crisis today, if there is a crisis that is “ours,” it would have to do with this plurality, which is a plurality of norms and a plurality of “reasons.” It also means a plurality of “we’s” – or perhaps even the end of the “we” altogether. This means: the need to judge without clear rules of procedure or agreed upon systems of justification. Perhaps a thinking that is attentive to the figures of interruption, alterity, difference, is a thinking well-suited to such a situation.

We might begin as Ricoeur sees Husserl beginning, with a series of questions attentive to the historical moment: Is humanity, perhaps “Western” humanity, in a crisis today? What might constitute such a crisis? A crisis of thought? of culture? of politics? And how might those who try to “think” such things deal with whatever this crisis may

be? Can we ask where “we” are today? Where “we” are going? Must we first not ask who “we” are, and who or what this “we” might have a responsibility towards?

The questions are multiple and complicated. We obviously will not answer them, but we might let them guide our inquiry. But it can be said provisionally that, for Lyotard and Derrida at least, the problem for thought today is one of crisis taken as judgment or decision, but as judging or deciding outside of the law or without rules for proceeding, judging when faced with what does not come to us in recognizable form, when faced with what exceeds the organizing force of teleology. Judging that must take place outside of any recognizable *norms*. We might say that thought, “Western” thought, *philosophy* construed here in its broadest sense, faces today, in this so-called “globalized” world, the problem of plurality, which is the problem of recognizing as legitimate what is strange, even foreign. It is fair, I think, to suggest that this plurality has been a considerable problem thus far to philosophical thought and to “Western” rationality. That this even becomes for philosophy the problem of its legitimacy, the question of whether or not it can find a way to proceed alongside such pluralities, whether it can deal respectfully with them. It might also be a question of whether it *needs* to deal respectfully with them. Whether, to invoke a Kantian problematic present in the thought of both French thinkers, it *ought to (sollen)* or *must (müssen)*.

Which would return us to the sense of crisis as turning point, as a time of pressing need or urgency – and, once again, to the question of task. If philosophy is in a crisis, if it faces the crisis of its own legitimacy, what might this have to do with its task, with the way that it conceives of itself and its purpose or end? Such are the questions asked by Kant and Husserl in terms of teleology and the progress of humanity under the banner of

an over-arching idea. In a certain sense they are the questions asked by Lyotard and Derrida also, but it is precisely on the question of teleology, the questions of unity and of unity under norms, that we will find these later thinkers parting ways with their German counterparts. We have had some intimation of this already. Nonetheless, it is also the case that Lyotard and Derrida are each indebted to these thinkers, particularly to Kant – in what ways I will endeavour to make evident. But let us focus again on these questions, those of crisis, of task, of philosophy itself, as we turn to Lyotard, that we might begin to get a grasp on both these mergings with, and partings of, ways.



## Chapter Three

### Lyotard: Narrative, the Sublime, and Affective Temporality

#### 3.1 Crisis and the “Postmodern”

We began Chapter 1 by observing that for Lyotard the problem of “modernity” is in many respects a problem of crisis. Indeed, it is very tempting to associate Lyotard with this notion, in both the senses that we have thus far given it – even if, as will become evident, there are many complications involved in doing so, complications to which we will need to be sensitive. Nonetheless, we live, he tells us in the opening passages of a famous essay, in “a period of slackening” (AQ 71),<sup>131</sup> in which experimentation is discouraged and resisted in the name of a “call for order, a desire for unity, for identity, for security, or popularity (in the sense of *Öffentlichkeit*, of ‘finding a public’)” (73). This call for order is itself a sign of crisis. It is motivated by *anxiety*, the anxiety caused by a lack of faith in reality, a “shattering of belief” and a discovery of the “‘lack of reality’ of reality” (77). These are, indeed, among the very conditions of modernity as Lyotard conceives it,<sup>132</sup> with the addition that along with this loss of faith in reality and the attending crisis of belief comes “the invention of other realities” (ibid.). We already have some idea of what these “other realities” are from our discussion in Chapter 1 (§ 1.1) – they are the “grand-” or “meta-” narratives that work to organize events in terms of a universal history guided by the Idea taken in a Kantian sense. As belief in one narrative

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<sup>131</sup> Although this text is appended to the English translation of PMC, it was written some three years later. Since it seems worthwhile to keep that in mind, I shall reference it separately.

<sup>132</sup> Again, modernity is not to be taken as an historical era but rather as a mode of thought and of sensibility – “in whatever age it appears” (AQ 77).

has been shaken, another has been developed to replace it, one reality questioned, another invented to take its place.

Crisis, then, is in a certain sense at the center of the modern, which, if we may be permitted here to look ahead to Derrida, we might describe as being divided in itself by crisis (this is, indeed, the very “condition” of the postmodern, as we will see). This is an observation to which we have already alluded (see § 1.2), and one it will be useful to keep in mind when we come to consider the place (and time) of the “postmodern.” In a sense, the possibility of reality’s being shown up as an “unreality” is a feature inherent in the narrative itself, along with the attending need to construct a new narrative in the old one’s place. Delegitimation, as Lyotard says in one of the texts gathered together as *The Postmodern Explained*, is already a part of modernity (19).

But Lyotard says more than this when he speaks of this period as one of “slackening.” This “call to order” reflects a temper of the time, a temper that leans towards unity as protection from the doubts and anxieties produced by this “‘lack of reality’ of reality.” People seek the norm as a result of anxiety, seek to return to the comforts, perhaps, of the old narrative, the old sense of reality, in the face of the unknown or of what challenges the accepted categories or rules. It is an attitude that surely marks the death of a narrative. The gesture towards unity, towards “realism” and against experimentation, is reactionary, and it comes in the face of crisis.<sup>133</sup>

Such a state of affairs, however, might characterize the death of any narrative.

What is interesting in the context of Lyotard’s work on the “postmodern” is that there

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<sup>133</sup> Although in the immediate context, Lyotard is referring to realism versus artistic experimentation, he is very clear that the gesture towards unity which he sees as underlying the cry for a return to realism and an end to experimentation has much broader-reaching implications, particularly *political* implications, some of which will become our concern in Chapter 5.

appears to be something different about *this* anxiety, something that is undoubtedly related to another crisis, the one named by Lyotard at the very outset of *The Postmodern Condition*: the “crisis of narratives” (xxiii). Indeed, this crisis is what invokes the very famous and problematic distinction between the modern and the postmodern in Lyotard’s thought. In the Introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard uses the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself through “explicit appeal to some grand narrative,” among which he includes what he calls the “dialectics of Spirit,” the “emancipation of the rational or working subject,” or indeed the creation of wealth (ibid.).<sup>134</sup> The *postmodern*, on the other hand, has, at least initially, a much simpler definition: “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv).<sup>135</sup> Obviously much more will need to be said in order to come to some grips with this very troubling notion; nonetheless, this seems a good enough place to begin. We might at least ask where such incredulity comes

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<sup>134</sup> Lyotard also mentions what he calls “the hermeneutics of meaning,” presumably with the Hegelian-Gadamerian hermeneutical tradition in mind. While other, more “open” hermeneutical traditions (such as that which comes through Kant and Dilthey) no doubt avoid much of what Lyotard says here about grand narratives, I take it that Lyotard’s interest is in the hermeneutical focus on *meaning*, even if the interpretive exercise is one open to adjustment and change. A certain hermeneutical flexibility will no doubt go some way to alleviating some of the concerns we will see Lyotard raise here; nonetheless, there will be limits, I think, as to how far he would be willing to go in approving any version of hermeneutics, whose telos must, ultimately, be the establishment of meaning, to the detriment of any sustained attention to heterogeneity and difference as Lyotard invokes them through terms such as “affect” or “event.” See the discussion of Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* below (§ 3.4) and the discussion of the event in Chapter 5.

<sup>135</sup> In a well-known footnote to *Just Gaming* that appears to constitute one of the earliest attempts at formulating the distinction, Lyotard speaks of the difference between the modern and the postmodern in terms of the presence or absence of an addressee. The modern (which is, we must remember, an order of *narrative*) is dependent on an Idea, that of “the people,” an idea “whose referent oscillates between the romantics’ *Volk* and the *fin-de-siècle* bourgeoisie.” Any narrative of emancipation depends upon an Idea of they who are to be emancipated. We will see this idea of the “people” returning in *The Postmodern Explained* (see below), and will take it up again in terms of the way that humanism works in both Lyotard’s and Derrida’s thought (see below and Chapters 4 and 5). For now let us note that the “people” in this sense constitute a kind of addressee – the narrative of emancipation is presumed to be addressed to a coherent whole who will recognize it and recognize themselves as addressed by it. The “people” are such because they share a set of criteria for judging (a work of literature or art, for instance, but also for judging in politics or in terms of truth claims). According to Lyotard, the postmodern, on the other hand, is a “condition” of any literatures or works of art that “have no assigned addressee and no regulating ideal.” Its value, therefore, is “measured on the stick of experimentation” (JG 16, n). The “postmodern” must therefore find its addressee, establish its public only after the event of its instantiation. In many respects, Lyotard will hold to this throughout.

from. On the one hand, Lyotard attributes it to the progress of the sciences themselves, a claim that in our context doesn't seem too difficult to comprehend: that scientific discovery should lead us to question the metaphysical presuppositions that have governed our conceptions of the world is a common enough thought in the twentieth century, not to mention science's relation to various of the crises philosophy is meant to have suffered in the last couple of centuries. Indeed, it is possible to see Kant's suggestion in both prefaces to the first *Critique* and in the *Prolegomena* that metaphysics is mired in past controversies and is failing to live up to the standards of a science as being made precisely in comparison with other (natural) sciences, Newtonian physics being the exemplar (§ 1.2). And Husserl, as we have seen, also cites "objectivist" science's progress as a yardstick by which philosophy's failures might be measured (though not a yardstick by which to measure its successes). But in both instances the attempt is to reverse the problem – for both Kant and Husserl, philosophy (metaphysics) *grounds* the endeavors of natural science, so that any crisis in philosophy is ultimately a crisis for science also, even if science is unaware of it. The suggestion here is rather that our attitude toward the kind of grand narratives that are meant to do this grounding has changed as a result, in part, of the progress of science itself. Indeed, according to Lyotard science has produced the very "crisis of metaphysical philosophy" that both Kant and Husserl anticipated and tried to head off (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, however, Lyotard also claims that the progress of science in turn *presupposes* this incredulity towards narratives. How? One possible answer is that it is only through a willingness to suspend such narratives that science is able to move beyond the confines laid out by these legitimizing discourses, so that on the one hand

science leads us away from the great metaphysical foundations that have supported us, and on the other a growing incredulity towards these foundations permits further drifting – in an interplay that sounds almost dialectical, and therefore not very “Lyotardian.” However that may be, Lyotard, at the writing of *The Postmodern Condition*, certainly seems content to suggest – along with the North American sociologists and critics among whom the term “postmodern” is said to be current – that “since the end of the nineteenth century” certain transformations have “altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts” (xxiii) in such a way that the discourses that have heretofore legitimated science have suffered a crisis that amounts to a crisis of legitimation.

It is clear that these transformations are, in *The Postmodern Condition* at any rate, partly technological, partly economic (as Lyotard describes them in the first section of PMC, 3-6). And they have had a lasting effect. Lyotard describes the crisis of narratives and the ensuing loss of legitimacy thus:

The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable. (xxiv)

The society of *the future*, then (a theme that continues to appear for us), is described as falling within the province of “a pragmatics of language particles” (ibid.). Still content to speak in terms of language games here (a concept he will drop in *The Differend*), Lyotard’s focus in this text is on the heterogeneity of language games and elements, and on the locally determined institutions – “institutions in patches” – to which they give rise

(ibid.). In a sense we appear to be looking forward, then, to a *new* future, one in which grand or metanarratives have given way to local language games and the institutions they establish.

Such is one way of conceiving of the contemporary crisis – and I have already suggested that this description will not remain unchanged in Lyotard’s thought. In *The Postmodern Explained*, indeed, he describes this incredulity in a somewhat different vein. There he argues that the “project of modernity,” which he now associates more explicitly with universality, “has not been forsaken or forgotten but destroyed, ‘liquidated’” (18). The project of modernity itself, taken as the project of the realization-to-come of a universal Idea, a future to be accomplished according to such an Idea, is presented as having become an impossibility. Lyotard claims that there are many “modes” of the destruction of this project, but he specifically names two, the first being Auschwitz, the crime that, as he puts it, “opens” postmodernity (19).<sup>136</sup> The name of “Auschwitz,” according to him, is a symbol (18); what it symbolizes is the crime of “*lèse-souveraineté*” [which the translators give as “violated sovereignty”], of “populicide (as distinct from ethnocide)” (19). The argument Lyotard gives for this is that, following the abolition of the French monarchy in 1792, the source of legitimacy for modernity is to be found in an Idea, the Idea of “the people.” The people, as the source of legitimacy, are thus sovereign (recall here Lyotard’s reference to the people as the addressee of the modern narrative in *Just Gaming* 16, n.). If this is the case, then “Auschwitz,” in naming the destruction of an

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<sup>136</sup> But we should note a tension developing here. If the “postmodern” is not to be taken in a periodizing sense this “opening” cannot designate an historical inauguration, but must be thought rather on the level of an opening onto a silence or even an abyss, one that stands as a kind of interruption of any historical narrative. Nonetheless, the crime designated by the name “Auschwitz” does appear to have an exemplary status with regard to the postmodern and to the crisis of narratives invoked in PMC. In some sense this crime has come to produce the crisis Lyotard is attempting to describe (and indeed, historically locate) in these pages.

entire people, names the destruction of a “modern sovereign” (ibid.). It attacks the modern narrative of emancipation at one of its sources, then: the very Idea of “the people.” It is a crime (and a loss of addressee) to which we shall return in Chapter 5. Suffice for now to say that this crime stands as one mode of the destruction of the very possibility of the legitimacy of the modern project.

The second such mode that Lyotard names in this passage from *The Postmodern Explained* is what he calls “capitalist technoscience,” which would seem to connect more readily to his discussion in *The Postmodern Condition*. In the earlier text he speaks of the effects on knowledge as a result of technological transformations, knowledge having to be “translated into quantities of information” in order to fit with the model provided by computers, which bring along with them “a certain logic, and therefore a certain set of prescriptions determining which statements are accepted as ‘knowledge’ statements” (PMC 4). Knowledge is “exteriorized,” separated off from the (speculative) model that sees education as inseparably entwined with “the training (*Bildung*) of minds,” becoming rather one more commodity within the late-capitalist system of exchange (ibid.).<sup>137</sup> Since this commodity is essential to the production and maintenance of the mechanisms of power, knowledge as “informational commodity” becomes “a major – perhaps *the* major – stake in the worldwide competition for power” (5). This goes some way to indicating how the political realm is to be characterized in terms of what Lyotard calls “technoscience.” But what is key for understanding the role that technology plays in the acquisition and legitimization of knowledge, as Lyotard formulates it in *The Postmodern Condition* but also elsewhere, is that technology follows a particular principle, one that

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<sup>137</sup> See PMC 32 for the association of *Bildung* with what Lyotard calls there the “speculative” narrative of legitimation.

has come to define capitalist society in general: the principle of performativity, or of “optimal performance,” which is described in terms of “maximizing output (the information or modifications obtained) and minimizing input (the energy expended in the process)” (PMC 44). This principle, which gains currency as a result of transformations in technological capacity, itself effects transformations in society as a whole. Such, at least, is the “strategic” hypothesis as Lyotard sets it out in *The Postmodern Condition* (see PMC 7). But it is also behind his claim in *The Postmodern Explained* that “Success is the only criterion of judgment technoscience will accept” (18), a criterion that provides a hint of what might constitute a crisis moment for the modern narrative. For technoscience cannot say what success is, nor, importantly, why it might be good, just, or even true – since, as Lyotard puts it, “success is self-proclaiming, like a ratification of something heedless of any law” (18-9). It therefore cannot be universalized, which in turn means it cannot complete the project of modernity, even though it has won out over “the other candidates for the universal finality of human history” (18).

Indeed, capitalist technoscience operates according to a logic that is opposite to the one by which it seems to operate. On the one hand it appears to be yet another modern narrative of emancipation, and Lyotard lists it in many texts as one of the narratives of modernity. We get descriptions, then, of emancipation through the “creation of wealth” (PMC xxiii), or “the capitalist narrative of emancipation from poverty through technical and industrial development” (UCD 315), or “the enrichment of all humanity through the progress of capitalist technoscience” (PE 17). But it is also, along with the crime symbolized by the name “Auschwitz,” “another means of destroying the project of modernity” while here also giving the impression that it completes it (PE



18). For while it seems to promise emancipation from poverty and dependence through the development of wealth, it has also shown itself to be perfectly capable of flourishing in despotic regimes (e.g., the Nazi regime), while it has also shown itself to be unbothered by the decline of the universal narratives of modernity (59), thriving, indeed, in the “anything goes” of a certain kind of “postmodernity” (that of Charles Jencks, for instance, though not that of Lyotard himself, as I hope will become clear) (AQ 76). Capitalist technoscience projects an end (the emancipation of humanity through the accumulation of wealth), but it plays a trick, since it presents itself as a necessity for this end and therefore by-passes any need for legitimation. That is, it is presented as a *necessity*, not as a *finality* (PE 59). The promise of the capitalist technoscientific narrative will not be kept; its failure hides in the shift from the language of progress (towards an end) to that of development (which proceeds according to a logic internal to the laws of capital itself).

The regime of capitalism is one of “pseudorationality and performativity” (PE 73), according to Lyotard, one that, operating in accordance with its technoscientific principle of constant development, is driven by a dynamic that in fact takes no account of human needs (83). It proceeds, rather, entirely according to its own logic of improved performance, of constant building, promotion, usefulness and utility. “To succeed is to process,” as Lyotard puts it (in English) in *The Inhuman* (199). This is why it is no longer even possible to call “development” progress, for to do so would indeed suggest a connection to human needs and interests, while technoscientific development “seems to proceed of its own accord, with a force, an autonomous motoricity that is independent of

us” (PE 78). Lyotard associates such development rather with the destabilization of social and individual institutions or entities (ibid.).

Much remains to be said. Nonetheless, let us note that the situation that we find ourselves in – still with reservations, to which we will return, regarding this “we” – is, according to Lyotard, an “original situation in history” (PE 83).<sup>138</sup> In some sense, then, ours is indeed a crisis moment, and the word “crisis” can be found throughout his texts on the postmodern. Nonetheless, we must negotiate what Lyotard might mean by this term very carefully. It seems clear that, on one hand, whatever the term “postmodern” is meant to capture or express, it seems to entail certain crises, crises that demand our attention and that call upon thought. And yet we have already had occasion to be suspicious that whatever may constitute the crisis of “postmodernity,” whatever might constitute its “solution,” it cannot quite be the “crisis” (nor, obviously, can it entail the solution) of either Kant or Husserl.

Let us follow this trail a little further. For Lyotard indeed gives us a hint of this in his discussion of technoscience when he claims that it is “a state of reason” (64). Reason, however, is no longer the domain of the philosopher, of the scholar whose thinking contained its end within itself. With the technoscientific there is a supplementary end to thinking – it is subordinated to the logic of technology and the end pursued by capitalism (64-5). Education has been transformed into training, the training aimed at maximum performativity. If we conceive of cognition as best subordinated to the interests of public

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<sup>138</sup> It seems correct to associate what Lyotard says about the “autonomous motoricity” of techno-scientific development with Marxist alienation, which in turn might make it tempting to suggest that this situation is thus not entirely original (at the very least going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century). The question is perhaps one of how broadly to take the “present situation.” Lyotard’s claim regarding the “originality” of this situation would by no means preclude early manifestations of it. He would no doubt agree that Marx recognized at least some of the conditions of what Lyotard calls “capitalist techno-science,” for instance. Nonetheless, Marx’s narrative remains one of emancipation, and thus modern.

institutions, however (reason in the service of society), which would mean that the “reason” of knowledge ought to be discovered in the ends of the public institutions themselves and not in knowledge itself, we come around again to the crisis Lyotard appears to be getting at here. For if this were the case,

the reason of cognitive reason would inscribe itself in the social, economic, and political order. Science would offer greater justice, greater well-being, and greater freedom. This was largely the thinking of Europe and North America two centuries ago when they gave credence to the grand narratives of emancipation in the Enlightenment. (65)

We return, then to the crisis of narratives – and to the crisis of the present time. If what Lyotard argues with regard to the crisis of grand narratives is true, science has not offered greater justice, well-being, and freedom – as the name “Auschwitz” would attest. Indeed, the history of the last two centuries is characterized by crimes, “or at least deceptions” (ibid.), that would put the lie to any such conception of the role of reason in the social, economic, or political order.

The problem here is one of ends, of giving reasons, for instance, the “the reason of cognitive reason.” If (cognitive) reason is subordinated to the ends of capitalism, the ends of knowledge sought in the institutions governed according to the logic of technoscience, then what is lost, indeed, is a diversity of ends, the independence of certain ends (say, those of political discourse) from others (say, those of capitalist economics). All reason has the same reason for being, is evaluated according to the measure of the same end. The heterogeneity of ends is lost.

The present state of reason is in fact a state of confusion – the reason associated with the pursuits of knowledge is not the same reason (we might also say here, “logic”) according to which the economic order operates, nor is it the same as the reason that

guides the state. There is thus a confusion of reasons, and it is significant that this confusion is seen by Lyotard to be central to the very crimes and deceptions that he argues characterize the last two centuries. The confusion is between at least two different orders of reason: one with respect to knowledge; the other with respect to the “world” (by which Lyotard means the reason of public institutions, the reason of “the state,”) (ibid.).

This confusion is linked to the doubt that plagues reason, a doubt that again might put us into a kind of relation with what we have seen, in different but not exclusive ways, from Kant and Husserl. The problem here, however, comes from the confusion of reasons itself, which Lyotard associates with “the very ‘modern’ project of a universal language” (ibid.) – the kind of project Descartes outlines when he dreams of a language so purified of ambiguities that “peasants [would] be better judges of the truth of things than philosophers are now.”<sup>139</sup> Lyotard describes such a language as a “metalanguage,” the aim of which would be to collect “every shred of meaning established in specific languages” (PE 65). To unify meaning, then, according to the “reason” of a single discourse. It is the critique of such a metalanguage, that is, the critique of – and therefore loss of faith in – metaphysics that has produced the present doubt of reason. Contrary to what Lyotard might seem to suggest in the Introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*, here he is clear that the sciences are not to blame for this doubt (and thus for the attending crisis of narratives that seems to follow, at least in part, from it). Rather, it is the conflation of heterogeneous ends or reasons that is the problem, the fact that the order of knowledge is measured according to the principle of performativity that governs what he calls capitalist technoscience. We thus arrive at the stakes for philosophical thought

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<sup>139</sup> René Descartes, “Letter to Mersenne, 20 November 1629,” *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. III*, trans. Cottingham et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), pp. 10-3. This ref., p. 13.

today: to follow the fall of metaphysics (as Adorno suggested) while avoiding the adherence to any kind of hegemonic philosophizing (as an example of which he names what he calls without elaboration “positivist pragmatism”) that would be guilty of perpetuating the confusion between different “reasons” (65-6).

### 3.2 A Heterogeneity of Ends

Recall Lyotard’s question at the outset of the essay on universal history and cultural differences whether we today can continue to organize the “mass of events” of both human and non-human world in terms of the Idea of a universal human history (§ 1.1). Lyotard speaks in that essay of what he calls the “failure” (*défaillance*, which is also “lapse,” or “default” in the juridical sense of that term) of modernity.<sup>140</sup> It is this “failure” we have been attempting to track here in terms of the notion of crisis. However, Lyotard gives us yet another possibility for this failure when he wonders here whether it “might not be related to resistance on the part of . . . the multiplicity of worlds of names, on the part of the insurmountable diversity of cultures” (UCD 319/PE 30-1). The Kantian Idea that he argues organizes the modern sense of history is what he calls “cosmopolitical” in nature, which is to say, universal. The grand narratives of legitimation that are characteristic of modernity so conceived thus constitute an overcoming of the particularity of individual cultures “in favor of a universal civic identity” (321/34). This is the humanist gesture – the assumption of a universal “human” history into which any given, particular community is then inscribed “as moments within the universal development of human communities” (ibid). In the face of this

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<sup>140</sup> David Macey translates this term as “defaillancy,” but given the obscurity of this word I don’t find it helpful. I will follow the translators of PE in using “failure” – keeping the above listed alternative terms in mind.

“insurmountable diversity” of human cultures, however, the question, obviously, is whether there *is* such a history (ibid.) – whether, indeed, there could be.

What can explain the “retreat into local legitimacy” (322/35) that characterize (this aspect of) the failure of modernity?<sup>141</sup> When we deal with the question of legitimacy with Lyotard (at least, the Lyotard of what I am calling for convenience the “postmodern” texts), we are dealing, as we know, with metanarratives – and thus with the Idea in the Kantian sense. A single narrative of legitimation harbors a violence. The Idea of freedom, the Idea, then, of free citizenship in the universal human community, works to deprive individual peoples of their particular narrative legitimacies: legitimacies (in the plural) are given over to a single legitimacy (322/34) – one that descends, as it were, from “outside” of the culture in question. All particular ends are subordinated to a single, universal end. The “retreats” into the local or the regional that have characterized recent political history, then, are not (simply) produced by the failure of modernity and the crisis of narratives (and thus the crisis of legitimation). They are resistances to the violence of the universal end, conceived of by others and visited upon particular cultures from “outside.” Lyotard suggests both that this violence invokes local resistance *and* that this local resistance brings on the sense of failure of the modern project. But things are more subtle still, since he also suggests that the modern project could not help but “fail,” an example of which failure seems to be contained in one of the very statements of this project, the Declaration of Rights, which, in spite of itself, invokes the universal from the place of a particular: “We, the French people” (322/35).

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<sup>141</sup> Lyotard’s example here is that of the workers’ movement, whose international pretensions were marred by conflicts at the national and regional levels, while the post-WW II struggles for independence (for instance, that of Algeria) and the demand for the recognition of new nationalities “seem to indicate a strengthening of local legitimacies and the disappearance of any prospect of universal emancipation” (322/35). We might recall his reference in the Introduction to *The Postmodern Condition* to the “local determinism” produced through heterogeneous language games (PMC xxiv).

This seems to suggest that the project of modernity contains within its very birth the seeds of its own dissolution – the logic of which might give us a hint of just how the “postmodern” relates to the modern. That is, there is something contained within the very moment of this projection that is itself not of the Idea. The universal is tainted by the particularity of its projection, a particularity from which it is unable to escape. Which would seem to suggest, in a way that is very similar to what we have seen Derrida suggest above (§ 2.4), that the crisis we have been attempting to track here has somehow always been unavoidable. It is at any rate the violence toward particularity inherent in the universal, overarching Idea (in the Kantian sense) that has led some commentators to focus (not entirely incorrectly) on the modern project itself as the subject of Lyotard’s political mistrust.<sup>142</sup>

Nonetheless, there are many ambiguities here, not the least of which is Lyotard’s observation that “the rebuilding of the world market after the Second World War and the immense economic-financial battles now being waged by the multinational companies and banks, with support from national states, to win that market *offers no cosmopolitan prospects*” (UCD 322-3/PE 35-6, my italics). Again we see the specter of capitalist techno-science – which is not cosmopolitical in the Kantian sense (despite appearances and claims to the contrary), but regional and even national at base, and which even promotes cultural differences “as touristic and cultural commodities” (323/36). Given his

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<sup>142</sup> For instance, David Carroll, *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989), p. 159, where it is suggested (somewhat cautiously and carefully) that the totalitarian state is “in a certain sense . . . a radical extension and perverse application of the governing principles of all metanarratives.” While not absolutely false, this leaves aside Lyotard’s important identification of totalitarianism with the *mythic*, i.e., classical and not modern, narrative. See below.

distrust of this “metanarrative” (but is it, properly speaking, a metanarrative?) it seems clear that at least *certain* retreats into the local or national are to be questioned.<sup>143</sup>

More interesting for our present concerns, however, is his return in the final passages of this essay to the problem, today, of the “we” that is the “subject” (in more than one sense) of the current crises of narratives, of legitimation, perhaps even of history itself. On the one hand, of course, this “we” must certainly be questioned in terms of the “retreats into local legitimacy” that he speaks about here. After all, who are “we” when the notion of universal humanity is in question? But the “we” has another referent, the “we” who tries to think in terms of these crises or questions – who tries to think the very notion of humanity itself. What is *this* “we,” asks Lyotard, “if not the kernel, the minority, the avant-garde” which anticipates today what a liberated or free humanity might be tomorrow (*qui anticipe aujourd’hui ce que devrait être l’humanité libre de demain*) (ibid.)? We should note immediately the reference to the “avant-garde” here, for it is precisely the avant-garde that, as we know, symbolizes for Lyotard the vanguard of experimentation that counters the “call to order” with which we began this chapter (see AQ 73). In the famed footnote in *Just Gaming* that marks an early attempt to draw the distinction between the modern and the “postmodern” (see above), Lyotard, as we have seen, describes the postmodern in terms of literatures or arts that lack an addressee – which means they also lack a regulating ideal (JG 16 n). This means they lack a norm, they are abnormal, outside of any recognized language game. In the context of the conversation in question in *Just Gaming*, Lyotard is quick to point out that this is a political problem, and not only “in the usual and simplistic sense of the term” but in the sense that “it is a problem of how one views history and society” (10; see also § 3.4).

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<sup>143</sup> We shall see more in Chapter 5.



The question is one of the *subject* of history, which is to say, of the universal human subject whose adventure history is. The avant-garde has no audience, “no readers, no viewers, no listeners” (ibid.). This is what, in this early text at least, constitutes the “postmodern” (although in fact, Lyotard still speaks here of the “modern” artist in this passage, since this discussion precedes and indeed helps to bring about his attempt to make the distinction between modern and postmodern). It is a condition in which the question of value has not yet been answered, in which there is no subject to whom one speaks and no subject in whose name one speaks (ibid.). This constitutes the refusal that characterizes what he is still calling here the modern, but which will soon be referred to as postmodern:

To presuppose such an addressee or tutor [i.e., the subject to whom or in the name of whom I speak], is to admit that all the actions that form history, including those of the works in question [i.e., those of the “artistic vanguard”], find their ultimate meaning in the accomplishments of a universal subject. It is the idea of such a subject that modern [within a few pages, “postmodern”] artists refuse. (ibid.)

The avant-garde artist (and by extension, those who are in the “minority” more generally), is willing to go alone, “to be celibate.” But this is not to remain mired in incommunicability. If the avant-garde have no addressee, no audience, this does not preclude the formation of such an audience at some later time. The avant-garde work is always able to “wind up producing its own readers, its own viewers, its own listeners,” so that one of the effects of such a work is “the constitution of a pragmatic situation that did not exist before” (ibid.). The message itself, and indeed, the *form* of the message, will “elicit its own addressees,” positioning sender and receiver only then, when the new pragmatic situation is obtained.

Let us note Lyotard's suggestion in the essay on universal history that "the core, the minority, or avant-garde" might just be that "we" that "anticipates today what liberated humanity might be tomorrow." The suggestion is one of possibilities, of possibilities present in the very projection of a future. The avant-garde do not obey existing rules, but dare to invent new ones; they thus open the possibility of a different future. David Carroll summarizes the role of the avant-garde thus:

The importance of the avant-garde for Lyotard is that it continually puts into question the art we already know (or think we know) by producing forms and constructs that force us to ask whether they can be considered to be taken as art and whether, therefore, we really do know what art is and whether we shall ever know. The avant-garde, for Lyotard, always gives to the question "Do we know what art is?" the response "Not yet."<sup>144</sup>

The question here is that of the rules by which the "game" of art is played – a problem that brings us back to the question of "reality" posed by Lyotard in "Answering the Question" (see § 3.1). Rather than provide the "correct" image of reality, the "correct" form of the real, the avant-garde experiments with new forms, and in the process demands that we question our understanding of "reality." Such a demand is uncomfortable – it fails to conform to any a priori categories of good or proper representation and has thus an "unrecognizable" quality about it. It is not "well-formed," as we might put it. Looking ahead, we can thus suggest that it is in keeping with a certain attention to indeterminacy that Lyotard sees as necessary today (§ 3.4). The call to good order that "realism" signifies for Lyotard is at least in part a reaction to this discomfort, one that itself, as we have seen, signals anxiety at the potential loss of what is taken as "real." This call to good order demands conformity to norms as a defense against this

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<sup>144</sup> Carroll, *Paraesthetics*, pp. 155-6.

crisis. One possible reaction to the anxiety of the “lack of reality” of reality is to demand a retreat to the safety of the familiar, to subordinate what is represented (or rather, presented, see below) to the order of knowledge, the order of the known, of what is already known or understood.

We might well recall here Lacan’s claim that, contrary to Hegel’s philosopher, “the relation of the artist to the time in which he appears is always a contradictory one.”<sup>145</sup> The artist for Lacan works against the current of his or her time, “in opposition to reigning norms – including, for example, political norms, or indeed, systems of thought.”<sup>146</sup> Lyotard’s misgivings about Lacan notwithstanding (see Per 10-1), this is very close to what Lyotard is getting at here, especially the reference to political norms and systems of thought. The importance of the avant-garde (and of the “minority” more generally) reaches beyond the confines of art, since “science and industry are no more free of the suspicion which concerns reality than are art and writing” (AQ 76).

All of which leads Lyotard to say something surprising and rather striking (for the thinker most often associated with “postmodernism”) at the end of the essay on universal history: that the question here about the “we” that might be left to try and think the predicament of the crisis of the present time is raised in order to see if, modestly, “without wishing to be presumptuous,” it might be interesting (*intéressant*) “to begin to trace a line of resistance against our modern defaillancy” (UCD 323/PE 37). Obviously, such a line of resistance could not take the form of a simple return to metanarratives, a return to the universality of the singular Idea. The gesture of the avant-garde or the “postmodern” artist in rejecting the idea of a universal subject of history is what is

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<sup>145</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-60: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 142.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

opposed by Lyotard to that reactionary realism that avoids the question of reality (AQ 75). No return to such a subject is presumably either possible or advisable.

And yet something is troubling about the failure of modernity. It will likely take us some time to come to terms with what exactly it might be, but we might begin to get a sense for it through Lyotard's reference to the "cosmopolitical," and indeed through a return to Kant. We will turn more directly to matters of politics in Chapter 5, but let us note the way that Kant attempts to deal with the problem of the progression of the human race in *The Conflict of the Faculties*. There he speaks about the "occurrence" (*Begebenheit*) that must be sought in order to find evidence that the human race has the capacity "to be the cause of its own advance towards the better" (7:84/301). Such an occurrence would not, of course, be a *cause* of history, but it would act as a *sign* of history (ibid.). That is, it would only indicate (*hinweisen*) humanity's capability to be the cause and author of its own progress, though it would not prove (*beweisen*) it.<sup>147</sup> We have already seen that human progress is an Idea of reason for Kant (§ 2.1), which means that the progress of the human race cannot be experienced – in Lyotard's language, it cannot have a presentation. Even less so, as it bears upon *the future* (D 164). Nonetheless, as we know, there *is* such a *Begebenheit* for Kant, a sign that, as Kant says, recalls, demonstrates and foretells (*signum rememorativum, demonstrativum, prognostikon*, CF 7:84/301) – as Lyotard puts it, a sign that "presents" free causality "according to the three temporal directions of past, present, and future" (D 164).<sup>148</sup> This great occurrence is of course the French Revolution, or rather, it is to be found in the way

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<sup>147</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Krakauer Fragment zum 'Streit der Fakultäten,'" *Politische Schriften*, ed. Van der Gabelentz (Cologne and Opladen: n.p., 1965), pp. 172, 173; quoted by Lyotard, D 164.

<sup>148</sup> See also Jean-François Lyotard, *L'enthousiasme: La critique kantienne de l'histoire* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), p. 56.

that the onlookers to this revolution reacted to it. Regardless of its errors, regardless of the miscarriages of justice, the misery and atrocities this revolution has caused or will cause, Kant claims that it still “finds in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in this game themselves) a wishful *participation* that borders closely on enthusiasm” (CF 7:85/302). We know, and Lyotard knows, that for Kant this enthusiasm is in fact fraught with danger, since it is a blind affect (*Affekt*) and is thus “an agitation of the mind” such that the mind is “unable to engage in free deliberation about principles with the aim of determining itself according to them” (KU 272/132). It therefore does not lend itself to the approval of reason. Nonetheless, it is, as Lyotard points out, “a modality of the feeling of the sublime” insofar as “the imagination tries to supply a direct, sensible presentation for an Idea of reason” (D 165). The reaction of the disinterested onlookers to the revolution is not directly ethical, since they are in the grip of a kind of “madness (*Wahnsinn*)” in which the imagination is “unbridled” (KU 275/136); nonetheless, “genuine enthusiasm,” as Kant says, “always moves only toward what is ideal, and indeed, to what is purely moral, such as the concept of right, and it cannot be grafted onto self-interest” (CF 7:86/303). The sympathy felt by these onlookers, then, if it is not to be wholly esteemed, still provides a sign of “a moral predisposition in the human race” (7:85/302).

As Arendt points out, it is this sympathy that inspires the hope Kant invokes in the final passages of the “Idea for a Universal History” – the hope for the realization of “a universal *cosmopolitan existence*” for humankind (UH 51, italics given).<sup>149</sup> We know that for Kant this existence is to be “the matrix within which all the original capacities of

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<sup>149</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1992), pp. 46-7.

the human race may develop” (ibid.). That this cosmopolitan hope is justified hinges on the fact that this *Begebenheit* has to do with only with the spectators of the revolution, who are free of the interests and passions of those caught up in the revolutionary struggle. Indeed, since they reside “where absolutism generally reigns,” they “cannot on the contrary be suspected of having empirical interests in making their sympathies public (*öffentlich*),” indeed, “they even run the risk of suffering repression at the hands of their governments” (D 167). This guarantees at the least the aesthetic value of their feelings, according to Lyotard, who concludes that it must therefore “be said of their enthusiasm that it is an aesthetic analogue of pure, republican fervor” (ibid.).

But we must also remember that these spectators are foreign – Kant says that they watch “without the least intention of assisting” (CF 7:87/303). This indicates that this event has an import beyond the particular culture in question, but rather “concerns all of humanity” (D 167). It retains, then, its universality, but its universality is as yet only potential. It’s universality resides in the invocation of an Idea (of a republican social contract), in the calling of a future not yet realized, in the “sentimental anticipation of the republic” (168). Like other aesthetic judgments, it is not determinant, but operates according to a rule that awaits its universality (ibid.).

In *L’enthousiasme*, Lyotard invokes the notion of a *Begebenheit* for “our” era: that which has been called “postmodernity.”<sup>150</sup> Here the postmodern is described as “the feeling of a fission of this great, deliberative political core.”<sup>151</sup> This *Begebenheit* of our time is hardly that which Kant tries to identify in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, of course, and for an essential reason: the *Begebenheit* of our era “is not awakened (*éveillée*) by the

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<sup>150</sup> *L’enthousiasme*, p. 108. Carroll calls our attention to this quote, *Paraesthetics*, p. 155.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

Idea of one end, but by the Idea of several ends, or even by the Ideas of heterogeneous ends” (ibid.). Nonetheless, as with the great occurrence Kant speaks of in the context of the French Revolution, this *Begebenheit* that marks that which has come to be called the “postmodern” “would induce a new kind of sublime” – one even more paradoxical than that of enthusiasm (ibid.)

Again, we return to the notion of crisis, here with reference to the irreducibility of difference (the Idea of several ends or even of Ideas of heterogeneous ends). And yet this *Begebenheit*, connected to whatever might be named by the “postmodern,” produces also a kind of sublime – a displeasure, but also a pleasure. Lyotard refers to the sublime – and to the Kantian sublime more specifically – in “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?” also, and in the context of the “lack of reality” of reality:

The phrase [“‘the lack of reality’ of reality”] is of course akin to what Nietzsche calls nihilism. But I see a much earlier modulation of Nietzschean perspectivism in the Kantian theme of the sublime. I think in particular that it is in the aesthetic of the sublime that modern art (including literature) finds its impetus and the logic of the avant-garde finds its axioms. (77)

If the avant-garde works to constitute a pragmatic situation that did not exist before (JG 10), the sublime is “a rule awaiting its universality” (D 168). In both cases Lyotard hints at a notion of time that, too, will become connected to the “postmodern,” and this in relation to the problem of presentation that, as we will see, is exemplified by the sublime. Far from coming “after” the modern, the postmodern, according to Lyotard, “would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms” and the consensus of taste that such forms would bring, in order to search “for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in

order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable” (AQ 81). The sublime, as we will see, in some sense exemplifies the unrepresentable – for in the sublime the imagination is unable to form an image adequate to the manifold, which crisis induces reason to work to present Ideas that are adequate to the presentation. Ideas, then, that as yet have no form. This means that the postmodern artist or writer is in a position similar to that of the philosopher: “the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules” (ibid.). What the artist, writer, or philosopher have in common, then, is that they “are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*” (ibid., italics given). Lyotard thus connects the work of the artist, writer or philosopher to the *event*, a term to which we will have occasion to return (§ 3.4, Chapter 5). For now let us only note that this “what will have been done” gives us the “tense,” as it were, for the postmodern itself: “*Post Modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*)” (ibid.).

If ours is an era characterized by distress brought on by the collapse of the promise of emancipation and the failure of narratives of legitimacy, then a line of resistance to this collapse, this failure, would be one that, following Adorno, would not try to calm this distress but rather “save its honor” (PE 96). It is possible that hidden in this claim of Lyotard’s, this praising of Adorno, lies a hint of what he might mean when he suggests that we ought to begin to inscribe a line of resistance to the failure of modernity. We shall take this up again, but first, let us attempt to go a bit more deeply into Lyotard’s relation to Kant, in order that we might begin to come to some terms with just what relation the so-called “postmodern” might have to the sublime.



### 3.3 Crisis and Subjectivity: Temporality in the Sublime

Philosophy, says Lyotard, “has as its rule to discover its rule” (D 60, § 98). What is the rule of critical philosophy? At the outset of his famous *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, Lyotard argues that reflection plays an important, even a central role in any such rule, since, as we have seen, it is given the task, in Kant’s third *Critique*, of reunifying philosophy after its division into the theoretical and the practical in the first and second *Critiques* respectively (§ 1.4). The case he makes in the *Lessons* is a long and complicated one; here, in keeping with what we have already seen, I want to focus specifically on his analysis of Kant’s sublime, which in some sense comes to exemplify the underlying “rule” of critical thought, as well as illustrate the relation of that thought to any philosophy of the subject.

According to Lyotard, Kant’s analysis of the sublime reveals a crisis of the conscious subject and of its normally well-tailored relation to the world, one that imposes a gulf between the finite (but rational) individual and the infinite this individual is meant to open on to. The Kantian judgment of taste epitomizes this happier relation – it heralds an affinity between the mind and nature, a harmony between thought and natural forms that gives us reason to hope for a kind of harmony between the phenomenal and the noumenal realms. The sublime, however, contains a “moment” – if such it can be called – of failure, a collapse of the presentative powers resulting in the displeasure that must always accompany the pleasure of sublime feeling. At the center of the complex that causes this displeasure, Lyotard seeks to identify certain traits, “traits analogous to those of the unconscious affect and of deferred action in Freudian thought” (HJ 31, see below). The reference to Freud indicates the locus of the issue here: what is central to Lyotard’s

interest in Kant's sublime and the crisis of subjectivity that it reveals is the function of *time* in the Kantian analysis, and specifically, the loss or suspension of time in what we might well term the critical moment. This loss is the loss of progressive time, the time of the project of human emancipation through the free use of reason, the time of the eschatological unfolding of human destiny, the time in which the subject observes and constitutes itself *as* a subject, and a rational one at that. At the heart of the thought of the greatest thinker of the Enlightenment, therefore, lies a "no time," a here and now that in fact never quite becomes "now" in this teleological, progressive sense, an event that disrupts and comes to haunt the "before" and the "after" that together assemble the modern project.

We should recall the central movements of Kant's analysis of the sublime in the *Critique of Judgment*. Contrary to the beautiful, which is characterized by the pleasure involved in the harmonious "play" of the faculties of imagination and understanding, the sublime is made up of two "moments": a "momentary inhibition of the vital forces" in the failure of imagination to form an image of the manifold; and an immediately following "outpouring" of these same forces as reason steps in to exhibit in ideas what cannot be exhibited sensuously (KU §23 245-6/98-9). The first is the moment of "pain" associated with the sublime; the second the pleasure, in which this failure of sensibility is found nonetheless to be purposive for thought, since the ideas of reason are "aroused and called to mind" by the very inadequacy of the imagination's presentative powers (245/99). This dual nature of the sublime is what makes Kant say that it is seriousness rather than play (245/98) – in the sublime, imagination does not play on the forms of nature but indeed fails to give proper form *to* nature, suffers a crisis with respect to its relation to the natural

world. Only then does the mind attempt to present unboundedness in an idea, the production of which is independent of the sensual realm.<sup>152</sup>

This is what leads Lyotard to call the sublime “an aesthetic without nature” (LAS 54). It is the seed within modern aesthetics of the very dissolution of that aesthetics, since it announces that confidence in natural forms has been shaken (ibid.). The sublime does not contribute to the reconciliation of nature and freedom; the harmony between nature and mind heralded in the beautiful is exchanged for the beyond-form of the sublime “thing,” which, since it is excessive for imagination, threatens it as “an abyss in which the imagination is afraid to lose itself” (KU §27 258/115). As Lyotard describes it, “[t]he sublime denies the imagination the power of forms, and denies nature the power to immediately affect thinking with forms” (LAS 54). If the beautiful contributed to the Enlightenment and its confidence in thought’s being led by nature to its “final illumination,” then, the sublime by contrast “is a sudden blazing, and without future” (55). Which does not mean that it doesn’t have or hold the promise of a future.

Of course, we must remember the pleasure of the sublime. We like it; the sublime is a term of approval. If the form of the object in the sublime can appear as contrapurposive for our power of judgment, then (as Kant says it can, KU §23 245/99), and reveals “nothing purposive whatever in nature itself,” it nonetheless produces a feeling of purposiveness *within ourselves*, a purposiveness that is entirely independent of

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<sup>152</sup> Kant rarely uses the term “play” in relation to the sublime, although he does do so on occasion, for instance in §27, where he refers to the “subjective play of the mental powers themselves (imagination and reason)” as being “harmonious by virtue of their contrast” (KU 258/115). This “play” is the pleasurable moment of the sublime, when the discord between the mind’s reasoning and presentative powers provides us with the feeling that we have a pure mental power independent of and superior to the sensible world (258/116). But even here the “play” supposed to take place in the conflict of the faculties of imagination and reason (through which conflict the power of *reason* is affirmed) is legislated over by reason itself, which gives to imagination its “law-governed task” (see KU 268-9/128). No such legislation takes place in the free play of imagination and understanding in the beautiful.

nature (246/100). Reason overcomes the failure of the imagination's presentative powers, it gives evidence of a "supersensible vocation" that is superior to "every standard of sensibility" (258/115). Nature, the phenomenal realm, is indeed "lost" to the subject in the moment of the sublime; but according to Kant the subject's own inability to form an image adequate to the manifold "uncover[s] in him the consciousness of an unlimited ability which is also his" (259/116), the feeling that we possess "a pure and independent reason" (258/116) superior to all sensible powers, and indeed superior to all of nature itself. If nature is lost to the subject, then, its own "nature," its own vocation, is made explicit to it in this loss. The rational, supersensible power of the mind retains its independence from the phenomenal world, the power "natural" to the human revealing its superiority over crude nature. Which is why we mustn't in fact say that a natural object is sublime – what we are really saying when we judge something sublime is that the object "is suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind" (245/99).

The sublime feeling, then, consists of two contradictory sensations, displeasure followed by pleasure, repulsion alternating with attraction (see 245/98). Indeed, Kant is clear that the pleasure in the sublime is a purely negative one. The critical question (critical now in the Kantian sense) is, as Lyotard suggests, how to find the "subjective finality" that unites these two kinds of sensation in such a way as to make this negative pleasure possible (LAS 109-10). The answer to this question, according to him, reveals a violence at the heart of the sublime judgment, at the heart of the very subject itself. The two sensations cannot be brought together without this violence, which reveals a "differend" between imagination and reason in the sublime moment.

Lyotard defines what he calls a “differend” in the opening passages of the book of that name: as opposed to a litigation, “a differend [*différend*] would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both parties” (xi). The differend to be found in the sublime finds its articulation, according to Lyotard, in the sections of the third *Critique* that discuss the sublime as a mathematical synthesis, and it is centered on this division between the sensible and the supersensible, imagination and reason. More specifically, it is centered on a *demand*, the demand of reason that imagination present the ideas it formulates in the face of the unbounded. What’s more, it demands this presentation in one instant (*in einen Augenblick*), in a comprehension that does not exclude the infinite itself. Says Kant, reason demands comprehension in *one* intuition, and *exhibition* of all the members of a progressively increasing numerical series, and it exempts from this demand not even the infinite (space and past time). Rather, reason makes us unavoidably think of the infinite (in common reason’s judgment) as *given in its entirety* (in its totality). (254/111, italics given)

Reason thus “challenges the thought that imagines” to make the absolute as conceived by reason present to its forms (LAS 123). The paradox becomes evident immediately: form is limitation, the bordering of an outside and an inside – it cannot present what is absolute, since what is absolute is without borders (ibid.). The absolute can only be represented as an idea of reason; it cannot be represented in the realm of the sensible. Indeed, no Idea of reason can ever be the object of sensible experience, which is why Lyotard says that the sublime “is the child of an unhappy encounter, that of the Idea with form” (180). The rational idea of the absolute is by definition an impossibility for the mind’s presentative powers.

And this goes further. For a thinking that presents has its own absolute, its own measure, beyond which it is rendered helpless. To understand this we need to bring out more fully a distinction that Kant makes between two functions of the imagination: apprehension and comprehension. Apprehension is the act of grasping a magnitude part by part in temporal sequence. Comprehension (*Zusammenfassung*), which is what Kant is referring to in the above quote, is the act of collecting these units together into a unity.<sup>153</sup> According to Kant, apprehension can progress to infinity and thus presents no problems for perception; comprehension, however, “becomes more and more difficult the farther apprehension progresses, and it soon reaches its maximum” (KU 251-2/108). When comprehension arrives at this absolute it encounters its own limit.

Two absolutes, then, both equally “present” to thought: “the absolute whole when it conceives, the absolutely measured when it presents” (LAS 123). The paradoxes multiply. Not only is the absolute of concepts put into relation with something else (and how can the absolute be put into relation, since it is the “without-relation”?), but this other is itself an absolute (*ibid.*). Which would seem to cancel each out as an absolute; however, Lyotard is well aware that these absolutes occupy different realms of the critical structure. They are heterogeneous. Present to one another in conflict, the absolute of reason and the absolute of imagination (presentation) must each remain absolute in terms of its respective faculty. But if this is the case, no dialectic can subsume this difference into a unity, no shared standard or rule could mediate. Says Lyotard, each “continues to be its own sole recourse, its court of appeal, unaware of the other. This conflict is not an ordinary dispute, which a third instance could grasp and put an end to, but a ‘differend,’ a *Widerstreit*” (124).

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<sup>153</sup> For a helpful summary of these functions, see Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation*, p. 69.

So far we have been discussing the “displeasure” of the sublime, the moment of failure of the imagination in presenting an image of the given, and its “anguish” (the word is Lyotard’s) when confronted by the demands of reason. We can already see that the unity of the subject is at issue here. In Kant’s discussion of the sublime as a mathematical synthesis, in which the question of the subject’s ability to measure magnitude is at issue, we discovered a subjective, aesthetic “limit” to the ability to present that produces an absolute for imagination. Let us say a little more about this, in particular in terms of its relation to time.

According to Kant, all measurement of magnitude – even, ultimately, mathematical measurement – presupposes a subjective, aesthetic estimate, a “basic measure” that grounds even the very notion of measure:

our estimation of the magnitude of the basic measure must consist merely in our being able to take it in [*fassen*] directly in one intuition and to use it, by means of the imagination, for exhibiting numerical concepts. In other words, all estimation of the magnitude of objects of nature is ultimately aesthetic (i.e., determined subjectively rather than objectively). (KU 251/107; see also LAS 101)

It is this ability to take it (*fassen*) that Lyotard calls an “insurmountable limit” to what can be grasped in terms of magnitude: “It is enough for thought to feel this measure as insurmountable, as subjectively absolute, for this aesthetic maximum to convey ‘the idea of the sublime’” (LAS 101). The limitation of the ability to take a magnitude in “directly in one intuition” sets the standard, as it were, for the sublime feeling, since this ability is taxed by the demands of reason in the sublime instant. Of course, mathematical estimations of great magnitudes by means of numerical concepts do not produce a feeling of the sublime, since these proceed by comparison, exhibiting only relative magnitude

(KU 251/108; LAS 101). Only aesthetic estimation runs what we might call the risk of the sublime. And it is with regard to this estimation that Kant makes the distinction between apprehension and comprehension.

Making a comparison with Kant's analysis of the threefold synthesis in the A Deduction of the first *Critique* (and especially the synthesis of apprehension in an intuition and that of reproduction in imagination) (KRV A97), Lyotard stresses the linear aspect of temporality in apprehension, even aesthetic apprehension (LAS 105-8). In aesthetic *comprehension*, however, temporality is experienced in a non-linear fashion. This is the moment of the regression, where the imagination annihilates the conditions of time and relates itself not to concepts of the understanding but to ideas of reason.<sup>154</sup> Says Kant:

Measuring (as [a way of] apprehending) a space is at the same time describing it, and hence it is an objective movement in the imagination and a progression. On the other hand, comprehending a multiplicity in a unity . . . and hence comprehending in one instant what is apprehended successively, is a regression that in turn cancels the condition of time in the imagination's progression and makes *simultaneity* intuitable. Hence, (since temporal succession is a condition of the inner sense and of an intuition) it is a subjective movement of the imagination by which it does violence to the inner sense. . . . (KU 258-9/116, italics given)

It is this regression that "cancels the condition of time" and "does violence to the inner sense" that Lyotard is interested in, the need of the imagination to provide a comprehension in a single instant of what has been apprehended successively. This "violence", according to him, is nothing less than "the destruction of the temporality

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<sup>154</sup> See Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation*, pp. 67-8.



proper to all presentation” (LAS 143). He cites the A Deduction, where Kant says that all representations, “as modifications of the mind,” must always “belong to inner sense” and thus “are in the end subjected to the formal condition of inner sense, namely time, as that in which they [our cognitions] must all be ordered, connected, and brought into relations” (KRV A98-9; LAS 142-3). If time is the “formal condition of the internal sense,” then any violence done to it is a violence done to inner sense. Now, as the form of inner sense, time is also the form “of the intuition of our self and our inner state” (KRV A33/B49), which means that (aesthetic) comprehension in an instant “does ‘violence’ not only to the *a priori* condition of the intuition of any given or succession, but to the eminent and unique condition that such a grasp imposes on the ‘intuition of ourselves and of our state’” (LAS 143). The subject itself, then, is deprived of the means of constituting its own subjectivity in the instant of the sublime, since the “I think” of apperception is “nothing other than the consciousness of the originary synthetic unity to which all representations are imputed” (144). Whatever is “represented” in this moment is not the representation of a subject (*ibid.*).

This moment of the cancellation of the condition of inner sense, this “no time” in which the imagination feels the crisis of reaching the limit of its ability to synthesize givens in succession, is not the only weakening of the principle of succession present in the sublime. There is a second “no time” for reason itself, which, to quote Lyotard, makes “a leap, in the exaltation of recovering the maximal power that thinking has of beginning a series of givens without being bound to it” (LAS 145-6). In the Antinomy of Pure Reason in the first *Critique*, Kant has argued not only that reason, as the cause of producing human actions, is not determined in the chain of natural causes, but that it is

also not subject to the form of time, nor to the conditions of succession in time (see A550-9/B578-87). This is only an idea of reason, the Idea of freedom, but Lyotard sees this Idea as being at the root of the injunction of reason to imagination that it must present the absolute, that indeed it is *obliged* to do so. Intelligibility is to be revealed in the sensible, or rather, in the failure of the presentation of the sensible, in which failure lies a “testimony” to the presence of reason’s power of absolute causality (LAS 141).

Such “departures” from temporality and the result they have on the constitution of subjectivity are what lead Lyotard to conclude that Kant’s philosophy cannot well be considered a philosophy of the subject (146). As he puts it elsewhere, the “shock” of the sublime is one that “defies the power that is nevertheless constitutive of the mind according to Kant” (HJ 31). The “flux” of matter that makes up the content of experience is in fact constituted by the retention, the basic memory, of what has been apprehended. In the elementary syntheses that are constitutive of time in the Kantian philosophy, syntheses that it is the charge of the imagination to effect, lie the very possibility of the flux of sensible matter. The imagination, then, provides the “frame” for the sensible, a border or framework placed over the manifold. The sublime overflows this frame (*ibid.*). Since such a frame is the condition of the given, the given which arrives and departs in flux, the sublime is not given. It has no moment (32). In Lyotard’s words, “When the sublime is ‘there’ . . . the mind is not there. As long as the mind is there, there is no sublime” (*ibid.*). With this sublime that is not there, we get our first sense of what Lyotard calls the “event.”

### 3.4 Freud, Emma, and “Affectivity”

If experience – a “modern figure,” according to Lyotard – requires a subject, and if, in the moment of the differend of the sublime, there is, properly speaking, no subject, or at the very least, no ability for any “subject” to constitute itself in the moment of that differend, then the sublime cannot be experienced. Experience needs a subject, an “I” to speak in the first person. And it needs a specific temporal arrangement for this to happen, one in which “the view of the past, the present and the future is always taken from the point of an ungraspable present consciousness.”<sup>155</sup> The issue in the temporality of the sublime for Lyotard is not simply that the subject is “ungraspable” – his claim is that there is no consciousness present to itself. There is a feeling, but in the moment of the differend – a differend that is, we must remember, *constitutive* for the sublime – there is, according to Lyotard, no consciousness for it to be “present” to, no consciousness that is able to claim it and to announce it as such. One can only speak of the sublime “after” this feeling itself, when thought has the chance to grasp itself again, to take up the thread of temporality once more, to find words for it. The sublime “thing,” then, is a thing that does not, in fact, turn towards the mind (IH 142) – invoking Lacan, Lyotard will often refer to it simply as the Thing (*Chose*). This invocation of Lacan brings us into a psychoanalytical register that is, in fact, very important for Lyotard. For there is a link between the sublime and what he calls in his later work the “affect,” as well as a link to the relation this affect has to a notion of temporality found in Freud.

That the sublime is a pleasure mixed with displeasure links it, for Lyotard, to a problematic important for “today,” the problematic of indeterminacy (see *ibid.*, 101).

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<sup>155</sup> Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Monory, *The Assassination of Experience by Painting – Monory*, bilingual edition, English trans. Rachel Bowlby (London: Black Dog, 1998), p. 85.

This is the problematic for the avant-garde, for instance (93). But it is also the problematic for philosophy, which is presented through this indeterminacy, as well as through the “court of darkness” introduced by the concept of the unconscious, to a moment of anguish that lies at the heart of the movement of thinking: “this anguish, this contradictory affect, sorrow and pleasure, sorrow caused by pleasure, is without doubt the first spirit of philosophy – it *excitatio* – the recurrent occasion for the act of philosophy” (EPP 24). This insight is what the psychoanalyst has to teach the philosopher: that there is a no-thing, “a nullity of object and of concept,” what Lacan called the Thing, that excites thought, that calls to it. It is not without its contradictions, since it is the call of something that is not, in fact, a thing at all, that does not turn to the mind or to thought, and that demands an articulation that will never be sufficient to it, since it itself is inarticulable, as we will see. Following the logic we have already seen in Lyotard’s reading of Kant’s sublime, this “no-thing” takes hold of a “you” that is in fact not present to itself in the moment of this seizure. Still, it is this inconsistency that philosophy must try to think if it wants to do justice to psychoanalysis (as well as its own melancholy) (ibid.).

This turn to the affect of psychoanalysis returns us to the problematic of time. Lyotard’s “case study” is Freud’s discussion of Emma in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*.<sup>156</sup> As a young woman Emma comes to Freud because she is unable to go into shops alone. The first memory that she produces surrounding this problem is of entering a shop when she was 12 years old and feeling an “affect of fright” at two shopkeepers who were laughing, laughter that she takes to be directed at her and at her

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<sup>156</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume I*, trans and ed. Strachey et al. (London: Vintage/ Hogarth, 2001), pp. 281-397. For what follows, pp. 353-9.

clothing. Freud calls this “Scene I,” but in order to track Lyotard’s reading let us call it, after him, (T<sub>1</sub>). A second memory is produced only later in which she recalls that on two occasions when she was eight years old she went into a shop to buy sweets and the shopkeeper sexually assaulted her – Freud’s “Scene II,” which Lyotard calls (T<sub>2</sub>). To these two “times” Lyotard adds another: (T<sub>0</sub>), when Emma at last becomes “conscious” of this earlier assault while on the couch (EPP 30).

According to Freud, this case is to a certain extent typical in hysteria: “a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by *deferred action* (*Nachträglichkeit*).”<sup>157</sup> But this very notion of “deferral” or “afterwardsness” is what intrigues Lyotard. The “effect” of the excitation in question here is the affect itself, which appears paradoxical with regard to time (EPP 30), precisely paradoxical with respect to its being an “effect” at all. Indeed, it includes a denial of chronological time: “the affect issued from the shock at T<sub>2</sub> does not take place there, it does so at T<sub>1</sub>” (ibid.), that is, at the time that Emma encounters the two shopkeepers laughing when she is 12. It is only then that the affect of the initial assault is felt. Nonetheless, it is not *recognized* at this time, it “takes place as a new feeling, a fear” (ibid.). It comes in a manner that is entirely unexpected, unrecognized, and it repeats itself again and again, until Emma becomes “conscious” of it (but Lyotard is suspicious of this “consciousness”) at T<sub>0</sub>.

We will not go into the details of Lyotard’s reading of Freud’s analysis. Let us note, however, that Lyotard is inclined to invoke Kant with regard to the temporality of Emma’s feeling of pain or anguish. Contrary to either classical or phenomenological

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<sup>157</sup> *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 356. Jean Laplanche has argued convincingly that Strachey’s translation of *Nachträglichkeit* as “deferred action” has too strong a suggestion of a simple delay between cause and effect and that it cannot be used to translate all of Freud’s uses of the term. He suggests instead the neologism “afterwardsness” in English (in French, *après coup*). See Jean Laplanche, “Notes on Afterwardsness,” *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1999), pp. 260-5.

analyses of time, it is necessary to view the “faculties” of feeling pleasure or pain as entirely singular, though “inseparable from the faculty of knowing or acting” (31). The psyche of Emma at  $T_2$ , the time of the assault, has no representations of the event – she lacks the apparatus or the tools to incorporate this event into consciousness. It is thus immediately forgotten, a “blank” in temporal development. This means that Emma’s psyche has been affected “without the power *to imagine* this excitation, that is to say, in good Freudian doctrine, without the power to control and ‘liquidate’ it” (32, my italics). In good Kantian doctrine, this sounds very similar to the sublime, of course – with the difference that reason does not come to the rescue here. No ideas can be invoked in this failure of the imagination. The excitation that Emma feels or suffers is “present” only in the instant of the assault, and only as affect – if it is present, it is not representable, a turn of phrase that is, as is well-known, common to Lyotard’s thinking.

The affect is not subject to “representative substitution” in things and words, a substitution that forms the “associative fabric” of a life history (ibid.). Emma not only does not “experience” the affect at the time of the assault, but she does not recognize it, nor can she recognize or articulate it at the time ( $T_1$ ) that it, in fact, re-enters memory and becomes an affect. Nonetheless, for the affect to be triggered at  $T_1$ , *something* had to have made Emma susceptible to it – the assault at  $T_2$  was not *simply* forgotten. It somehow marked Emma without her understanding how or why. Not until “after,” in the language of adulthood (a term we should mark here) did she come to recognize it, when she had 1) developed sexually<sup>158</sup> and acquired a conceptual apparatus such that the assault

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<sup>158</sup> In the *Project* Freud still considers the “retardation of puberty” to be what makes these “posthumous primary processes” possible (see p. 359). The theory of infantile sexuality (along with that of primary narcissism) will change the logic of this aftershock, but only in ways that Lyotard thinks will “augment” his claims here. See EPP 38.

could be understood as such; and 2) become “conscious,” with the help of Freud, of the trauma she was repressing. But how does the affect come to be forgotten and then recalled? And does this ability to articulate the assault mean that it is simply brought up into the associative fabric of Emma’s life? Is it understood as such, the pain of the trauma somehow eased?

Lyotard is suspicious of this model. He invokes the distinction between *Darstellung* (presentation) and *Vorstellung* (representation), a distinction that is, he says, “ontological” (in quotation marks) for him. If the affect is present, if it *is*, it is only in the most minimal sense. It is “not for anything other than itself” (EPP 32). It cannot simply be translated into the language of the adult. It has a structure that Lyotard associates with the aesthetic feeling of pleasure in Kant, which for Lyotard is *both* the aesthetic judgment *and* the thing of which it is a judgment (the feeling of pleasure) at the same time, a state of affairs he calls a “tautegory” (LAS 8 ff.; see also 14, where Freud’s affect is explicitly invoked). The affect has this structure. It is irrefutable in its presence (the pain or anguish in Emma’s case), and yet it is an insufficient witness to this pain or anguish because it “says” no more than that it is there (EPP 32). The affect is not phenomenological because it is not lived (33). And as not-lived it is not available to consciousness, except as affect. In an association that will be instructive for us (see § 5.2), Lyotard says that the affect is like birth or death: if it is thought or articulated or described in any way, it is only as the other or as others.<sup>159</sup> In terms of discourse it is deaf or mute.<sup>160</sup> It therefore does not follow the rules of logos.<sup>161</sup> If it is present each time

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<sup>159</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Lectures d’enfance*, Paris: Galilée, p. 137.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. See also Claire Nouvet, “The Inarticulate Affect: Lyotard and Psychoanalytic Testimony,” *Minima Memoria: In the Wake of Jean-François Lyotard*, ed. Claire Nouvet et al., Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007, pp. 106-22, particularly, pp. 113 ff.

Emma enters a store, according to Lyotard it is always for the first time – since it represents nothing, it always presents itself (EPP 33). Thus, it arrives “with the suffocating force of an event” (ibid.).

But it is related, is it not, to the assault, to a particular thing that happened, the fear and trauma of which is triggered repeatedly every time Emma has reason to “recall” it? Say, through the association of laughter of two shopkeepers, who bring back the “memory” of the first shopkeeper’s grin while he assaulted her? This is true. But the question revolves around these terms, “recall” and “memory.” Lyotard’s claim is that what *happened* to Emma is not, in its absolute singularity, in the “absolutely singular nuances” of pain that the affect here is,<sup>162</sup> translatable into discourse. And this is related to the strange temporality of afterwardsness or *Nachträglichkeit*. If the affect is, in fact, a phrase, as Lyotard claims that it is, it is one that is inarticulate, since it does not have any of the four components of what Lyotard calls the articulate phrase: it has no addressor, no addressee, no referent, and no meaning. It is a phrase only in the most minimal sense that it attests to itself, as we have seen, to the presence of pain or pleasure. Importantly, this minimal sense in which it is a phrase allows Lyotard to keep it in the orbit of the philosophy of phrases he develops in *The Differend*, because it allows other sentences to link onto it. But, as Geoffrey Bennington puts it, these phrases can link onto it “only in an attempt to domesticate it or to make it the object of cognitive discourse.”<sup>163</sup> These other phrases come later, to try to place it in the associative fabric of conscious life after

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<sup>161</sup> Nouvet, “The Inarticulate Affect,” p. 113.

<sup>162</sup> Nouvet, *ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Geoffrey Bennington, “The Same, Even, Itself . . .,” *Parallax* 17, 2000, pp. 88-98, this ref. p. 92. See also Nouvet, *op. cit.*, p. 111.



the fact, to “retroactively [try] to assimilate it” (EPP 38). Given that the affect does not mean anything, discourse can never properly draw it up, articulate it.

What of the initial delay, the time between the assault at  $T_1$  and Emma’s more recognizable “affect” at  $T_2$ ? It’s a little difficult to tell, but Lyotard refers to the “stasis” of the affect-phrase, which is “evidently tied to the unpreparedness of childhood,” an unpreparedness that Lyotard associates with the initial absence of articulated language (34). At the age of 8 Emma had language, but not the conceptual apparatus to articulate the assault as an act of another motivated in a particular way. At  $T_1$ , she at least possesses the ability to imagine the laughing shopkeepers as directing their laughter *at her*. So in a sense, as Emma’s ego develops (this would be related to the process of education, including social education – see § 5.2), it becomes more and more conscious of its own affectivity, if not, for obvious reasons, the content of that affectivity. Perhaps we can say that she is more susceptible to the testimony of this witness, whose time, as we shall see, is always now.

We will return to this division between vulnerability of childhood and languaged adulthood in the final chapter (§ 5.2). But Lyotard argues that this unpreparedness “persists into adulthood as a susceptibility to ‘presence,’ to a possibility both tempting and threatening, because one is precisely ‘without defense’ before it” (ibid.). Such a susceptibility, a being-without-defense, is what Lyotard sees, for instance, in Kant’s analysis of the sublime also. It is an affect that comes at once too soon (one is unprepared for it) and too late (to plague thought long after the “event”). It’s time is neither linear nor phenomenological. And it is not communicative. It makes a demand but precisely not in addressing anyone or anything. Emma must find a way to respond to

the affect *in spite of* the fact that it does not address her. She is seized by it. But it is never present – as with the logic of the sublime that we saw above, the affect is not “there” at the same time that a conscious subject, an ego or an “I,” is present to grasp and articulate it. “Its sole time is now” (39). Each time it occurs, it is present in a way that defies representation. It is thus a “lost time” for the ego or the subject, outside of diachronic time, although it passes through or rather interrupts this time. In this sense, again, it is associated by Lyotard with Kant’s aesthetic judgments, affects too, in their way. And all such affects necessitate “a ‘before’ and an ‘after,’ or in any case and ‘outside’ of the articulated phrase” (40). To place the affect, to give it a place in a diachrony, can only be done when it is not “there,” when reasoning discourse “returns,” as it were, to pick up the pieces, to attempt to repair the tear in the associative fabric. It is there “before,” it is there “after,” but it is not there in the time of the affect.

To think the affect in such a way as to respect its heterogeneity, one cannot rely on given or pre-existing rules of discourse. This is why in a list of possible names for the “dead time” of the affect, Lyotard includes reflection in Kant’s sense (*ibid.*). The affect presents thought with the need to find new rules in order to link up with it, to try to think it. But because such linking is only ever provisional, because the affect has no referent, no meaning, no way of linking that would follow the rules of rational discourse, this task is endless. And we should note the importance of the artistic work here, especially given the importance of the avant-garde to Lyotard’s thinking (§§ 3.1, 3.2):

In truth, the silent “presence” of the affect, a sigh, demands of articulated language an endless series of stagings, novels, tragedies, epics, an accumulation and linking of articulated phrases which are contradictory, undecidable, very numerous, or, at least, very “fair.” In short, a “fortuitous” writing, one which relieves adult language of the impossible task of getting even

with the “nothing” of childhood “affect.” Then again, the literary work (and the artistic work as well, although with materials other than words and therefore under other conditions) will not cease “rendering” this un-working which is “pure” affectivity. In this, it is not without similarity to the psychoanalytic undertaking. (43)

Psychoanalysis and philosophy are both “arts” in the sense that they both employ “technique” in the absence of strict criteria (28). This is, obviously, a strength for Lyotard rather than a weakness, and it is not unrelated to justice, and more importantly, to judgment: “Jurisprudence when (right) theory is lacking” (ibid.). To do justice to the affect is to respect its heterogeneity and to accept the responsibility of trying to link with it, but this task, as we have seen, is endless. It is also painful, the “pain of labor,” as Claire Nouvet says.<sup>164</sup> But it also holds a promise, the promise of the possibility of new linkages, of new forms of phrasing. After the shattering of the affect, “one writes twenty or one hundred pages to pick up the pieces, and one puts together the plot again” (IH 151). In this anguished “re-writing” lies the promise of new institutions, even improvement (see Chapter 5).

The question is one of being able to think in a way that recognizes this susceptibility to the presence of what, in the language that Lyotard uses in the context of the sublime in Kant, does not speak “in good and due form” (LAS 54). To think in the face of the anguish of this susceptibility, in the face of its risks to a unified subjectivity. Emma suffers a crisis of identity in the grip of the affect, which threatens the continuity of her selfhood as it threatens the continuity of “adult” time: “Personal identity cannot constitute itself apart from the sole instance of the ‘I’” (EPP 40). We have seen this in relation to Kant’s sublime above. In a passage to which we have already, strangely, had

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<sup>164</sup> “The Inarticulate Affect,” p. 121.

recourse (§ 2.4), Lyotard argues that Descartes gives, perhaps unwillingly, the best proof of this when he fears, in the cogito, that if he ceases to think he may cease to be at all.<sup>165</sup>

The interruption of affect threatens the smooth running of diachrony, threatens the thinking subject with disappearance. Can philosophy think in the “presence” of this that “haunts” it (Nouvet)? Can thought respect what does not speak “in good and due form”? Does the affect indicate a crisis for thought? Or is perhaps philosophy’s traditional unwillingness to accept an “other” to the accepted structures of discourse and of conscious thought be part of what has plunged it into crisis?

We ought here to recall the “slackening” of the time, and Lyotard’s praise of avant-garde experimentation, the possibility of establishing what will have been, of finding a new language or idiom through which to view society or history. This attention to the affect is not without its political stakes. For the happening of the affect is what Lyotard would call an event, by which he means something radically singular, unprepared-for, an occurrence that defies the preparedness of “adult” language, “adult” time, the smooth running of the narrative. The event is “infinitely simple,” but it requires a kind of privation of thought. For the event to be welcomed, “That which we call thought must be disarmed” (IH 90). Traditions, schools, institutions, be they of philosophy, painting, politics or literature, tend to downplay the event in its singularity, to project a future (“in the form of Schools, of programmes, projects and ‘trends’”) based on what has been, to determine what has not yet been through the determining of “what has already been thought, written, painted or socialized” (90-1). To a certain extent, of course, one has to set up a system, theory, program or project, to anticipate what is to

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<sup>165</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, third ed., trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 2<sup>nd</sup> Meditation, 19/27.

come. But as we have seen and as we shall see again (Chapter 5), “one can also enquire about the remainder, and allow the indeterminate to appear as a question mark” (91).

One can do this as an act of resistance, of course, to established traditions, programs, or projects, as a way of resisting the program, for instance, the program of the process of development. One can also do it in order to attend to what slips out of such projects and programs, in order to learn something new, for instance, the temporality given us by the father of psychoanalysis, who has “placed on the philosophical table the bread of a temporality that even now we are not close to digesting” (EPP 37). It would certainly be a way of “saving the honor” of the distress brought on by the collapse of the modern narratives of emancipation, not by hiding from this distress but by acceding to a vulnerability, a childishness, a susceptibility of thought to what it cannot control and what does not come to it in a readily recognizable form – and by showing a willingness to attempt to think it anyway.

We will attempt to make sense of the political aspect of this attempt in the final chapter. For now, I want to turn to Derrida, who is, in his way, also attentive to this notion of the event, although in a way that sets the problem in a different light, as one not of narratives, properly speaking, but of borders, limits and contexts. He too takes his lead in a certain respect from Kant, and we will initially devote ourselves to a reading of two of the more famous of Derrida’s texts on Kant’s third *Critique*. But I will want to show that the thematic of crisis remains in these texts, and that there is a way of reading Derrida such that he, too, can be seen to be resisting a certain kind of systematicity in the name of a respect for singularity, chance, and even, perhaps, a certain excitability of thought.

## Chapter Four

### Economy and Chance: The Law of the Frame

#### 4.1 Economimesis and the Work of the Frame

In Lyotard we have had reason to begin to question the unity and self-evident consciousness of the subject that stands at the base of humanism. It is perhaps not so strange, then, that we here turn to mimesis, which has, of course, been implicated in considerations on “man” at least since Aristotle described it as “natural to man from childhood” and claimed this propensity toward imitation as one of humanity’s “advantages over the lower animals . . . that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns first by imitation.”<sup>166</sup> Kant agrees with Aristotle that learning is “nothing but imitation (*Nachahmung*),” and even goes so far as to suggest that the greatest discoverers in scientific matters differ from “the most arduous imitator and apprentice only in degree” (KU § 47, 308-9/176-7). Nonetheless, imitation has its limits, for Kant. Even the “simpleton” is capable of at least learning and imitating (308/176), which pursuit can even turn to “aping” if the pupil is so incautious or dependent on the teacher as simply to copy everything without attempting to add anything of his or her own (§ 49, 318/187). Simple imitation is especially inessential to the making of art, and Kant famously opposes it to genius in § 47 of the third *Critique*. Nonetheless, according to Derrida, there is a “systematic link” between mimesis and economy (*oikonomia*) (E 264), even in the Kantian critique of pure judgments of taste. What’s more, this link will follow what Derrida calls an “inexhaustible reiteration of the humanist theme” present in Kant’s text

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<sup>166</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans I. Bywater, *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume Two*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), 1448b6-8.

(E 265). Let us begin our reading of Derrida's reading of Kant here, then, in order to keep the problem of the human – the subject, let us remember, of history – in focus from the very outset.

Economy informs Derrida's reading of this text from the beginning. Indeed, the entirety of the Kantian theory of mimesis, according to him, is to be found between two remarks on salary (264). These remarks (which we shall take up as they appear) are linked to the operation of those oppositions set up by Kant in the Deduction of judgments of taste, beginning with those that position art (and ultimately, fine art) as an original mode of production. In § 43, "On art in general," Kant claims that art is to be distinguished, first, from *nature*, "as doing (*facere*) is from acting or producing (*Wirken*) in general (*agere*)," with the result that the product of art is to be distinguished from the product of nature as being a *work* as opposed to an effect (*Wirkung, effectus*) (KU 303/CE 182). Art, then, is associated with freedom: "By right, only production through freedom, i.e., through a capacity for choice that grounds its actions in reason, should be called art" (ibid.). This free use of reason is what distinguishes works of art from productions of nature such as the honeycombs of bees, which are called works of art only on analogy with the real thing. The notion of an end or purpose is, initially at least, central. In an argument reminiscent of Hume's descriptions, in his summaries of the argument from design, of half-built houses and other human contrivances as evidence of a human organizing reason,<sup>167</sup> Kant describes a moor walker who finds a piece of carved wood and immediately infers its providence in the ends of human artifice. The cause that produced it is conceived of in terms of an end that gives it its form – as with other works

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<sup>167</sup> See David Hume, "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State" and "Dialogues concerning Natural Religion," *Writings on Religion*, ed. Anthony Flew (Chicago & La Salle: Open Court, 1992), pp. 89-103; 183-292.

of human art, one immediately recognizes that “a representation of it in its cause must have preceded its reality” (ibid.).

Although Kant will reject with Hume the inference that moves from the half-built house and its inferred human designer to a conception of the universe as the product of divine design, we have seen that for Kant reflective judgment nonetheless depends on such an analogy when it judges teleologically (§§ 1.4, 2.1). Nature is to be judged (only reflectively, of course) *as if* it were the product of an intelligent designer. The notion of a purpose (rational, freely chosen) is what differentiates between activity and mere mechanism, what gives the product of human artifice its character as intelligent production. This is what separates *physis* from *tekhnè*, but we can already see that, reflectively at least, there is a certain analogy at work between the two.

Nonetheless, in the separation of human artifice from mere mechanical nature, the humanist theme appears. Art is produced by human beings through the free use of reason – animals (e.g., Kant’s famous bees) do not produce art, since they lack the ability to pursue conscious ends in a rational manner, a manner that is proper, precisely, to humans. The concept of art, according to Derrida, plays a central role in this thematic; it serves to “raise man up (*ériger l’homme*)” above animality, provides a guarantee of humanity’s separation from other beings, assures that it is free from contamination “from below” (E 265-6). Art is a skill of human beings taken as rational beings endowed with freedom – it is the product of this freedom.

In the broadest sense, the artifice involved in science and work must be included in this raising of “man” above animality; nonetheless, the work of art, at least in the humanist conception we have already taken note of, is not to be confused with either. In



its free production, art, as we will see, is higher, purer because *more* free. In § 43 Kant confirms this by distinguishing art not only from natural processes, but from other human skills as well. It is thus not science, which is described in terms of “knowing,” but is rather an ability, a technical knack, a “being-able-to” that is quite separate from theoretical knowledge (303/CE 183). This distinction is of course essential for what Kant comes to say about genius. The production of art cannot be described scientifically, since the author of a product of genius “does not know himself how the ideas for it come to him,” nor can he or she therefore think up or communicate to others any precepts for producing such a work (§ 46, 308/187). Neither are the prescriptions of nature in genius prescriptions for science – nature only prescribes the rule to art (*ibid.*). This lack of knowledge, however, will open the way for a certain *analogy* to come and break down the distinction between art and nature, as we will see: whatever the act of genius is comparable to, it is not the theoretical endeavor of the scientist.

In a distinction that will prove to be important for Derrida’s reading, art is also to be distinguished from handicraft, the former being free or liberal (*freie*) art, the latter being remunerative or mercenary art (*Lohnkunst*) (304/183). Though we are still speaking of art in general and not yet fine art more specifically, we begin to approach this distinction here, and it is here that Kant’s first comment regarding salary appears. For although liberal or free art “is regarded as if it could turn out purposively (be successful) only as play,” remunerative or mercenary art is “an occupation that is disagreeable (burdensome) in itself and is attractive only because of its effect”: *Lohn* – wage or salary.<sup>168</sup> Liberal art does not take part in an economy or a system of exchange. This

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<sup>168</sup> For the most part I have been using the Cambridge Edition of the third *Critique* in this section, where Guyer and Matthews translate *Lohnkunst* as “remunerative art.” Pluhar translates it as “mercenary art,”

suggests that liberal art and remunerative art are therefore not coupled in a simple opposition to one another: “One is higher than the other,” says Derrida, “more ‘art’ than the other: it has more value for not having any economic value” (E 266). If art is the product of freedom, liberal art is more in conformity with its essence, since it is not tied to economic necessity, the desire for or need of payment, the pressures and demands of the market place. It is more free, more removed from worldly concerns. Derrida will go so far as to suggest that remunerative art really “belongs to art only by analogy” with liberal or “pure” art, and that if one follows the logic of this analogy, remunerative art begins to look more like the productivity of bees, at least insofar as it is tied to (bodily) life needs and lacks the spontaneity or play of “pure” production. Remunerative or mercenary art is determined by a distinct purpose or finality, fixed in its program, “without reason and without the play of the imagination” (ibid.). Not without imagination, of course, but without the *play* of the imagination: “The craftsman, the worker, like the bee, does not play. And indeed, the hierarchical opposition of liberal art and mercenary [remunerative] art is that of play and work” (ibid.).

We see now that it is liberal or free art that is “the distinguishing property of man as freedom.” It is an exemplar of this freedom in a way that remunerative art, tied as it is to the need for salary and to the life-process more generally, could never be. Liberal art is therefore more *human* than remunerated art (267). It is further “above” the products of nature. This puts it into a relation of superiority over any economy: the artist as producer of free art, the genius, “is not *homo oeconomicus*” (ibid.).

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which is how R. Klein translates Derrida’s “*l’art mercenaire*.” See the French edition of “Economimesis” in *Mimesis: des articulations*, ed. Sylviane Agacinski et al. (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), pp. 55-93, particularly p. 58.

Oppositions continue to pile up that would, in fact, appear to keep shifting Kant's theory of fine or beautiful art *away* from both economy and mimesis. These oppositions are, as Derrida puts it, "apparently irreducible," but in order to draw out the presence of and complicity between mimesis and economy, he insists that we "propagate and multiply" these oppositions – precisely in order for them finally to dissolve, "as they always do" (265). To do so, we discover yet another, found considerably earlier in the third *Critique*, in the "General Remark on the first section of the Analytic," where Kant reiterates the distinction between reproductive and productive imagination:

. . . [I]t turns out that everything flows from the concept of taste as a faculty for judging an object in relation to the **free lawfulness** of the imagination. But if in the judgment of taste the imagination must be considered in its freedom, then it is in the first instance taken not as reproductive, as subjected to the laws of association, but as productive and self-active (as the authoress of voluntary forms of possible intuitions). (240/124, emphasis given)

The distinction of course goes back to the first *Critique*. Reproductive imagination is rule bound, subject solely to the empirical laws of association and reducible, ultimately, to psychology; productive imagination, however, is "spontaneous," according to Kant (KRV B152), and, Derrida adds, "free and playful" (E 267).<sup>169</sup> Although the context of the above quote is the judgment of taste, Derrida's interest is in the role this same productive imagination plays in genius. As with the judgment of taste itself, genius is constituted by the union of imagination and understanding. And as with the judgment of taste, imagination is not subject to the laws of the understanding and therefore under its constraint, as it is in cognition. The imagination in any "aesthetic respect" is

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<sup>169</sup> The distinction between productive and reproductive imagination as it pertains to the first *Critique* is discussed by Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, trans. Charles T. Wolfe (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998), for instance, at p. 206.

unconstrained, freely productive, i.e., “free to provide . . . unsought extensive undeveloped material for the understanding” (KU 316-7/CE 194). This characterizes the “happy relation” (*glücklichen Verhältnisse*) between imagination and understanding in which genius consists, the relation in which imagination comes up with aesthetic ideas and the forms through which to express these ideas (317/194).

It is at this point that mimesis begins to show its importance, according to Derrida. For mimesis is not only to be found in the reproductive works where one might, indeed, expect to find it, but more importantly “in the free and pure productivity of the imagination as well” (E267) – the pure productivity which is at work in genius. There, the productive imagination “deploys the brute power of its invention only by *listening* to nature, to its dictation, its edict” (ibid.). The suggestion here is that this inventive power is unrestrained by any law, outside the law, in a state, precisely, of *nature*. It is true that if, in the productivity of the genius, nature is not exactly the law, it is at least that which provides the rule. But its rule does not adhere to the law of conceptual understanding, the ideas that result from it (*aesthetic* ideas – an analogue, but only an analogue, to the Ideas of Reason) cannot be determined and therefore cannot be fully articulated. The force of productive imagination operates in the absence of the law, provides its own force in the absence of that force. The productivity to which it gives the rule remains separated off from any kind of knowing. Science remains silent here – not, as we shall see, for the only time in the Critique.

Nonetheless, this productivity has its analogues. The concept of nature does play a certain role, it functions, according to Derrida, “in the service of that ontotheological humanism” which is itself the “obscurantism of the economy one could call liberal in its

era of *Aufklärung*” (ibid.). This economy is linked to the division that underlies Kant’s various distinctions between the arts, the distinction that has produced, indeed, the entire “incalculable gulf” (*unübersehbare Kluft*, KU 175/63) of the critical enterprise, the gulf between the theoretical and the practical, between nature and freedom, the phenomenal world and the noumenal realm. Human art (taken in the general sense), produced through freedom, is separated from purely mechanical nature; art is separated from science “as a practical faculty is distinguished from a theoretical one” (303/183); liberal art (free) is separated from remunerative (tied to the life process and to economy). In § 44 Kant introduces the fine or beautiful arts (*schöne Kunst*), but here too we are faced with initial divisions and distinctions. The *mechanical* arts, which simply perform the actions required to make a previously conceived-of object actual, are distinguished from *aesthetic* arts, whose aim is the feeling of pleasure (305/184). Again, the aims of pure mechanism are to be opposed to more purely “human” aims (free pleasure over merely mechanical action), and if the goal of feeling pleasure appears to remain too firmly in the sensible or the bodily, we know that Kant immediately makes a further distinction between those aesthetic arts that are only “agreeable” because they aim merely at empirical, individual enjoyment (*Genuss*) and those that are, properly speaking, beautiful or fine arts, those that produce a disinterested pleasure (*Lust*) not of enjoyment but of reflection – the latter being the kind of art that “promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication” (305-6/184-5).

It is beautiful or fine art that is the art of genius, according to Kant (§46). This kind of art “does not allow the judgment concerning the beauty of its product to be derived from any sort of rule that has a concept for its determining ground” (307/186). It

thus also lacks any concept concerning the ground of its possibility as a work. The work of art must seek a rule – but from where? This is where a certain sense of “nature” arrives: “nature in the subject (and by means of the disposition of its faculties) must give the rule to art, i.e., beautiful art is possible only as a product of genius” (ibid.).

“Nature in the subject” – this is not simply the natural world, of course, but rather a kind of human nature. But it maintains a relationship to the workings of the natural realm. The productions of the genius are not nature, but following the movement of the famous *als ob*, the purposiveness of their form must appear free from the constraint of arbitrary rules, *as if* they were the products of nature (§ 45 306/185). Works of art must therefore appear like nature, they must “resemble *effects* of natural *action* at the very moment when they, most purely, are works [*opera*] of artistic confection” (E 271, italics given). A strange logic is at work here. The pure and free productivity of the imagination resembles the pure and free productivity of nature, but it does so precisely insofar as, being free and pure, it is free from dependence on those same laws. Indeed, the less the pure and free productivity of genius depends on nature, the more it resembles it. The mimesis in question here, then, is not the simple imitation of one thing by another, which one might describe as a relation of two products. It concerns, rather, the *production* of genius itself:

*Mimesis* here is not the representation of one thing by another, the relation of resemblance or of identification between two beings, the reproduction of a product of nature by a product of art. It is not the relation of two products but of two productions. And of two freedoms. The artist does not imitate things in nature, or, if you will, in *natura naturata*, but the acts of *natura naturans*, the operations of the *physis*. (272)

The artist of genius is in the position of productive nature, of a nature that produces according to its own rules. But is nature not mechanical, operating according to the laws of Newtonian physics? In the realm of external nature constituted determinatively this is undoubtedly so, but here we are dealing with reflective judgments, and we have seen that reflectively an analogy has to be made between nature taken (teleologically) as a whole and the products of an artist or author (§§ 1.4, 2.1). Kant feels the need to augment mechanistic nature reflectively through an analogy with the production, precisely, of an *artist*, which means that the mimesis at work in the Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment “displays the identification of human action with divine action – of one freedom with another” (ibid.).

Of course, there are few geniuses. But the “nature” at work in genius, this “nature in the subject,” is a nature which Kant describes in the first Remark of the Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment as “the supersensible substratum of all our faculties” (KU 344/219). This substratum is shared by all rational beings. The analogy, then, is not confined to those few “favorites of nature” (309/188) who have a talent for producing original work that is nonetheless exemplary for judgment. It remains the case that the productions of the genius are *communicable* precisely through the universality (among rational beings) of this substrate. For the genius to avoid producing “original nonsense,” he or she must produce work that serves as a standard for the power of judging that is shared by all humans (308/186-7). The ability to produce fine art depends on the ability to share universally in the judgment of taste that it occasions, an ability that finds its origins in judgments of the beauty in nature. When I judge an artwork beautiful, I do so through an analogy with beauty in nature. Nature appears as the product of the divine genius; fine or

beautiful art appears as the product of a human genius. In both cases the productivity of the imagination must be in harmony with the lawfulness of the understanding. All rational human subjects share in this productivity, and in the communicability of the feeling that such productivity produces.

Thus, according to Derrida:

The communicability of pure judgments of taste, the (universal, infinite, limitless) exchange between subjects who have free hands in the exercise or the appreciation of fine art, all that presupposes a commerce between the divine artist and the human one. And indeed, this commerce is a *mimesis*, in the strict sense, a play, a mask, an identification with the other on stage, and not the imitation of an object by its copy. ‘True’ *mimesis* is between two producing subjects and not between two produced things. (E 272)

Derrida’s claim is that this structure is implied by the whole of the third *Critique*, regardless of the explicit rejection of *mimesis* as imitation. Indeed, this kind of *mimesis*, *mimesis* as identification with an author-god, a *mimesis* that depends on free and pure productivity, must necessarily reject the mere imitation of products, since such imitation is “servile” (*ibid.*). The *mimesis* at work in the third *Critique* Derrida calls an “anthropo-theological” *mimesis*, and we should note that its first effect is that of a “divine teleology” that “secures the political economy of the Fine-Arts,” a political economy that serves to place everything in a hierarchy, that organizes the entire structure of beings according to freedom and reason: “*Economimesis* puts everything in its place, starting with the instinctual work of animals without language and ending with God, passing by way of the mechanical arts, mercenary art, liberal arts, aesthetic arts, and Fine-Arts” (*ibid.*).



What is proper to humanity is at least analogous to what is divine, and this means, infinite – an infinite productivity. God is the exemplar of this productivity, and exemplars are teleological, they provide the model that orients the pursuit of an ideal (see IHOG 58). This is why exemplarity becomes a central notion in “Economimesis.” The political economy at work in Kant’s account of the production of the Fine Arts is organized according to the ideal of divine production, an ideal that structures the hierarchy of profane production to the privilege of a certain conception of free, and freely producing, human beings. Mimesis itself is complicit in this economy, grounding as it does a number of hierarchical oppositions, such as those between object and representation, or original and imitation.<sup>170</sup> In each instance privilege is given to an original or originary presence, to original production over mere reproduction.

This gives us some sense for why Derrida claims in *The Truth in Painting* that the philosophical questioning of art (“What is art?” “What is the origin of the work of art?” “What is the meaning or history of art?”, etc.) is in “collusion” with “the hierarchical classification” of the arts in general (TP 22). Philosophical discourse aims to give art its place within an economy of production and meaning. Philosophy attempts to “master” (*maîtrise*) and “enclose” (*enclôt*) art in a “history of meaning” or even an “ontological encyclopedia” (34). It thus attempts to *frame* art, which raises the issue of the parergon. Derrida’s famous interest in this notion as it appears at the end of § 14 of the third *Critique* is well known. There Kant refers to what he calls “ornaments” (*Zieraten*, also “decorations” or “embellishments”), “parerga,” which he describes as those things which only belong to a representation (*Vorstellung*) “externally.” The parergon is an

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<sup>170</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982), p. 185.

“addendum” which might “augment the satisfaction of taste” but does so “only through its form” and not internally (226/CE 110-11). Examples include the borders or frames (*Einfassungen*) of paintings, drapery on statues, and the colonnades of grand buildings (226/111). The parerga are secondary, supplemental, they constitute the remainder of a work. They provide, among other things, a *context*, which raises the “project of delimitation” that we will see Derrida invoke at the outset of “Economimesis” (E 263; § 5.1). Such a project is never without its political implications.

It is also, significantly, never without its limitations. A context, as Derrida puts it in “Signature Event Context,” “is never absolutely determinable” (M 310). This is why the very concept of belonging to a set is open to “dislocation” precisely by the operation of the parergon (E 263, see also § 5.1). This suspicion regarding the exhaustiveness of a context is what motivates Derrida’s discussion of the parergon in *The Truth in Painting*. The parergon “comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon* . . . but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside” (TP 54). This touching and cooperating is what is key for Derrida. The parergon, at work establishing and maintaining the border, is thus “[n]either simply outside nor simply inside” the work it attempts to encircle or frame (*ibid.*). It supplements the “inside” from a certain “outside” that, precisely through its role in defining the inside, is never quite *external*. This means the “inside” can never quite maintain its autonomy, its “purity.”

This logic of the parergon obviously extends far beyond the framing of art works. Derrida invokes another of Kant’s uses of the term “parerga,” in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, where Kant describes the four “General Remarks” appended one to each part of the work as “*parerga* to religion within the boundaries of pure reason;

they do not belong within it yet border on it.”<sup>171</sup> Each of the four Remarks deals with what Kant calls an “extravagant idea”: “Of Effects of Grace,” “Miracles,” “Mysteries,” and “Means of Grace” respectively. Reason “extends itself” to such ideas in the face of the consciousness of its own impotence regarding the satisfaction of its moral needs, even though such ideas cannot be incorporated into its maxims of action and thought for the obvious reason that they extend into the supernatural and thus beyond experience (6:52/96). Nonetheless, they can make up for reason’s “moral impotence,” and reason can even count on such ideas with what Kant calls “reflective faith” (which he opposes to the *dogmatic* faith which would take such ideas for knowledge) (ibid.). Even to remove the difficulties and qualify the dangers inherent in such ideas is what Kant calls “a secondary occupation (*parergon*)” (ibid.).

Derrida reads this in terms of reason’s lack – due to its moral impotence, reason “has recourse to the *parergon*, to grace, to mystery, to miracles. It needs the supplementary work” (TP 56). Again, the *parergon* cannot simply be detached from the *ergon*, from that which it frames:

The *parergon* inscribes something which comes as an extra, *exterior* to the proper field . . . but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside only to the extent that the inside is lacking. (Ibid., italics given)

The *parergon* is thus an extrinsic or exterior element that nonetheless intervenes on the inside, that supplements what the inside is lacking. What’s more, this lack would thus be *constitutive* of the unity of the *ergon* or proper itself (59). The work would need this

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<sup>171</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. George di Giovanni, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), pp. 39-215, this ref., Ak. 6:52/p. 96.

frame, this framing or bordering operation, at the very least in order to take the shape it does. This means its “shape” is slightly different to the one that appears, there is an extra, an add-on that is not exactly present but is nonetheless involved.

This gives a certain urgency to separating the borders or frames from the work itself. Because they are secondary, “outside” what is proper to the work, the *parerga* are, as Derrida puts it, “what the principle subject *must not become*” (TP 54, italics given). And indeed, Kant suggests that this augmentation of the satisfaction of taste can go too far, if its form is not purely beautiful and if it thus “detracts from genuine beauty” (226/111). This is what we might call the risk of the *parergon* – it can overtake or take away from that which it frames, here by a lapse into mere decoration or adornment (*Schmuck*) that impairs (*Abbruch*) the genuine beauty of the work. As Derrida points out (TP 64), the example Kant gives of such decoration is, precisely, a *frame*, “a gilt frame, attached merely in order to recommend approval for the painting through its charm” (KU 226/111). Such a risk, which would apply, too, to the entire logic of the *parergon*, is what philosophical discourse must work against: “Philosophical discourse will always have been *against* the *paregon*” (TP 54, italics given). *Against* – Derrida italicizes it. Philosophy works “against” the *parergon* in at least two ways. In questioning art, philosophy strives to differentiate, to distinguish (*krinein*) between what is primary and what is secondary to it, to identify its properties, what is proper to it, and thus to identify its place, role or task. It works against the *parergon* in an effort to keep what is properly external to the work from entering inside, to draw a clear border or frame around the work. But philosophy also works *against*, right up beside, the *parergon*. We shall see that it can do nothing else.

Nonetheless, art must be given its place. For philosophy, it is a question of knowing what one is talking about, which is a question of what is proper to a subject, of what is inside and what is outside, what is internal and essential to a question, and what is external, peripheral, secondary. Thus, Derrida's summary of the problematic of Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful":

Now you have to know what you're talking about, what *intrinsically* concerns the value "beauty" and what remains external to your immanent sense of beauty. This permanent requirement – to distinguish between the internal or proper sense and the circumstance of the object being talked about – organizes all philosophical discourses on art, the meaning of art and meaning as such, from Plato to Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. This requirement presupposes a discourse on the limit between the inside and outside of the art object, here a *discourse on the frame*. (45, italics given)

Derrida's reading of the analytic of the beautiful in *The Truth in Painting* will largely be centered on exactly this problematic. His claim there is that Kant's entire discourse on art and the beautiful "forever assumes that one can distinguish rigorously between the intrinsic and the extrinsic," and that Kant makes "a fundamental presupposition, presupposing what is fundamental" by assuming that he knows both what is being framed and what is being excluded "as frame *and* outside-the-frame" (63, italics given). We shall consider this in more detail. But already in "Economimesis" we can see a theoretical framing at work, in the service of a particular (liberal) political economy.

What frames Kant's discourse on artistic production? At least in part it is the "inexhaustible reiteration of the humanist theme" that serves to raise "man" up to the level of a quasi-divine producer by putting "free-will (*Willkür*) to work" (E 265). Derrida calls this an "obscurantist buzzing that always treats animality *in general*, under the

purview of one or two scholastic examples, as if there were only a single ‘animal’ structure that could be opposed to the human” (ibid.). Let us note this “early” reference to the theme of animality that becomes so prevalent in Derrida’s later writings. It works here, as everywhere, in the raising of humanity, the erecting, as Derrida puts it, of a “man-god,” and it marks what he calls “an incontrovertible limit of anthropological domesticity” (266). The gesture is one of establishing what is proper to human beings, of establishing or reaffirming the borders of human being itself. The “logic of man” is this gesture’s “ruse and its naiveté,” both of which

lie in the necessity, in order to save the absolute privilege of emergence (art, freedom, language, etc.) [the emergence, that is, of an *original* production], of grounding it in an absolute naturalism and in an absolute indifferentialism; somewhere human production has to be renaturalized, and differentiation must get effaced into opposition. (Ibid.)

What is obscured in this “obscurantist buzzing” is the differentiation that allows for “man” to be separated off and defined above or beyond the “animal.” The framing work, then, is what must be covered over, so that it appears as both natural and undeniable, incontrovertible. Art and nature, initially separated, must therefore be reconciled into a hierarchical structure that gives both a (“natural”) place within the same system.

Analogy will do much of this work, artistic production being conceived of in analogy with natural production, natural production in turn conceived of in analogy with the work of a (divine) artist. Through the figure of the genius, nature and art are brought back together. Human production is renaturalized by genius, and the movement of differentiation that allows for the raising of “man” above animality, the movement of *differance* (a movement to which we shall return), is effaced into various rigid (and, again, “natural”) oppositions: for instance, those of human/animal and culture/nature.

What could be more natural? And yet it is precisely this naturalization that effaces the effect of its own framing (see TP 73). Because it is seen as “natural,” even obvious, one does not look for any mechanisms that might operate on, outline, and establish this hierarchy. The limits are effaced, and the effects of this framing go unnoticed. We speak, here, of a frame *effect* – not simply of a frame, but of an act or movement of framing, of what results from the frame, but also of the effect of framing itself, the shaking or trembling that is a necessary part of its operation. The frame itself is “essentially constructed and therefore fragile” (ibid.). Neither inside nor outside but working to define both, the frame is itself determined by this operation. In being articulated it is therefore vulnerable to its own dislocation. Let us examine this through the example Derrida gives, turning to the second remark on salary in Kant’s text.

It appears in § 51, “On the Division of the Beautiful Arts,” where Kant says that everything that is “contrived and laborious” in beautiful or fine art is to be avoided, for beautiful art must be free art in a double sense: it must not be a matter of remuneration [*Lohngeschäft*], a labor whose magnitude can be judged, enforced, or paid for in accordance with a determined standard; but also, while the mind is certainly occupied, it must feel itself to be satisfied and stimulated (independently of remuneration [*unabhängig vom Lohne*]) without looking beyond to another end. (321/CE 198-9)

Kant goes on to compare the orator and the poet. The orator gives something that s/he does not promise, that is, “an entertaining play of the imagination” (321/199). But in attending to the style and not the content of the speech the orator also *takes away* from what is promised, “namely the purposive occupation of the understanding” (ibid.). The orator thus gives less than what he or she promises to give. The poet, on the other hand, gives more. Promising little and announcing only “a mere play with ideas,” the poet

nonetheless “accomplishes something that is worthy of business,<sup>172</sup> namely providing nourishment to the understanding in play, and giving life to its concepts through the imagination” (ibid.). This free giving, giving without return, without remuneration, puts the poet at the top of Kant’s artistic hierarchy. And this puts the poet in a very privileged position with regard to the divine. Says Derrida:

At the summit is the poet, analogous (and that precisely by a return of *logos*) to God: he gives more than he promises, he submits to no exchange contract, his overabundance generously breaks the circular economy. The hierarchy of the Fine-Arts therefore signifies that some power supersedes the (circular) economy, governs and places itself above (restricted) political economy. The naturalization of political economy subordinates the production and the commerce of art to a transeconomy. (E 275)

Naturalization is a movement of both subordination and effacement. It both subordinates the production and exchange of art to a “transeconomy,” a subsidizing capital, *and* covers over the fact that this transeconomy governs the political economy, gives it its movement, and in doing so subordinates it to itself.

One must not think, however, that economimesis is impaired by this state of affairs. On the contrary, it “unfolds itself there to infinity” (ibid.). The poet has a gift, the power to produce, the power to give, a power, however, which is given to the poet in its turn by God. The poet then transmits this “supplementary surplus value” in order that it be permitted “to make its return to the infinite source” (ibid.). Taking up a common

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<sup>172</sup> In German, *leistet etwas, was eines Geschäftes würdig ist*. In Derrida this is translated as *effectue quelque chose qui a la valeur d'une occupation sérieuse* (see the French, p. 71), which Klein renders (reasonably enough) as “supplies something which has the value of a serious occupation” (E 275). But Guyer’s and Matthews’ use of “business” for *Geschäftes* obviously plays well into Derrida’s intentions here.



theme in his work (see, for instance, § 2.4), Derrida points out that it makes this return through the *voice*:

The genius poet is the voice of God who gives him voice, who gives himself and by giving gives to himself, gives himself what he gives, gives himself the [power] to give (*Gabe* and *es gibt*), plays freely with himself, only breaks the finite circle or contractual exchange in order to strike an infinite accord with himself. (Ibid.)

The poet receives from God the power to give his or her gift, the power to give more than promised. Taking this gift from nature, the poet in fact receives what s/he then gives.

Receives it not from nature in the mechanistic sense, of course, but through a very particular nature, “nature in the subject,” from God as the divine artist. In this very giving this gift is returned to its infinite source, is reappropriated by this “infinite circle.”

The positive, divine infinite strikes an accord with itself through this giving of the power to give that is then returned through the very gesture of giving. This means,

paradoxically, that this giving becomes debt – the poet is indebted to God for the very power to give more than promised. The poet relies on God for this power. No one pays the poet, but “God supports him. He supports him with speech and *in return for*

*gratitude*. He furnishes him his capital” (275-6, my italics). The difference between

restricted and general economy is effaced here – indeed, this effacing is even “the *function* of the passage to the infinite” (275, italics given). Circulation (restricted

economy) and “expendiary productivity” (general economy) are not opposed to one

another – something must supplement the circulation, come from outside and gives it its movement. Its *chance*, both in the sense of its possibility, but also in the sense of

opening it to the unexpected, as we shall see. As opposed to Hegel’s bad infinite, this

positive infinite is a place of generosity and overabundance. It’s not only good, but

infinitely so. And it supplements from the outside what would otherwise appear to be a closed system. Indeed, it a *necessary* opening of that system. Without this originary production, there can be no reproduction, and no exchange.

The privilege of the poet is one of the voice, of speech, and this means, of logos. The free productivity of the poet is taken on a kind of analogy, again, with the free productivity of God, who legislates, who commands precisely through reason and the word. Whenever nature gives the rule to the genius, it does so through discursive metaphors: “nature says, dictates, prescribes, etc.” (278). According to Derrida, “these are not just any metaphors but analogies of analogy, whose message is that the literal meaning is analogical: nature is properly [*proprement*] *logos* towards which one must always return [*remonter*]. Analogy is always language” (ibid.).

What’s more, this language is *prescriptive*. God *commands*, nature *dictates* or *gives the rule* to genius, the genius *prescribes* to other artists (albeit “in the form of non-conceptual rules which forbid repetition, imitative reproduction” (ibid.)). Analogy itself is a rule, a “singular norm” which thus has the force, according to Derrida, of an order (277). The moral order therefore sustains the aesthetic through analogy: “There is an ‘analogy’ [*Analogie*] between the pure judgment of taste which, independent of any interest, provokes a *Wohlgefallen* suitable *a priori* to humanity, and the moral judgment that does the same thing by means of concepts” (279; see KU § 42 301/CE 180). This leads, as Kant puts it in the passage from § 42 that is in question here, “to an equally immediate interest in the object of the former as in that of the latter,” although obviously “the former is a free interest, the latter one grounded on objective laws” (301/180). But Kant immediately adds the following:

To that is further added the admiration of nature, which in its beautiful products shows itself as art, not merely by chance, but as it were intentionally, in accordance with a lawful arrangement and as purposiveness without end, which latter, since we never encounter it externally, *we naturally seek within ourselves*, and indeed in that which constitutes the ultimate end of our existence, namely the moral vocation. (301/180-1, my italics)

The “articulated play of this analogy,” says Derrida, is thus, and again, “subject to a law of supplementarity” (E 279). In the aesthetic experience, the purpose or end of its famous purposiveness does not, as we know, appear. This without end, this “purposelessness [*sans-fin*],” as Derrida puts it, “leads us back within ourselves. Because the outside appears purposeless, we seek purpose within” (ibid.). Cut off from any purpose outside, we seek what we are lacking within ourselves, “in an autonomous fashion” (ibid.). Such is the nature of human beings that this “interior purpose is at our disposal, it is ours, ourselves, it calls us and determines us from within, we are *there [da]* so as to respond to a *Bestimmung*, to a vocation of autonomy” (ibid., italics given). Autonomous, which is to invoke, of course, the moral.

Such is what Derrida calls “the singular moral surplus value of the *without [le sans]* of pure detachment” (280). A moral *interest* is provoked through meditation on a *disinterested* pleasure. Disinterestedness finds its way into an economy, acquires an interest. This is directly linked to nature, whose beautiful forms, while not falling under the legislation of the understanding in the judgment of the beautiful, nonetheless *provide a sign* that there is a harmonious relationship between the mind and the world.<sup>173</sup> The interests of reason demand this, as Kant himself makes clear:

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<sup>173</sup> Let us note that it is to this relation, along with its contribution to Kant’s “general project of reconciling nature and freedom, that is, of unifying philosophy,” that Lyotard opposes the violence of the sublime. The beautiful, in the reconciliation of thought with natural forms, “contributed to the Enlightenment,” that

But since it also interests reason that the ideas (for which it produces an immediate interest in the moral feeling) also have objective reality, i.e., that nature should at least show some trace (*Spur*) or give a sign (*Wink*) that it contains in itself some sort of ground for assuming a lawful correspondence of its products with our satisfaction that is independent of all interest . . . reason must take an interest in every manifestation in nature of a correspondence similar to this; consequently the mind cannot reflect on the beauty of **nature** without finding itself at the same time to be interested in it. (300/180, emphasis given)

Derrida links the “trace” (*Spur*) and “sign” (*Wink*) to a kind of writing, to signification. Nature is a coded text, a “cipher” (*Chiffreschrift*) as Kant puts it, “by means of which nature figuratively speaks to us in its beautiful forms” (301/180). The “moral surplus value” of the purposiveness without purpose of the judgment of beauty is essentially linked to this trace or sign of nature. Nature “leaves us signs so that we still feel assured, in the *without* [*le sans*] of pure detachment, of banking on our own account, of satisfying our purpose, of seeing our stocks and our values on the moral rise” (E 280-1, italics given).

This leads Derrida to the rather startling conclusion that beautiful forms, in signifying nothing and having no determined or determinable purpose, “are therefore *also, and by that very fact*, encrypted signs, a figural writing set down in nature’s production” (281, italics given). Being cut off from all purpose and therefore inaccessible to conceptuality, these forms demand to be read, interpreted, given meaning. The “*sans*” or “without” of pure detachment, the *ohne* of Kant’s famous *Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*, “purposiveness without purpose,” is not enough to cause silence, to cease

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“departure from childhood,” while the sublime, an aesthetic, precisely, “without nature,” “is a sudden blazing, and without future” (LAS 54-5). For the sublime, see § 3.3, for the reference to childhood, §§ 3.4, 5.2.

talk. Humanity's moral vocation will save it from this silence. The silence that is imposed upon science in the judgment of taste, the silence imposed by the *sans* of pure detachment, which keeps its purpose hidden and its forms free from conceptuality, is in fact *itself* a language between nature and "man" (ibid.), and one precisely insofar as it is silent, and thus demands to be read, interpreted, given sense. Humanity's free rationality, its link to God through its power of free productivity, the very condition of its moral vocation, all this ensures that nature is given a meaning that is compatible with "man's" calling, even when concepts cannot prove that this is so. Without determinant objectivity, it is a "hermeneutic *interest* that matters" (ibid., italics Derrida). It is in the interests of "man" that this moral interest intervenes on aesthetic disinterestedness. Such a thing "remains impossible to control objectively" (ibid.) – we are in the realm of reflection, of course. But as long as the notion of a divine artist allows us to trust in the sincerity and the loyalty of nature's speech to humanity (ibid.), humanity's place in the hierarchy not only remains firm, but indeed is confirmed by this enigmatic cipher that is nature.

But this hierarchy has already been decided by its particular brand of ontotheological-humanist framing. The moral vocation that saves humanity from the silence of the *sans* of pure detachment is in some sense *already decided* by this framework. It supplements the economy that places human beings in a God-like position with regard to nature, when those same beings are confronted by the enigma of that very natural realm. When they have no more to say, when they can no longer see a purpose in nature or relate it to knowledge, nature gives a sign, a "wink," if we may play on this fortunate correspondence between the German and the English, that free rational human

beings are nonetheless superior to it, have a vocation that is higher. This is one way that reflective judgment will reconcile nature and freedom, in spite of those occasions when nature produces pleasure without apparent purpose, in spite of the apparent weakness of humanity with regard to nature's power, in spite of their being determined, at least in part, by its laws. As free rational beings, humans will seek a purpose inside themselves when they fail to find one in aesthetic experience. They will act autonomously, without determination from outside, they will present themselves to themselves as what they are: "free existence or presence [*Dasein*], autonomous, that is to say moral" (279). Humanity cannot consume, from the outside, its moral purpose; it must give it to itself. And this has an essential relation to the judgment of the beautiful: "not-to-consume forms the condition of possibility of taste understood as what relates us to purpose-lessness" (280).

The poet's position at the top of the artistic hierarchy reflects this autonomy – indeed, in a certain sense it reflects the values that provide the ground for this autonomy. The value the poet exemplifies, according to Derrida, is that of "full presence," a value that the moral agency itself derives from or is dependent upon (285). Full presence or full speech are not values that are "narrowly or immediately moral" (*ibid.*). The pureness of full presence, the ability to be self-present in speaking, an ability taken as a value throughout the history of metaphysics (by which we mean the "metaphysics of presence," more on which below), is what in turn gives autonomy its moral significance. And the poet is the exemplar of these values. Poetry "favors the process of interiorization" by avoiding the use of any external sensible content or mechanical means (*ibid.*). And if all the speaking arts do this, poetry has the advantage of being more honest, more sincere. It is the mere play of ideas, but in so being it is faithful to itself, adequate to itself: "it

*imitates* the least” and “therefore *resembles* most closely divine production” (284, italics given). Kant says that poetry “expands the mind by setting the imagination free and presenting . . . the one [form] that connects its presentation with a fullness of thought to which no linguistic expression is fully adequate” (§ 53, 326/CE 203-4). Because the imagination is free, in particular from any determination from nature, this presentation (*Darstellung*) is the result of its productive work – it is not representation or reproduction. Full presence is the work of the productive imagination, which relies on nothing that is external. In the case of poetry in its free play, the act of presenting is “bound” to what is presented “in its plenitude” (E 284-5). Freed from the determinations of nature, the presenting presents purely, without restriction – there is no gap between the presenting and what is presented.

In this “faithful adequation to itself,” poetry is thus more authentic, more *truthful* than the other spoken arts (285). Its adequation to its interior content ensures it a “fullness of meaning” in presentation, it is meaning at its fullest, in the extreme proximity of self-identity. What’s more, poetry actually tells the truth, it is not *deceitful* in its play of forms: “It plays with the illusion which it produces at will, yet without thereby being deceitful; for it itself declares its occupation to be mere play, which can nevertheless be purposively employed by the understanding for its own business” (KU 327/204; see also E 285). It does not manipulate, as rhetoric does. It does not subordinate itself to outside purposes. It is pure interiority, “without external limitation” (E 285). Invoking an expression that is of considerable importance for his thought, Derrida associates the poet’s play with “auto-affection” (*ibid.*). In this play of forms, the imagination is free from all constraint from nature, but it is also, as speech, free from any mechanical

constraints. It does not need paint or canvas, stone or other building materials, musical instruments. Of course, there is something “mechanical” and “academically correct” in the production of all beautiful art (KU § 47 310/188). As Kant puts it in the *Anthropology*, the judgment of taste requires the freedom of the play of the imagination to harmonize with the lawfulness of the understanding.<sup>174</sup> Genius must therefore attend to certain basic rules and avoid going against nature if it is to avoid producing “original folly.”<sup>175</sup> Undoubtedly, this applies to poetry also. But in poetry interiority is the most pure of external influence, it is produced in the best possible manner, and preserved “in its plenitude” (E 285). If it is not divine production, it is the closest possible thing to it.

This gives poetry a certain *value*. Derrida calls it a “priceless pleasure” – it is out of circulation, outside of any (finite) economy of exchange, and yet (and precisely for that reason) it has a kind of infinite value. Indeed, “it is the origin of value. Everything is measured on a scale on which poetry occupies the absolutely highest level” (286).

The poet retains his or her autonomy in the auto-affective play of poetic presentation, retains it in the play of poetic *speech*, in that auto-affective structure Derrida describes so often as “hearing-oneself-speak.” Here the mouth and ear cannot be dissociated (287). Ideally, this would apply to all speech, which would at least *seem* to have no need to pass through the external detour of the world in order to affect the speaker (SP 78, 80). We can see that Derrida’s interest in soliloquy in Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena* has a similar significance to his interest here in the role the poet plays in Kant’s hierarchy of the fine arts (§ 2.4; see SP 32 ff.). Pure auto-affection, hearing-oneself-speak, occurs “in a self-proximity that would in fact be the absolute reduction of

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<sup>174</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), § 67, p. 109, Ak. 241.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, § 57, p. 93, Ak. 225.



space in general” (79). Let us note the poet’s strange privilege here, and the unique work s/he accomplishes. All art is expressive, but given its relative freedom from external constraints or mechanical devices (including, of course, *writing*, and we shall return to this) speech expresses more purely, and thus *more*, than other forms of expression (E 285). Of all speech, however, “poetic speech is the most telling [*la plus parlante*]” because “interiority is produced there and is better preserved there in its plenitude” (ibid.). Interiority, the purity of the internal, free from all external contamination. The poet works “within the limits of a given concept,” but chooses “among the unbounded manifold of forms possibly agreeing with it” that one form that connects his or her presentation “with a fullness of thought to which no linguistic expression is fully adequate” (KU 326/204). This is how poetry “elevates itself aesthetically to the level of ideas” (ibid.), as we have already seen. The poet works with what is available – a given concept, an “unbounded manifold of forms” – but transforms this externality, turns it to his or her advantage, to the advantage of a presentation (*Darstellung*) that is not determined by natural forms. Hetero-affection, then, is transformed into auto-affection – significantly, and yet also slightly strangely, Derrida refers to this as the work of mourning, and it is in poetry that this work “produces the maximum of disinterested pleasure” (E 286).

That this is mourning, and a *work* of mourning more specifically, obviously recalls Freud, who famously calls mourning the “work” of removing all libidinal attachment from a loved object that no longer exists.<sup>176</sup> This is work at least in part because of the time and (psychic) energy it takes to make this separation. Reality tells

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<sup>176</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIV*, trans. and ed. James Strachey et al. (London: Vintage/Hogarth, 2001 [1957]), pp. 237-58. See especially, pp. 244 ff. Hereafter I will cite page references in the text.

the subject that the loved object no longer exists, and demands that attachment to it be withdrawn. Nonetheless, “people never willingly abandon a libidinal position” (244), which means the subject clings to the object in question, resists the demand from reality that a separation be made. The demands of reality must thus be “carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathetic energy,” while “the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged” (245). The libido is bound to the object through “memories and expectations,” and each one of these must be “brought up and hypercatheted” before the libido can achieve separation (ibid.). Hypercathexis, Freud’s *Überbesetzung*, designates a charge of supplementary energy or investment in the idea of an object, an occupation, a hyper- or *over*-occupation with each memory and expectation.<sup>177</sup> An over-investment, one, indeed, that Freud finds it difficult to explain in economic terms (245). Through this over-investment, the subject works to let go of its attachment to an external object that is no longer present (and indeed, is all the more troubling for that). For the work of mourning to succeed, all attachment to the beloved object must be internalized, memorialized, freed from external commitments. The lost other must be idealized, incorporated, *consumed* (WM 159). What affects the subject from outside must be turned inward, hetero-affection turned into auto-affection. The work of mourning is completed by attaining one’s independence, one’s autonomy – by removing oneself from the (empirical) world. The lost object, the vanished other, becomes present within us as an image – a memory or a monument, as Derrida puts it (WM 159). One takes control of it; its meaning is frozen.

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<sup>177</sup> See J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York & London: Norton, 1973).

Strangely, then, the poet mourns, poetry is a work of mourning, one which, indeed, produces the highest amount of disinterested pleasure. Immediately all reference to the other, to alterity, enters into play. In poetry nature is idealized, which is perhaps not an unusual thing to think – but according to the logic we are attempting to follow here, this means it is internalized, consumed, its forms detached from the external world. The poet gains independence from it, “man” gains independence in the disinterested pleasure taken in poetic forms. The empirical realm of nature is abandoned for the noumenal realm of transcendental freedom. One gains one’s autonomy; one is in a position to recognize and accept one’s moral vocation – and we should remind ourselves here that Kant is very clear that taking an “immediate interest in the beauty of nature” (in nature’s *forms*, that is, and not its charms) is the mark of a good soul (KU § 42, 298-9/178). As he puts it when he discusses aesthetic ideas, the imagination, as a “productive cognitive faculty,” creates an *alternative* nature, an interiorized, idealized one – “out of the material which the real one gives it,” it’s true, but free of and beyond that nature, guided by higher principles:

We entertain ourselves with [this other nature] when experience seems too mundane to us; we transform the latter, no doubt always in accordance with analogous laws, but also in accordance with principles that lie higher in reason (and which are every bit as natural to us as those in accordance with which the understanding apprehends empirical nature); in this we feel our freedom from the law of association (which applies to the empirical [that is, reproductive] use of that faculty [i.e., imagination]), in accordance with which material can certainly be lent to us by nature, but the latter can be transformed by us into something entirely different, namely into that which steps beyond nature. (Ibid., § 49, 314/192)

The works of productive imagination are free from the law, the human subject free to produce its own laws of association, to give itself the rule in a way that is analogous to the assent the rational subject freely gives to the moral law.

Nonetheless, the poet needs help, supplementation – a “gift” from God, the gift of being able to give, the gift of (divine) productivity. And this help must be effaced, the help the economy gets must appear natural. When Derrida says in *The Truth in Painting* that “what has produced and manipulated the frame puts everything to work in order to efface the frame effect,” and that this is most often done by “naturalizing” the frame “to infinity, in the hands of God” (TP 73), this is what he means. In the context of economimesis, the economy in question receives divine help; the logic of pure human productivity, the “logic of man,” is framed by this privileged relation to the divine infinite. And yet the role that this divine infinity plays in this economy must nonetheless be naturalized, its work of framing effaced, a circumstance that suggests a certain complicity between the frame and the work, between *paregon* and *ergon*. The *paregon*, as we have seen, is not entirely detachable. The four “general Remarks” appended to the four parts of the *Religion*, for instance, serve to supplement a lack that is internal to the proper field of “religion within the limits of reason alone.” They are not added for no reason. If they are not central to the work, they are deemed a kind of necessary addition. They are only “quasi” detachable, and Derrida claims that in their quasi-detachability, *all* *parerga*, including Kant’s examples in § 14 of the *Critique of Judgment* (frames, draperies, colonnades, and the like), prevent a lack on the inside of the work from appearing (or from not appearing – “which amounts to the same thing for a lack”) (59). What constitutes *parerga* “is not simply their exteriority as a surplus, it is the *internal*

*structural link* which rivets them to the lack in the interior of the *ergon*” (ibid., my italics). Not just *any* externality is a parergon. The parergon acts on the inside of the work, it supplements a lack that is “central” to the inside. Indeed, “this lack would be constitutive of the very unity of the *ergon*” (ibid.). The parergon thus reveals something – or in fact, nothing – at the heart of the ergon. But what is the ergon’s lack? What does it lack, what is missing that needs to be supplemented in this way? “Without this lack, the *ergon* would have no need of a *parergon*. The *ergon*’s lack is the lack of a *parergon*. . . .” (59-60).

The work needs to be framed, any unity needs borders, limits. Again we return to the notion of a context. It is the parergon that does the work of placing, of organizing; it is what ensures interiority, the relation and exchange of resources in an economy. It thus ensures meaning. Without it, what is “internal” cannot be determined.

And yet this lack itself “cannot be determined, localized, situated, *arrested* inside or outside *before the framing*” (TP 71, italics given). In this sense, then, the lack is simultaneously “both *product* and *production* of the frame” (ibid., italics given). The frame makes meaning possible, but only by supplementing the interior with its framing effect. Frame and work have a reciprocal relation – there is no ergon without a parergon, but the very definition of the ergon would necessarily define or produce its specific parergon. There is no work without a frame, but what that frame will be is dependent on the work that it simultaneously defines; there is no context without limits or borders, but any given context will have specific and unique borders. Is it fair to suggest that ergon and parergon are two sides of the same coin? But this is perhaps too rigid an image – ergon and parergon *produce* one another, are both product and production, framing is an

*effect*. We might be right to suggest that all that falls under the name of “deconstruction” follows this logic of production/producing, a logic that indeed would precede any distinction of active and passive.

The frame stands out, then, from both the work and what is external to the work. And yet it also blends in, vanishes, effaces itself. It fulfills its function only by being hard to notice, almost invisible (and indeed, the laborious task of “deconstructive reading” to be found in Derrida’s own texts can be seen, from one point of view, as constant testimony to the difficulty of uncovering the frame). With respect to the *work*, the frame blends into what is external, extraneous to the interior – it cannot, must not compromise the work itself. With respect to the *outside* of the work, however, it blends in with the work, separates itself from the exterior (61). At the moment that it “deploys its greatest energy,” says Derrida, it “disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away” (ibid.). We should note, however, that this state of affairs licenses neither the attempt to reframe the work, nor any “dream of the pure and simple absence of the frame” (73). One cannot simply reframe Kant’s discourse in order to compensate for any perceived inadequacies, to “correct” it; and there is no discourse, Kantian or otherwise, without a frame. Reframing and de-framing are, indeed, the very gestures “of *what* is here deconstructed” (ibid., italics given) – of what is deconstructing itself, and what is being deconstructed. Energy, movement, reciprocity, supplementation – nothing is fixed here. The poet receives the gift and gives in receiving; God gives to the poet and gives to Himself in that very giving; the economy of economimesis is supplemented by a positive infinite and through this supplementation receives, is opened to, chance (79). It is

precisely this movement or effect, which is at the same time an exceeding or overflowing of the frame, that allows the economy its movement of exchange, that sets it going (4).

#### § 4.2 “A Nonknowledge Intervenes” – The *Sans* of the Pure Cut

The inside is defined in terms of its frame – or perhaps, more properly, it is defined, at least in part, by what it is not, the exterior that the frame keeps at bay. Necessarily. This logic, which is the logic of the frame or parergon, works in “Economimesis” through the reiteration of the humanist theme that links human production to divine infinity. It is also at work in Derrida’s reading of Kant’s judgment of taste in the third section of the chapter entitled “Parergon” in *The Truth in Painting*, the section entitled “The *Sans* of the Pure Cut.” We will see that it is not unrelated to humanism, nor to the entire problematic of *judgment* that is also at work here.

We have already seen Derrida play on the “without” of Kant’s “purposiveness without purpose,” *Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*, in French “*finalité sans fin*,” in the context of the discussion of nature’s cryptic cipher in “Economimesis.” This figure of encryption and of the crypt is in fact not irrelevant to the constellation of themes we are attempting to pursue once more here. Derrida uses the term early on in *The Truth in Painting* in describing the pure and disinterested pleasure of the judgment of taste. Such a pleasure must remain free of any contamination from outside; it is exemplary for judgment for precisely this reason. It is a pleasure, then, that

no longer depends on any phenomenal empiricity, of any determined *existence*, whether that of the object or that of the subject, my empiricity relating me precisely to the existence of the beautiful object, or to the existence of my sensory motivation. As such, and considered intrinsically (but how to determine the intrinsic, that which runs along, *secus*, the internal

limit?), the pleasure presupposes not the disappearance pure and simple, but the neutralization, not simply the putting to death but the *mis en crypte* [entombment/encrypting] of all that exists in as much as it exists. (TP 46, italics given)

The pleasure taken in the judgment of taste is no doubt subjective. But this subjectivity, according to Derrida, “is not an existence, nor even a relation to existence. It is an in-existent or an-existent subjectivity arising on the crypt of the empirical subject and its whole world” (ibid.). The subject that feels pleasure in judging something beautiful must suspend any interest in the empirical world and in its own relation to that world. An embodied, physical subject living in the world is a subject that participates in that world, that relates to it, works in it, pursues its goals and interests in it. Pure and disinterested pleasure, on the other hand, operates as “a sort of transcendental reduction, the *epochē* of a thesis of existence the suspension of which liberates, in certain formal conditions, the pure feeling of pleasure” (44). All that exists, beautiful “object” and judging “subject,” at least insofar as that subject is taken as an empirical, interested actor in the world, must be suspended for the pure feeling of pleasure to be liberated.

In this *epochē*, of course, neither the subject nor the empirical world is negated, killed off. All that exists is taken out of the relationship of this subject to the feeling of pure pleasure, but it nonetheless is not simply absent from it. It is encrypted, codified, nature is left to become a cipher, as we have seen. But for Derrida this is also linked to the crypt, to a place “carved out of nature” that itself is not, or not entirely, natural, “a place *comprehended* within another but rigorously separate from it, isolated from general space by partitions, an enclosure, an enclave.”<sup>178</sup> The logic of bordering or framing

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<sup>178</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok,” trans. Barbara Johnson, *The Georgia Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, Spring 1977, pp. 64-116, this ref. p. 67.



applies to the crypt also, according to Derrida. The crypt encloses and seals off what it contains, and yet in so doing it creates its own alien space, a space that is cast off, cast out of living space. The crypt is a “safe” (*fors*), a place that saves, that preserves but also holds back, shelters, isolates and protects from contamination from the outside. But its interior is at the same time thus *exterior* to the space that encloses it, “an outcast outside inside the inside.”<sup>179</sup> The crypt is included, but in a clandestine manner, hidden below ground. This hidden space, then, is in a sense outside of the space in which it is included, sealed off, separate. It is a heterogeneous space within the interior.<sup>180</sup>

In this sense, the *epochē* Derrida invokes leaves the empirical world as a kind of ghost that haunts the pure and disinterested pleasure of the judgment of taste. It is a logic that will haunt, in its turn, the very judgment of taste itself. In the disinterested pleasure, the *uninteressirten Wohlgefallen* of the judgment of taste, “I please myself,” as Derrida puts it, but I do not interest myself, “especially not in myself insofar as I exist” (TP 47). Thus, Derrida’s formulation of the logic of this pleasure: I-please-myself-*in* – not, obviously, in anything that exists, at least insofar as it exists, but rather “*I-please-myself-in pleasing-myself-in* – that which is beautiful. Insofar as it does not exist” (ibid.).

If it is true that the affect of this *pleasing-oneself-in* remains subjective through and through, to the point even of the suspension of the empirical world itself, we are once again in the realm of auto-affectation. Nothing in time or in space could produce this affect, which thus, as Derrida puts it, “cathects itself with itself (*qui s’affecte donc lui-même de lui-même*)” (ibid.). The affect is out of space and time – in the “free play” of understanding and imagination in the judgment of taste, the “quickenings” or “animation”

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

(*Belebung*) of the mental powers that underlies the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful (KU § 9), the subject is alone with itself, pleases itself in the spontaneous production of “voluntary forms of possible intuitions” (“General remark on the first section of the *Analytic*,” 240/124). This production, which is in harmony with the understanding and yet produced without the understanding’s legislation, precedes and grounds the pleasure of the beautiful (§ 9, 218/103). But there must be an *occasion* for this free play, which is why Derrida argues that one does not *simply* please oneself in the free production of these forms. Rather, the very fact of this production itself indicates that something has been cut off, suspended. I please-myself-in and yet precisely not *in* anything other than the production of forms of possible experience. In the judgment of taste, the “object” is suspended, cut off, its empirical reality put out of play. Kant is clear that the judgment of taste is based only on the “state of mind” produced by the free play of imagination and understanding (217/102). Nonetheless, this judgment goes out to an object, the occasion of the judgment. There can be no judgment of beauty without an occasion, an object that would produce the correct formal conditions of the judgment of taste itself. This is why this self-affecting “pleasing-oneself-in,” paradoxically, “also indicates that this autoaffection immediately goes outside its inside: it is pure heteroaffection” (TP 47).

Without such a state of affairs, indeed, the judgment of taste would have no universality. Beauty is nothing by itself, outside of the relation to the subject’s feeling; and yet to judge something beautiful requires that one judge as if (*als ob*) beauty were a property of the object in question (KU 218/103). There must be an object, which means that the judgment of beauty is in some sense *provoked* by it, “provoked by what is called the beautiful, that which is said to be beautiful: *outside*, in the object and independently

of its existence” (TP 47). This is what gives this entire recourse to judgment its specific character: the very *structure* of auto-affection is one in which it necessarily “cathects itself [*s’ affecte*] with a pure objectivity,” an objectivity about which one *must* say both that it, the object itself, is beautiful, and that “this statement has universal validity” (ibid.). This problematic structure is what motivates the entire discourse on art: “*The entirely-other cathects me [m’ affecte] with pure pleasure by depriving me both of concept and enjoyment*” (ibid., italics given). Since the pure judgment of taste is made without the legislation of the understanding, science is silent here (see ibid., 89), while the fact that the judgment of taste is disinterested means that I get no enjoyment (*Genuss*) from the object itself. This latter is in fact why the judgment of taste has universal import in spite of the fact that it is not determined by concepts. The subject can find no “private conditions” for the satisfaction he or she “devotes to” this object (*welches er dem Gegenstande widmet*) and so must assume this satisfaction to be grounded in conditions he or she can presuppose in everyone else (KU § 6 211/96-7). I can find nothing personal, private, or particular in my judgment that something is beautiful. Indeed, I am *free* with regard to the pleasure that I take from it (ibid. 211/96).

But precisely this freedom from private interest takes us out of ourselves. I make a judgment about an “object” (the empirical reality of which is nonetheless suspended), a judgment that goes out to others, who must agree with me that this object is beautiful. Derrida suggests that such a paradoxical structure is necessary and irreducible: “The most irreducible heteroaffection inhabits – intrinsically – the most closed autoaffection” (TP 47). The judgment of taste is necessarily directed towards an entirely-other that is at the same time cut off from it. This entirely-other occasions such a judgment, inhabits it,

conditions the subjective auto-affection, and does so necessarily, intrinsically. The pleasure associated with the auto-affective judgment of taste comes from a pure outside that is itself not assimilable to this pleasure (48). The outside is essential to it, is the very condition of its possibility – but is, at the same time, the condition of its impossibility, since it prevents the pleasure from ever achieving the purity that is proper to it.<sup>181</sup> The “great difficulties” (*großen Schwierigkeiten*) that Kant tells us in the Preface to the third *Critique* must accompany the search for any a priori principles of judgment (since any such principles [*Prinzipien*] cannot be derived from the a priori concepts [*Begriffen*] of the understanding, which judgment itself only applies) (KU 169/56-7) are configured by Derrida here in terms of this paradoxical structure of an anexistent subjectivity whose “pleasing-oneself-in” is always already inscribed by an entirely-other. Which is to say, these difficulties reside in a pleasure that is not quite pure, a pleasure that does not quite offer itself up in its essence, does not quite allow us to get clear on what it is we’re talking about. The experience of the beautiful – but is there, indeed, an “experience” of the beautiful on this picture? – is not, and cannot be, unified and pure. Indeed, if feeling this pleasure means to experience it phenomenally, empirically, in the space-time of interested existence, this pleasure is neither felt nor experienced (TP 48). It is “unassimilable” (*ibid.*), a word which might help to suggest why it is that Derrida so insists on associating works of art and beauty in Kant with mourning, since what we are dealing with, according to him, is absence, and an absence that is necessary to the presence of the judgment of taste (see below).

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<sup>181</sup> We’ll return to this structure of conditions of possibility that are at the same time conditions of impossibility, or what Gasché and Bennington call “quasi-transcendentals,” below.

And so, again, we are at the question of the frame. In the third section of the chapter entitled “Parergon,” Derrida will link this problem to the third moment of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, which concerns “the *relation* of the ends that are taken into consideration in them” (KU §§ 10-17, italics given). Kant’s argument here (given in § 11) is twofold. On the one hand, the judgment of taste cannot contain any *subjective* end or purpose because such an end would bring with it an interest, and we know from the first moment of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* (and from what we have seen above) that this judgment is disinterested. On the other, it can’t include an *objective* end or purpose because that would require a concept, and we know from the second moment that the judgment of taste does not involve a concept. Therefore, the judgment of taste must be based on “nothing other than the subjective purposiveness in the representation of an object without any end (objective or subjective), consequently the mere form of purposiveness” (221/106). This is the origin of this *Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*, of which we have seen so much already. The aesthetic “object” has the form of purposiveness without its purpose or end being visible.

It is, indeed, in this exposition that the issue of the frame or parergon arises for Kant, at the end of § 14. Derrida draws our attention to a footnote that appears slightly further on, at the end of the final passage of the third moment, where a tulip that is to become the subject of his interest makes its first appearance.<sup>182</sup> Kant is here attempting to head off a possible objection to his definition of the beautiful in terms of relation as the perception of purposiveness without purpose or of finality without end. There are some things, says Kant, which may have the form of purpose without any purpose being

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<sup>182</sup> And let us note that Derrida’s procedure here is by his own admission “reflective” in the sense Kant uses this term: proceeding from a given particular (the example of the tulip) to, “if possible,” its concept (TP 84).

cognizable; and yet which are nonetheless not beautiful for all that. He gives as an example “the stone utensils often excavated from ancient burial grounds,” which are often “equipped with a hole, as if for a handle, which, although they clearly betray by their shape a purposiveness the end of which one does not know, are nevertheless not declared to be beautiful on that account” (236/120n). Nonetheless, the very fact that they are regarded as works of art (*Kunstwerke*), as artifacts of human intelligence, is already enough, according to Kant, “to require one to admit that one relates their shape to some sort of intention and to a determinate purpose” (ibid.). This is enough to explain why there is no immediate aesthetic satisfaction taken in their intuition. Kant contrasts to this example that of a flower, “e.g., a tulip,” which “is held to be beautiful because a certain purposiveness is encountered in our perception of it which, as we judge it, is not related to any end at all” (ibid.).

It is the tulip that will in some sense guide Derrida in his discussion of Kant’s *Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*, a term, as he puts it, “as faded as ‘disinterested pleasure’” and yet “none the less enigmatic for that” (TP 85). As Derrida describes it, and in terms of this example of the tulip,

It seems to mean this: everything about the tulip, about its form, seems to be organized with a view to an end. Everything about it seems finalized, as if to correspond to a design (according to the analogical mode of the *as if* which governs this whole discourse on nature and on art), and yet there is something missing from this aiming at a goal (*but*) – the end (*bout*). (85-6)

A goal is aimed-at, and yet there is a break, a “cut,” as Derrida will put it, between this aiming-at and the goal itself. This “absolute lack of end” provokes the feeling of the beautiful, its famed disinterest pleasure (ibid.). All of the qualities of the “experience” of

the beautiful have to do with this absolute lack – the pleasure that has no interest, the attraction without anything doing the attracting, the “fascination without desire,” the entire divide between judging subject and an “object” that is put out of play. The beautiful is characterized by “an oriented, finalized movement harmoniously organized *in view* of an end which is never *in view*, seen, an end which is missing” (87). Movement *toward* a goal is key, but this movement must be cut off: “But we must insist on this: the being cut off from the goal only becomes beautiful if everything in it is straining toward the end (*bout*)” (ibid.). Derrida speaks of an “absolute interruption,” a “cut which is pure because made with a single stroke” – only this interruption brings about the feeling of beauty (ibid.).

Having the form of purposiveness, of finality, means for Derrida that the beautiful “object” must strive or strain toward its end. But it is not a question of the object’s being in a position that such a striving cannot be attained, as though the end can be *seen* and thus seen to be impossible. The end must not be *visible* at all. No end can be in sight without the risk of there arising a subjective interest or the possibility of the application of a concept. This is what takes Derrida’s interest in the objection Kant is trying to address in this footnote at the end of § 17. As Derrida puts it, with the example of the utensils (taken, indeed, from a burial ground, so that the tulip, says Derrida, appears to be deposited on a tomb – linking up in this play on Kant’s imagery with the crypt and all that we will see relating to death and mourning) there appear to be “final forms without end which are nevertheless not beautiful; so not every finality without end produces the feeling of beauty” (ibid.).

This raises the question of the nature of the “cut” that separates the beautiful “object,” that appears as though organized toward a particular finality, and the end according to which it is so organized. Kant’s claim, as we have seen, is that the utensils are not felt to be beautiful because we are able to attribute their production to human intelligence; they are manufactured objects made according to some design, some purpose. Being thus related to a determinable purpose appears to be enough to prevent the feeling of beauty. One might still have to reflect on the object, on its purpose – but this would not of course be an *aesthetic* judgment. The suggestion in Kant is that in the case of the utensils we are able to infer an end that thus becomes visible conceptually, preventing any aesthetic feeling from rising. This means that there is a way of negotiating the lack of an end, of “suturing” the cut, to use Derrida’s language. As he puts it, “The finalized gadget is not absolutely cut off from its end, one can mediately prolong it toward a goal, virtually supply it, replace the handle in its hole, rehandle the thing, give the finality its end back” (88). The utensil or gadget is not sufficiently separated from its goal, not absolutely cut off from it. Nothing less than an absolute cut will function for the beautiful.

The question is one of an absolute absence. We are not faced here with the simple absence “of goal,” as Derrida puts it, with the absence of *any* goal, an absence which can be conceptualized, the gap filled in. Rather, we must distinguish “absence of goal” with “absence of *the* goal,” with a unified totality that lacks for nothing but knowledge of its end (88, 90). No missing handles, no unaccounted-for holes. A perfect unity which is nonetheless haunted by an absence. The absence appears, therefore, only at its edge: “the interrupted finality must show itself, both as finality and as interruption –



as edging” (ibid.). The cut can only appear by its edging, by the lack of any adherence to the edge. By nothing, and perhaps even by nothing, by absence, as a kind of *border* or *frame*.<sup>183</sup> I can make inferences about the unearthed utensils, about their purpose and function, the conditions of their production. “I can construct a technology, a sociology, a history, a psychology, a political economy, etc.” (89). In the “without,” the *sans* of the pure cut in the beautiful, however, such a reconstruction is impossible. Science has nothing to say here; it “remains open-mouthed” (ibid.). A “nonknowledge,” as Derrida puts it, “intervenes in a decisive, concise, incisive way, in a determinate place and at a determinate moment, precisely at the end, more precisely with regard to the end” (ibid.). More precisely, for this nonknowledge does not intervene *at* the end, but rather “somewhere in the middle, *dividing the field* whose finality lends itself to knowledge but whose end is hidden from it” (ibid., my italics). An essential part of the beautiful “object” is that it has the *form* of purposiveness or finality, but without any such purpose or finality, as we know. Though this absence appears at the “edge” or “border” of the cut, then, it is not marginal, but goes to the very heart of the beautiful “unity,” a unity organized by this “finalizing” form. Which is how this absence or nonknowledge comes in the “middle” of the field – the interruption of the teleological “placement,” as we might put it, of the beautiful “object” in turn interrupts the teleological whole, the organic unity of this “object,” an “object” which *must* be marked by this absence that “appears,” or rather leaves its trace, inside it, dividing it from within. The aesthetic judgment is not a teleological judgment in part because the “object” that occasions the judgment is absolutely cut off from the purpose that gives it form, unlike the unearthed utensils in

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<sup>183</sup> As David Carroll suggests in his *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989 [1987]), p. 140.

Kant's example. This missing end is thus in a sense *essential* to the beautiful; it constitutes it. The "finalized functioning" of the beautiful "object" must be interrupted, but this very interruption "leaves a trace" of the missing end (although not enough of one that conceptuality might come to suture the cut).

This is why Derrida, in a way that is perhaps no longer quite as surprising for us, invokes *death* here, which, he claims, "always has an essential relation to this cut, the hiatus of the abyss where beauty takes us by surprise" (89). Earlier on, he has already suggested that the pleasure of the beautiful, the pleasure produced by a thing whose existence is of no interest in the judgment of taste, determines what he calls the "enigma of the bereaved relation to beauty" (44). The beautiful object is lost to me; its loss is the occasion of the feeling of the beautiful. I do not experience it, at the very least not as an object in the world. Its existence is suspended or bracketed (*epochē*). One might be tempted to suggest that it is no longer part of the world – but perhaps better, the world is lost to me, lost to the one who feels the pleasure of the beautiful, lost as the world of one's aims, interests, actions, and goals. The judgment of beauty is always singular, the mind always unprepared for it. Beauty takes us by surprise, leaves us speechless. But what leaves us speechless is precisely an *absence*, the trace of an absence that is itself what gives the subject "what one should hesitate to go on calling the *experience* of the beautiful" (90, italics given). This leads Derrida to the remarkable conclusion that in point of fact, "beauty is never seen," neither inside nor outside of the totality in question in the judgment of taste. The "trace of the *sans*" is the "origin of beauty," and yet it is an invisibility, one which "marks a full totality to which it does not belong and which has

nothing to do with it as totality” (ibid.). The *sans* is not visible, it does not exist, and yet “*there is some of it (il y en a)* and it is beautiful” (ibid., italics given).

This means that beauty is never fully present; the “experience” of it depends upon an originary absence that can never come to presence without the very loss of the feeling of the beautiful itself. Hence, then, this “bereaved relation.” The judgment of taste must interrupt the teleology both of the organic unity of the “object” itself and any attempt to suture the cut and provide it with its missing purpose or end. The beautiful “object” must be divided in itself in order to “be” beautiful, to produce its *Wohlgefallen*. Again, we might think of this in terms of the frame or border of this “object,” a frame always already crossed by the trace of what is other to it in order to be constituted at all. As with the disinterested pleasure itself, the purposiveness without purpose that is meant to characterize this third “moment” of the judgment of the beautiful both retains a certain specificity, but only through a kind of “essential” contamination with what is outside and other to it. We see here again the structure of what has been called the “quasi-transcendental” in Derrida’s thinking, that is, that the conditions of possibility of something are also and at the same time its conditions of impossibility.<sup>184</sup> This structure, which is perhaps not quite as paradoxical as it might at first seem, appears here in terms of the purity of the beautiful object. This “object” can only have this purity by being cut off from its end; but the necessary absence of this end must mark this “object” from within, ensuring the impossibility of the very purity it otherwise enables. This is not to suggest that this is, as Bennington puts it, “a sort of failed transcendental.”<sup>185</sup> Indeed, *all*

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<sup>184</sup> See Bennington, “Derridabase,” pp. 267 ff. and “Deconstruction and the Philosophers (The Very Idea),” in *Legislations*, pp. 29ff. Bennington takes the term from Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, op. cit., pp. 274 and 316 ff.

<sup>185</sup> “Deconstruction and the Philosophers,” p. 43.

transcendentals are rather quasitranscendentals, contaminated “originarily” by what they transcend.<sup>186</sup> Bennington points us to an important passage in *Glas* where Derrida discusses the unassimilable:

And what if what cannot be assimilated, the absolute indigestible, played a fundamental role in the system, an abyssal role rather, the abyss playing *an almost transcendental role* [in Bennington: a *quasitranscendental* role, p. 43] and allowing to be formed above it, as a kind of effluvium, a dream of appeasement? Isn't there always an element excluded from the system that assures the system's space of possibility? The transcendental has always been, strictly, a transcategorial, what could be received, formed, terminated in none of the categories intrinsic to the system. The system's vomit.<sup>187</sup>

The system's vomit will indeed become the interest of Derrida in “Economimesis,” where he points to disgust (or, in Guyer and Matthews, “loathing,” *Ekel*) as the one thing that cannot be assimilated by Kant's hierarchy of the Fine-Arts because it “cannot be represented in a way adequate to nature without destroying all aesthetic satisfaction” (KU § 48, 312/190). That is to say, any artistic representation of disgust collapses into the feeling of disgust itself, so that it cannot be taken to be beautiful. It thus cannot be represented, nor can it even “announce itself as a *sensible* object without immediately being caught up in a teleological hierarchy” (E 290, italics given). Art cannot idealize it, which means it cannot be assimilated, cannot enter any “auto-affective circle of mastery and reappropriation” (ibid.). In being unrepresentable, disgust “abolishes representative distance . . . and prevents mourning” (291).

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>187</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln & London: U of Nebraska P, 1986), pp. 151-62a, my italics. See also “Deconstruction and the Philosophers,” p. 43.

Nonetheless, disgust is not simply the negative to the judgment of beauty, distaste the opposite to the system of taste. It forms “the transcendental of the transcendental, the non-transcendentalizable, the non-idealizable” of the system of taste (290). It cannot even be named in its singularity, since it does not have a place in the economy of the beautiful. If it cannot be idealized, it cannot be named as an idealizable object or thing, it cannot thus be *said* within the economy in question. And yet it sits in relation to taste, the distinction taste/disgust, this “oral relation” informs, structures the entire logocentric discourse. Disgust, that which is expelled, plays this role of nontranscendental, it is “outside of the transcendental field,” and yet it occupies a “structuring position” with regard to that field.<sup>188</sup> The excluded is constituted as the transcendental’s transcendental, an “imitation transcendental, transcendental contra-band (ibid.)”

### § 4.3 “There Shall be no Mourning”

We arrive here at what we might call the law of the frame, or what Bennington calls the law of the law.<sup>189</sup> The inside cannot be established without bearing the trace of what is excluded. Something must supplement the system from the outside, but in that way it contaminates it, leaves its mark within – and it does so necessarily. The frame orders and unifies what it frames, and yet this procedure is not and never could be fully complete by the very nature of (or law of) framing itself. The frame bears the mark of what is outside, and yet it cannot internalize it, bring it into its sphere in its entirety and thus master it. The frame “inscribes the outside inside without being able to contain it there.”<sup>190</sup> This entire problematic will link up with what Derrida says elsewhere around terms such as

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<sup>188</sup> Derrida, *Glas*, p. 244a.

<sup>189</sup> “Derridabase,” p. 246.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

the trace, *differance*, or arche-writing. It will also link up with the entire problematic of *krinein*, of crisis and the event (see §§ 5.3, 5.4). But through the figure of death, it returns us also to mourning, which might be as good a place as any to begin to open up these consideration in the direction, ultimately, of politics.

The frame works to ensure idealization, to cut the inside off from external dependence and to allow the work of mourning, here taken as the work of reappropriation, to proceed. One must cut the other off, harness or contain it, in order to internalize it. The parergon thus allows one to “get one’s mourning done” (TP 79). Indeed, the parergon both “provokes and delimits the labor of mourning, labor *in general as* labor of mourning” (79-80, italics given). As does hetero-affection (79). The Freudian images multiply: Derrida speaks of the “binding” (*Verbindung*) of energy as the “condition for the ‘mastery’ (*Herrschaft*) of the pleasure principle,” and of the “theoretical fiction” of the primary process, the “free energy of the originary process, its pure productivity” (80-1). One must not take such images too seriously, of course – the primary process itself, it must be remembered, “is metaphysics, onto-theology itself” (81). Nonetheless, the images are suggestive as to the role of the frame, which works “against the impossibility of *arresting différance* in its contour, of arraigining the heterogeneous (*différance*) in a pose” (80, italics given).

“Differance,” as is well-known, is Derrida’s neologism for both the differing and deferral at work in the play of meaning. The “a” in differance cannot be heard in spoken French – it thus slips though unnoticed; it “remains silent, secret, discreet as a tomb: *oikēsis*” (M 4). Why a tomb? Because this little letter reveals an “economy of death” at work in spoken language (ibid.), an economy that keeps us in the register of the work of

mourning. Differance can only be distinguished from difference through reading the inscribed signs, which reveals a certain necessary connection of the spoken word with inscription and iterability. Meaning depends on the differences between phonemes, between the elements in the system. The “a” of differance reveals how this difference itself remains inaudible (5). Differance makes the presentation of being-present possible while it itself “is never presented as such” (6). We might think of differance, then, as a kind of constituting absence that makes present meaning possible, following a logic in its way very similar to the one we have seen at work in Derrida’s readings of Kant’s third *Critique*. But in fact we should be somewhat more cautious with this language of presence and absence here, since Derrida is clear that such a distinction depends on the “authority of presence” itself, while the attention to differance in his work would at least in part bring our attention to a kind of difference, differance, that would in some sense precede such distinctions. If presence cannot be established without absence, or rather, without the trace of an absence, then we seem to be working in the register of an alterity that is of an entirely other order from this (metaphysical) opposition (see also §§ 2.4, 5.1).

Still, it is perhaps not surprising that Derrida invokes differance in *The Truth in Painting* at a moment in which he is also invoking the work of mourning. Let us ask it again: why is the “a” of differance like a tomb? Because it is a secret, one hidden inside of language in the way that a crypt is hidden in its grounds – heterogeneous to the space of its enclosure, representing a compromise with what is other to that space, but because of its heterogeneity, maintaining only in a state of repetition “the mortal conflict it is

impotent to resolve.”<sup>191</sup> The “a” marks speech’s dependence on the possibility of iteration, of repetition, of the written sign; it marks the “absence” necessary to any presence, and thus the inability ever to arrive at full presence, the full breath of life. Thus, an economy of, or perhaps even with, death. Differance is not death, but is rather the necessary movement of death or absence to any presence, the alterity at the heart of presence. Both a tomb (*oikēsis*) and a familial residence (*oikos*), the movement of alterity that allows any economy (*oikonomia*) its movement and chance. The *necessity* of differance is what makes this “mortal conflict” irresolvable – and what prevents mourning for ever being accomplished, what prevents the other from ever being fully preserved or internalized within the same.

What is written as differance is a “playing movement” that “produces” (in quotation marks) the differences on which meaning depends, that “produces” the effects of these differences (11). This movement dislocates the metaphysical conception of being as presence (to return to a theme raised in § 2.4 in the context of Husserl). The movement or play of differance is both a temporal deferral of meaning and a spatial differentiation of the elements of the economy of meaning. It differentiates by putting a distance, a space, between signs, by separating up the elements of the system. But this means that meaning is in some sense continually put off, deferred, since the meaning of any given sign is always dependent on other signs. In this sense, differance marks a movement in which both temporalization and spacing are connected, as “the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time” (8). Each “so-called ‘present’ element,” says Derrida, “is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation

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<sup>191</sup> To return to the language of “Fors,” p. 70.



to the future element” (13). This means that what he calls the “trace” of these other elements is “related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past” (ibid.). This other that leaves its trace on the “present” element is what this element “absolutely is not” – it is not any modified past or future of this element (ibid.). An “interval” separates the present from what it is not, an interval that divides the present “in and of itself” (ibid.). This interval is a division, but it is a dynamic one. The logic of differance, of the trace of the other or of what is “outside” the work, is a movement as well as a differing of elements – which is what brings Derrida to conclude that differance is both the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space.

This has obvious consequences for the notion of consciousness. Derrida will link the names of both Nietzsche and Freud to “the question of the primacy of presence as consciousness” (18), but let us focus only very briefly on Freud, since Derrida invokes here a Freudian notion that we have already seen taken up in Lyotard’s thought (see § 3.4). Every possible mode of presence is constituted by radical alterity, according to Derrida, which means that this alterity is “marked by the irreducibility of the aftereffect, the delay” (21). The “metaphysical discourse of phenomenology” is therefore inadequate to discussions of this “trace” (ibid.). An entirely new conception of “temporality” is necessary in order to think what is here invoked under the banners of “trace” and “differance.” As Lyotard also suggests, this notion of “temporality” (but according to the logic of differance it cannot, of course, *simply* be described in terms of temporality) finds an expression in Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit*, or, to invoke again Laplanche’s suggested

English translation, “afterwardsness.”<sup>192</sup> Derrida describes this problematic thinking of the delay of difference in the following way:

The structure of delay (*Nachträglichkeit*) in effect forbids that one make of temporalization (temporization [the term Derrida uses to describe this structure of the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space]) a simple dialectical complication of the living present as an originary and unceasing synthesis – a synthesis constantly directed back on itself, gathered in on itself and gathering – of retentional traces and protentional openings. The alterity of the “unconscious” makes us concerned not with horizons of modified – past or future – presents, but with a “past” that has never been present, and which never will be, whose future to come will never be a *production* or a reproduction in the form of presence. Therefore the concept of trace is incompatible with the concept of retention, of the becoming-past of what has been present. One cannot think the trace – and therefore, *différance* – on the basis of the present, or of the presence of the present. (M 21, italics given)

With this reference to a “past that has never been present,” it is not surprising that Derrida will immediately invoke Levinas and his critique of classical ontology in the essay “Différance” from which we are quoting. Let us note this in passing, since this marks a point of contact in the ethical thought of both writers. We shall have occasion to return in the next chapter in some way to this “admiring and indispensable reference to Levinas” that Derrida himself, indeed, claims to share with Lyotard.<sup>193</sup> Nonetheless, with this brief discussion of difference let us return to these themes as they pertain to the work of the frame in Kant.

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<sup>192</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, Strachey translates *Nachträglichkeit* as “deferred action.” For reference to Laplanche’s preferred translation, see § 3.4 and Jean Laplanche, “Notes on Afterwardsness” in his *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 260-5.

<sup>193</sup> Derrida marks this shared admiration for Levinas in a short article written after Lyotard’s death and published in *Libération*, March 22, 1998. See the little piece entitled “All-Out Friendship” in WM 214-5.

Given what we have seen, then, it is clear that the frame could never fulfill the task Derrida suggests it has in Kant's discourse on art and on the beautiful, this self-protection of the work that itself works against the impossibility of arresting difference. Difference cannot be arrested. Indeed, it is precisely this movement that gets any economy going. It is the "remainders" of any system, its surpluses and supplements, excesses and overflowings, that put any economy into motion "by exposing it to its chance" (TP 4). Given the logic of the parergon, the law of the frame that we have been exploring, this openness to chance is, indeed, *necessary*.<sup>194</sup> Part of Derrida's efforts in the chapter on Kant in *The Truth in Painting* will be to show the mechanisms or strategies whereby the Kantian discourse downplays this necessary chance, attempts, unsuccessfully, to frame it, to draw a border around it. But it is also to show, through Kant's discourse, the simultaneous necessity of the frame itself.<sup>195</sup>

The entire critical framework is indeed in question here, specifically Kant's efforts to frame the Analytic of the Beautiful with the transcendental analytic of the first *Critique*. As Derrida points out, the entire structure of the Analytic of the Beautiful (as well as that of the Analytic of the Sublime, we might add – with a couple of differences) is organized around the analytic of concepts, as Kant makes clear in a footnote at the outset of the first section: "In seeking the moments to which this power of judgment attends in its reflection, I have been guided by the logical functions for judging (for a relation to the understanding is always contained even in the judgment of taste)" (KU 203/89). It is this assumption that there be some link between understanding and imagination in the beautiful that raises Derrida's suspicions. The relation of

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<sup>194</sup> See Bennington, "Derridabase," p. 247.

<sup>195</sup> As David Carroll points out. Carroll is rightly sensitive to the fact that it would be very hasty to classify Derrida's reading of the third *Critique* here as "anti-Kantian." See *Paraesthetics*, p. 141.

understanding to imagination in the aesthetic judgment “is neither certain nor essential” and yet it “furnishes the frame of this whole discourse; and, within it, of the discourse on the frame” (TP 71). This is particularly strange, according to Derrida, given that Kant quickly proceeds to claim, in the second moment of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, that the beautiful “pleases universally without a concept” (KU 219/104). In this sense, then, the *Analytic of the Beautiful* “ceaselessly undoes the labor of the frame to the extent that, while letting itself be squared up by the analytic of concepts and by the doctrine of judgment, it describes the absence of concept in the activity of taste” (TP 75). The frame labors, warps or gives (*travaille*), “creaks and cracks, breaks down and dislocates even as it cooperates in the production of the product” (*ibid.*, see also n. 16). Derrida points to the role that *analogy* plays in maintaining the entire structure of the *Critique of Judgment*, in gathering together the “without-concept” and the concept, “the *without* and the *with*” (76, italics given). The nonconceptual is linked to the conceptual through analogy (*ibid.*), itself a *conceptual* operation. The origin of analogy, says Derrida in “Economimesis,” “that from which analogy proceeds and towards which it returns, is the *logos*, reason and word” (E 277). This in turn links us back to the entire problematic of “Economimesis” and the various analogies that Derrida draws our attention to there: between human and divine production; between God’s commands and a nature that speaks in order to transmit to genius; between the judgment of taste and morality (see especially 277-9).

We are still, then, firmly in the realm of humanism. Let us pursue it, however briefly, through the final pages of Derrida’s reading of the judgment of taste in *The Truth in Painting*. The beauty of “man” is not like that of the tulip. The tulip has what Kant calls “free beauty” (*pulchritudo vaga*), a kind of beauty which presupposes no end or

purpose, “no concept of what the object ought to be” (KU § 16, 229/114). But this term is introduced (at the end of the third moment of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*) in opposition to another kind of beauty, “merely adherent<sup>196</sup> beauty” (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). Flowers are “free natural beauties,” as are many birds and crustaceans, but also designs *à la grecque*, the foliage on borders or wallpaper, and “all music without text.” However, not all things can have such beauty. The beauty of a human being (strangely, Kant finds it necessary here to stress that “in this species” that would include “a man, a woman, or a child”), of a horse, or of a building (again, we’re given a list that might be slightly puzzling: “a church, a palace, an arsenal, or a garden-house”) – each of these presupposes “a concept of the end that determines what the thing should be, hence a concept of its perfection, and is thus merely adherent (*adhärierende*) beauty” (230/114). Any judgment about these things must include “the way in which the manifold is good for the thing itself, in accordance with its end,” and thus cannot be a *pure* judgment of taste (230/115). The *sans* and the *sans-fins*, as Derrida puts it, cannot be cut out in the experience of these objects (TP 106).

Derrida argues that all three of the examples Kant gives of adherent beauty, despite their apparent diversity, are nonetheless anthropological; they cannot be separated from the thought of their end because this end relates back to human interests, to “man.” The end or goal of the building is determined by the human purposes that gave it its being, and the building cannot be detached from this end. This is perhaps not so difficult to comprehend. But even the horse is conceived, argues Derrida, according to the use it gives human beings, the work it does on behalf of “man” (106-7). The horse has external objective purposiveness, to use Kant’s language (§ 15), it has a *utility* for human beings

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<sup>196</sup> *Anhängende*, although Kant also uses *adhärierende*. See Guyer and Matthews’ note, CE 114.

that cannot be suspended in any judgment of its form. The *teleological* nature of the Analytic of the Beautiful appears in this example. Derrida points to § 63 of the *Critique of Judgment*, in the Critique of Teleological Judging, where Kant once again refers to the horse, this time in the context of the uses it serves for “man.” The horse serves humanity’s rational ends (along with the ox and “in Minorca even the ass and the swine for plowing”) and so has a purpose relative to those ends, even if human inclinations are “by no means predestined by nature” (KU 368/240-1). Nonetheless, this external purpose of the horse can be regarded as a *natural* end (as opposed to a merely relative one) “under the condition that the existence of that for which it is advantageous, whether in a proximate or distant way, is in itself an end of nature” (368/241). In § 83, as we have seen (§ 1.4), Kant says that human beings are precisely that – at least, for *reflective* judgment. This is what makes Derrida say that the example of the horse makes the third *Critique’s* dependence on what he calls a “reflexive humanism” that much clearer. But one must look ahead in order to catch the significance of this example; the fact that the horse can have only adherent beauty can itself only be explained by the Critique of Teleological Judging. Thus is this a book that “must be read from the other end” (TP 105). A little further on, Derrida puts it in the following way:

To justify thus the choice of the example [of the horse], one has to look at what the second part of the book (notably in § 83) tells us about man: man is, like all organized beings, an end in nature, but he is also, here on earth, the final end of nature. The whole system of ends is oriented by him and for him. This is in conformity with the principles of reason. For *reflexive judgment*, of course, and not for *determinant judgment*. Man is the final goal of nature. (107, italics given)

If humanity is the final goal of nature, then whatever final end or goal it has with regard to nature must be sought in nature's beneficence. We return here, again and at last, to the synthesizing function of the third *Critique*, a synthesis that will bring the world of the rational (human) subject together. Derrida speaks of the "antinomic opposition between subjective finalism and objective mechanism" (TP 107) which can only be resolved through recourse to the supersensible, that "intelligible substratum of nature outside us and within us," as Kant himself describes it (KU 345/220). Nature, as we have seen (§ 1.4), has two ends for human beings: that which "can be satisfied by the beneficence of nature itself," happiness; and "the aptitude and skill for all sorts of ends for which [it] can use nature (external and internal)," culture (KU § 83, 429-30/297). Happiness and culture, then, "presuppose that man puts to work what nature puts at his disposal" (TP 107).

Hence the example of the horse, which in spite of appearances shows the "fundamental humanism" (115) of the system. But as Derrida points out, the example of the horse does not occupy the same place as "man" in the chain of examples Kant gives. Neither "suffers the *sans*" (109) of free or vague beauty, that beauty Derrida calls errant or wandering (see 91-3). Both are without the *sans* of the pure cut, are *sans* the *sans*. But this has a different effect on each. Both horse and building are capable of having adherent beauty. But humanity has a further capability, and a further distinction. Only the human is capable of presentation (*Darstellung*), since, as we have seen, "only he is capable of production" (110). Production, of course, is linked to the faculty of imagination. This capability of production, of presentation, means that the human not only cannot be separated from its end such that its beauty might be "free" beauty. It also

means that the human can produce an “ideal” of beauty – and ultimately, that it is the only being that admits of *having* such an ideal.

Kant discusses the ideal of beauty in § 17, the section immediately following the distinction between free and adherent beauty. Everyone must be able to produce in him or herself an idea of beauty as an “archetype of taste” which then provides the rule by which every object of taste is to be judged (KU 232/116-7). But the word “idea” designates a concept of reason (*Vernunftbegriff*), and this archetype, being one of taste, cannot be represented through concepts. So Kant immediately speaks rather of an *ideal* of beauty, ideal normally taken to mean a “representation (*Vorstellung*) of an individual being as adequate to an idea” (232/117). The archetype of taste, as an ideal, “rests on reason’s indeterminate idea of a maximum,” but given that it cannot be represented through concepts, it occurs “only in an individual presentation (*Darstellung*),” and thus “would better be called the ideal of the beautiful, something that we strive to produce in ourselves even if we are not in possession of it” (*ibid.*).

What species admits of such an ideal? We must first note, says Kant, that “the beauty for which an idea is sought must not be a vague beauty” but must rather “be a beauty **fixed** by a concept of objective purposiveness” (*ibid.*, emphasis given). It thus “must not belong to the object of an entirely pure judgment of taste, but rather to one of a partly intellectualized judgment of taste” (232-3/117). The pure judgment of taste, then, is opposed to the ideal, as Derrida points out (TP 111). This means there can be no ideal beauty of flowers, furnishings, or of any other thing that can partake in free or vague beauty. Nonetheless, says Kant, an ideal of beauty adhering even to determinant ends such as “a beautiful residence, a beautiful tree, beautiful gardens, etc.” also cannot be



represented, “presumably because the ends are not adequately determined and fixed by their concept, and consequently the purposiveness is almost as free as in the case of vague beauty” (KU 233/117). Only the human being is capable of an ideal of beauty, because it has its end in itself. “Man,” in Kant’s words, “determines his ends himself through reason, or, where he must derive them from external perception can nevertheless compare them to essential and universal ends and in that case also aesthetically judge their agreement with them” (ibid.).

The human avoids the *sans*, does not and cannot go without its end – but it also goes further, providing its own form as the ideal by which all objects of taste are judged. It can do this because it is endowed with reason and can fix its end for itself. “Man” completes himself (TP 111). The entire distinction between pure and ideal, between *sans* and non-*sans*, between free and adherent beauty, the without-end and the not-without-end, is governed, according to Derrida, by “man” itself. But not from some position *between* free and adherent beauty, between the *sans* and the non-*sans*. “He is situated on one side only (adherence to self, to his own end) and from that side he puts errancy [i.e., free or vague beauty] in perspective” (ibid.). The human has a special place in nature:

The only being in nature to give himself his own ends, to raise himself in the *sans*, to complete himself and think from his end; he is the only one to form an ideal of beauty, to apprehend the *sans* of others. He is not errant. He cannot conceive of himself without goal and that is why he is in the full center of this point of view. (Ibid.)

“Man” is thus the subject of this discourse in more than one way – and yet “in his humanity, [he] withdraws from his own discourse” (112). A “pure human aesthetic” is impossible, prohibited, “insofar as the *sans* of the pure cut is effaced” in the human (ibid.). How is this possible? How does humanity escape from a discourse on aesthetics

that takes that very humanity as the “central origin”? Kant tells us in § 17 that the ideal of beauty, which “can be expected only in the human figure,” “consists in the expression of the moral” (235/120). We are not dealing with a “mere judgment of taste” when we judge with regard to this form (236/120). Humanity’s inner vocation is what prevents the *sans* of the pure cut from appearing with regard to the human form: “If the human form and it alone has the right to ideal beauty, it is because it expresses the inside and this inside is a relation of reason to a pure moral end” (TP 114).

The ideal of beauty is opposed to the pure judgment of taste. The former can only be of adherent beauty, while the latter concern free or errant beauties exclusively. Derrida suggests that the entire set of distinctions at work here, between the ideal and pure, the not-without-end and the without-end, the adherent and the free, is grounded by the distinction between sense and non-sense (111). The ideal of beauty provides the standard against which free or errant beauties are measured. It gets errancy, vagueness (*vaga*) into perspective. Through the interests of reason, according to humanity’s rational vocation. If free or errant beauty wanders, if science has nothing to say about it, if there is no way to supplement a singular free beauty with a concept, which will come as “a saturating generality” in order to “drink up or efface the *sans* of the pure cut” (95), humanity avoids this silence because it gives itself its own end without regard for nature. The *sans-fin*, to return to the way Derrida puts it in “Economimesis,” “leads us back to ourselves. Because the outside appears purposeless, we seek purpose within” (279).

We find it in a moral vocation that prevents us from getting lost, from wandering. Humans are capable of an ideal because they cannot be detached from their purpose. One cannot have a pure aesthetic judgment of another human because the end must always

stay at least partly in view. The human can be idealized. Its place between nature and God is confirmed. This allows for a certain “course” to be steered with regard to humans, for sense and direction to be given back to errancy (TP 117).

The *sans* of the pure cut interrupts the process of idealization (111). It introduces an alterity in the heart of pleasure, an other that must remain entirely other because it cannot be conceptualized, domesticated. It resists generalization – the tulip is *only* beautiful insofar as it is judged without reference to any of the things science can say about it. It is unconditioned by any end or purpose, by any relation to a general category that would place it as a member of a specific species or kind. This is, indeed, the entire problematic of this and any discourse on the beautiful. Cut off from its goal, what Kant calls vague or free beauty “refers only to itself, to the singular existent” (93). The judgment of beauty is singular, beauty only ever beautiful once; and yet “judgment classifies it and drags that *once* into the series or into the objective generality of the concept” (ibid., italics given). This is what produces the “logical monsters” of which Lyotard speaks in the *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*: “a delight without incentive or motive, a subjective universality, a perceived finality, an exemplary necessity” (LAS 49). Borrowed from the logic of the understanding, these designations nonetheless suffer all the tensions of this singular “experience.” Kant’s discourse on the beautiful “must deal only with singularities which must give rise only to universalizable judgments” (TP 93). The beautiful is detached, cut off, but it must also be reattached, re-placed, just as each individual constituent of pure philosophy (understanding, judgment, reason as theoretical and as practical, etc.) must be separated, examined, and then reinserted into the system having undergone the critical suspension, the *krinein*, of critical philosophy

(38-9). This has everything to do with the parergon, with the importance of frames in general (93). But given what we have seen, can this process of reattachment, this harnessing of a non-conceptual, non-sensical other, ever fully succeed? What does the surprise of beauty, the interruption of idealization, mean for the process of idealization itself?

Looking ahead, let us turn to a footnote in “The Ends of Man” to which we will return in the next chapter (§ 5.1). Reason demands the thought of the unconditioned for any given conditioned (see, for instance, KU 345/220). It is humanity’s essence as a rational being to think the end in itself (M 122, n). This includes, preeminently, thinking its own end, which is a moral end. Its moral vocation is announced precisely in this ability to think its own end, its own purpose. This end is thus also *infinite*, “since the thinking of the unconditioned is also the thinking which raises itself above experience, above finitude” (ibid.). The movement of idealization is precisely this movement toward infinity, above the contingencies and particularities of finitude (§ 2.4).

It is here, says Derrida, “that anthropology regains all its contested authority,” at the point where humanity’s essence as a rational being is announced and the philosopher says “we” (ibid.). This “teleology of the first person plural” (121) is what prevents the human form from free or vague beauty – humanity remains unified by its end, by a universal rational vocation. Humanity resolves the *sans* of errant beauty, its non-sense, from this place of sense, from this place of the thought of the unconditioned that governs the conditioned. But will the human being be so readily unified? Idealized? And what might the logic of the parergon tell us about the possibility of this unified and universal “man”? About the idea or project of universal humanity and of universal history?

This returns us to the political considerations invoked by Derrida at various points in both “The Ends of Man” and in his readings of Kant, considerations to which we shall turn in the next chapter. Let us end here with only one final consideration, taking our lead from a text that Derrida wrote in honor of Lyotard after the latter’s death, the essay entitled “Lyotard and *Us*” (WM 216-41). There, speaking about the debt that one owes even (and especially) to the friend that has passed away, Derrida invokes the notion of an absence without return, an absence so profound that it cannot enter into the process of idealization, cannot be brought into the realm of auto-affection. Such an absence “would thus open on to the unconditional” (223). The unconditional, a death without death, a death that would never end, never be brought back up and internalized, a death that cannot be mourned. “There shall be no mourning” – a phrase taken from Lyotard the various meanings of which Derrida plays upon, in a way that helps us to consider the implications of the frame and of the work of mourning Derrida associates with this entire problematic. For is it not possible that the law of frame that we have emphasized would mean that the process of idealization is always susceptible to interruption, and that the work of mourning is thus never complete? That the openness to chance that we have seen to be a kind of necessity of framing might mean that the condition for the possibility of idealization is at the same time, according to the logic of the “quasi-transcendental,” the conditions for its impossibility? Might this not mean a kind of “essential” openness to the very notion of “man” itself, the unity of the human?

It is an openness with political implications. In *Specters of Marx* Derrida describes mourning, in a highly political context, as consisting always “in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present,” in the first place through the processes of

identification and of localization (SM 9) – both operations of the frame or paregon. In this sense, “all ontologization, all semanticization – philosophical, hermeneutical, or psychoanalytical – find itself caught up in this work of mourning but, as such, it does not yet think it” (ibid.). In a sense we might say that thinking this work of mourning, thinking of mourning in this way, opens the problematic of politics for both Derrida and for Lyotard. One has to know what one mourns, that is, what one ontologizes, fixes in its place, idealizes to infinity. “Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt” (ibid.). Everything we have seen here seems to suggest the essential possibility of just such confusion or doubt. And yet, perhaps strangely, we shall see that this does not mean that the fact that “there shall be no mourning” is to be taken negatively.

**Chapter Five**  
**Of Crisis, Justice, and an “Enlightenment” to Come:**  
**Philosophy, Politics, and the Event**

**5.1 The End(s) of Humanism**

From what we have seen in Chapter 4, we are now perhaps able to read as fully as possible Derrida’s claim, in the final passages of “The Ends of Man,” that “the ‘logic’ of every relation to the outside is very complex and surprising” (135). Let us allow this “surprise” to reverberate a little. It will prove to be very important for the political aspects of this entire problematic of the parergon and of what we have been calling the law of the law. Given the very structure of the frame, the necessity that any border be open to chance, the element of surprise is always a necessary possibility. Since the frame or border provides a kind of legality for whatever it is that it contains (artwork, theory, any economy of meaning), this means that the law must in some sense also be open to the surprise of this chance, to what we might call an “event,” in a sense very similar to that one that we have seen Lyotard use with regard to this term (§ 3.4). Now that we have seen how Derrida develops this “logic” through his reading of Kant’s Critique of Aesthetic Judging, let us turn, however briefly, to its significance for his reading of the history of Western metaphysics more generally. Once again the complex dynamic of Derrida’s relationship to Kant will prove helpful as we turn more and more to what becomes overtly “political” in this reading.

But indeed, we need not, initially, turn too far. At the outset of “Economimesis” Derrida speaks about reading Kant in a way that tells us much about his view of the

reading of philosophy more generally. In the context of a discussion of the “politics” that he argues operates on the Kantian critique of judgments of taste, he states that politics and political economy (at least one of the “economies” in “econo-mimesis”) “are implicated in every discourse on art and on the beautiful” (263). But to this very general claim Derrida immediately adds another, to the effect that any reading of such discourses must try to discern the *specificity* of this implication. In Kant’s discourse, for instance, certain motifs can be detected that go right back to the tradition of Plato and Aristotle, while others “would be inadmissible within an Aristotelian or Platonic politics of art” (ibid.). Simply sorting them out will not suffice, however, because each time these motifs are taken up again, their place in a new system, a new economy, warps them, changes their sense and function. This means that rigorous criteria are still essential in order to judge philosophical specificity, which for Derrida means seeking out what limits or frames a body of work, establishing that which marks whatever is proper to the system. It is necessary to establish, as closely as possible, the conditions that make a particular discourse possible. Here is the passage in question:

Folded into a new system, the long sequences [those in Kant’s text, for instance, going back to Plato and Aristotle] are displaced; their sense and function change. Once inserted into another network, the ‘same’ philosopheme is no longer the same, and besides it never had an identity external to its functioning. Simultaneously, ‘unique and original’ [*inédits*] philosophemes, if there are any, as soon as they enter into articulated composition with inherited philosophemes, are affected by that composition over the whole of their surface and under every angle. We are nowhere near disposing of rigorous criteria for judging philosophical specificity, the precise limits framing a corpus or what properly belongs [*le propre*] to a system. The very project of such a delimitation itself already belongs to a set of



conditions [*un ensemble*] that remains to be thought. In turn, even the concept of belonging [to a set] is open to elaboration, that is, dislocation, by the structure of the *parergon*. (ibid.) It is of course no accident that we return immediately to the *parergon*. The question of the frames of a discourse is obviously central to establishing its conditions of possibility, and thus its specificity. This seems to be a clear instance of what might be called the “transcendental” aspect of Derrida’s thought, an aspect that must no doubt begin to mark the presence of Kant in Derrida’s work.<sup>197</sup> Nonetheless, if there is something like a “transcendental” aspect to Derrida’s thought, we have seen through the structure of the “quasi-transcendental” that it cannot be understood in a straightforwardly Kantian sense. That the conditions of possibility must also be the conditions of impossibility must have a profound effect on how the transcendental is thought – an effect that is not without its political implications, as I will try to show.

But for now let me mark at least a few of the things that come out of this passage. First, reading must begin with the specificity of a certain text; it begins, to some measure at least, with the particularity, the uniqueness, of a work. Given that the borders or frames of a work will be linked to commitments (philosophical or otherwise) that make it possible, we can already sense that this economizing has effects that can be called political. But given this focus on specificity, the question here is not whether a political economy is implicated (generally) in any given discourse, but rather *how* one is, and which one, in a particular (con)text. One cannot reduce a given “philosopheme” to an abstract generality that takes no account of the role it plays in the economy of a specific discourse – indeed, as Derrida suggests, no “philosopheme” has meaning outside of a

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<sup>197</sup> In what follows we shall try to elucidate this “presence” or “influence” more fully through Derrida’s more explicitly political writings.

specific context, but takes its meaning *only* in relation to the other elements of the system.

Second point: this specificity leads “outward,” to the edges or borders of the text, to the conditions of its limiting. The question of the context here, too, is obviously central. But it is not, indeed, exhaustive, for – and this is a third point – the establishing or judging of these borders has its own effects – openness to elaboration, as Derrida puts it in the final sentence of this passage, is simultaneously openness to *dislocation*, that is, openness to recontextualization.

This passage provides a sense, then, at least initially, for how it is that a politics might “act upon” Kant’s discourse (or, indeed, any other) on art and the beautiful, if it is as one of the ways of placing this discourse in a particular context, framing it within a certain philosophico-political network.<sup>198</sup> The specificity of any given context notwithstanding, the *necessity* of framing itself is not, in fact, particular, is not confined to a specific context. All contexts are framed by definition, and are thus in a sense governed by that framing. In Derrida’s language, then, all texts operate according to a *law*, or really according to two laws. On the one hand, they are made possible through *conditions* that can be identified and elucidated. These conditions govern the economy of meaning of any particular text, determine what has sense and what is non-sense, structure hierarchies and provide what Derrida sometimes calls “guardrails” between the inside and outside of the system of meaning.<sup>199</sup> They lay down the specific law (or sets of laws) according to which a given text must operate in order to have meaning at all. We could

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<sup>198</sup> By now it should be clear that our suggestion will have to be that *all* conditions of possibility are political in this sense.

<sup>199</sup> See, for instance, the interview entitled “*Ja, or the faux-bond II*,” trans. Peggy Kamuf, in the collection *Points . . . Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), pp. 30-77, this ref. p. 55.

say that this is “structurally” necessary: a context is only a context in virtue of its being framed, in virtue of the fact that its components are governed by the law of its limits. On the other hand, each such law is subject to the “law of the law” that we have seen in the previous chapter, i.e., that it is always already marked by what it excludes and tries to keep at bay (§ 4.3). Nonetheless, the first “law” is as necessary as the second. To keep within the borders or rails that are guarded by the logic of the text is to hang on to what, for instance, “has made science possible or rather a science, a region, and an epoch, or a model of linguistic science.”<sup>200</sup> For anything like a science to be possible, decisions have to be made, certain commitments must go unchallenged. There is always the *demand* for system, a demand to which Kant, we know, was very sensitive. The conditions that make such a science, such an epoch, possible, however, at the same time interrupt them according to the logic of the parergon that we have seen at work in Kant’s texts on art and the beautiful. This science, region, or epoch, this “model of linguistic science” that is the subject of Derrida’s discussion here (but it is only an example of a more encompassing logic we are trying to establish more firmly), remains always open given the porousness of the border or frame itself. Law in the first sense provides the conditions for discourse; but it itself is always susceptible to the “law” that it, in turn, is conditioned by what is both outside the system and therefore unconditioned by that system. All law demands exclusion, inadmissibility. These terms, “conditioned” and “unconditioned,” are important ones for Derrida’s political thought, and we shall return to them. But in the context of this discussion here we already see the effects this law of the law will have on any discourse. For, as Derrida puts it,

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

if the ideal effect of such an internal system [such as that of the linguistic system Derrida is discussing here, but the point will apply to any such system] is constantly being overrun [according to this “parergonal” logic, this “law of the law”], if it has to defend itself against what has always deconstructed it as if from within and according to necessary laws, then this model of scientificity, *this* scientific project should be put back into question or at least complicated – *at the point where it poses an obstacle to a more powerful, as well as a more transformative science*, where it sustains at the same time a scientism and an obscurantism.<sup>201</sup> Science, say a particular approach to linguistics, is necessary, even “critical” (ibid. 54); and yet in attempting to elucidate particular aspects of linguistic structure or meaning, to illuminate or demystify the fact of linguistic meaning, it also obscures its commitments, its presuppositions, even its “metaphysics.” Interrogation of its boundaries and borders, of the law of its frame, is therefore itself also a kind of elucidation or “demystification” – which is why Derrida comes to associate deconstruction with the process of “illumination” central to the metaphor of “enlightenment.”<sup>202</sup> But this interrogation goes further, since it is also what opens the possibility of transformation or of dislocation. This interrogation reveals the very conditions of the frame itself, and in so doing attempts to uncover what motivates this particular framing, the ends or goals of drawing the border *here* and not elsewhere, the stakes, including the political stakes, of its exclusions and inadmissions (see AT 160). In working on the borders or frames, it works in a way that exceeds their law. No system, not even a science, can remain closed to this interrogation, closed and sealed within its own economy of meaning, the structures of its own discourse.

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid. The second set of italics are mine.

<sup>202</sup> See, for instance, AT 148, 159; but also 160 where Derrida distinguishes between the kind of demystification deconstruction is, and “a simple progressive demystification in the style of the Enlightenment.”

Nonetheless, we must stress again the necessity of the conditions themselves. It is in the necessity of such conditions – and in the exclusions that are part and parcel of the parergon – that philosophical writing is political from the start, and it is this political necessity that allows us to begin here by attempting to link what Derrida says in “Economimesis” about a politics that works on any discourse to another, though related, discourse, one long favored by philosophy: the discourse on *anthropos*, on “man.” This discourse plays an important role not only in Derrida’s readings of Kant’s third *Critique*, as we have seen, but also in his attempts to reconfigure ethics and politics in a “world” that is undergoing all the difficulties associated with what is often called “globalization,” “internationalization,” or even, in a rather literal translation of the French, “worldization” (*mondialisation*). Such a phenomenon is one of the questioning, precisely, of frames or borders, both in a geo-political sense (the partitioning of the globe into nation states, for instance) and in what we might call an anthropological-political sense (the separation of peoples or cultures, of the “civilized” from the lawless or “savage” – but also, indeed, of humans from non-humans). The question of the human also figures very importantly in Lyotard (see § 5.2), and I want to suggest that the figure of the human and the tradition of humanism that it invokes are not accidental issues for either thinker. In an ambiguous way, they are indeed important aspects to the politics at stake in the thought of each.

Derrida’s famed meditation on this discourse, “The Ends of Man,” begins, as does “Economimesis,” with the invocation of a lurking politics, this one having to do with philosophical colloquia such as the one at which “The Ends of Man” was first delivered. Every philosophical colloquium, he tells us there, “necessarily has a political significance” (M 111). The colloquium in question has chosen this discourse on

*anthropos* as its theme. Derrida's suspicions regarding this notion of "man" are made clear from the outset. Contrary to the implied promise of a "common element," "the universality of philosophical discourse" that gives support to the idea of an international philosophical colloquium, he speaks of "all those places – cultural, linguistic, political, etc. – where the organization of a philosophical colloquium simply would have no meaning" (112). These are not places, obviously, where philosophy might be *contested*. They are places where the notion of a philosophical colloquium is outside the system of meaning, literally meaningless (see SP 103). That such places exist undermines philosophy's assumption – an assumption usually made under the banner, precisely, of universal humanity, universal *anthropos* – that it can mediate cultural differences. Philosophy (as it is construed, obviously, in the "West" – leaving aside for now the difficult question of what the "West" may mean) is faced with a "difference" that is "of an entirely other order" than the differences of philosophical opinion that would have currency in any such colloquium, including discourses that would oppose themselves to philosophical thought. This "other" is not philosophical, but it is not "other" in such a way that it would simply be the negative of philosophy, which would link it to philosophical thought in a relation similar to Hegel's self and Other, so that philosophy might mediate itself through this other and in so doing sublimate it, bring it up into itself. Such an other as this latter would retain meaning for philosophy, would be open to a dialectical movement by which it could be incorporated into philosophical meaning. The problem with this would be the question of what might exceed philosophy, what might be neglected or left behind in this movement of sublation – externalized as contingent, irrelevant, even "irrational." Here, on the contrary, the otherness in question is not and

will not become philosophy's own.<sup>203</sup> Nor, importantly, is this other "barren," that is, empty, impoverished, or lifeless (M 113). If there are those who do not take part in this "universal" discourse, it is not due to educational or cultural lack. They do not speak the language of philosophy, nor that of "man" insofar as it is conceived by this philosophy.

The universal philosophical discourse in question here is of course not a reality but an Idea, "a project," as Derrida puts it (112). But in this claim to universality it fails to acknowledge the conditions of its own possibility, its own frames or borders – that it is "linked by its essence . . . to a certain group of languages and 'cultures'" (ibid.), what Derrida will call in a much later essay "Greco-European" or "Greco-Roman-Arab" languages or "cultures" (HPD 14). All of which is, as Derrida concedes, obvious enough, but it is worth repeating, and not only because he suggests that the very interest in what he calls "the universality of the anthropos" can be read as a part of a more general effort to interiorize the difference of this non-philosophical, non-Western other, a difference which "bears down, with a mute, growing and menacing pressure, on the enclosure of Western collocation" (M 113). It is worth repeating also because Derrida will invoke it again in the final passages of "The Ends of Man" when he speaks of "the violent relationship of the whole of the West to its other" (134). This interiorizing of the other is itself violent, an attempt at mastering, as Len Lawlor puts it, those places in the world where the discussion of the issues designated as "philosophy," those questions considered

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<sup>203</sup> I take this notion of an otherness that is not philosophy's own from Rodolphe Gasché. For a discussion of an alterity in Derrida that would not be a mere negativity complicit with Hegelian dialectics, see his *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard UP, 1986), particularly pp. 95-105. For reference to an Otherness that is no longer thinking's own, p. 101. This would be linked to Geoffrey Bennington's claim that "direct opposition to Hegel only fuels his dialectical machinery" and that therefore deconstruction must "proceed according to a nonoppositional difference." See his "Derridabase" in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993), p. 290.

“philosophical,” are without sense, foreign, unrecognizable.<sup>204</sup> The presence of this violence here would seem to put a very strange pressure, then, a political pressure, on the discourse of anthropos, which is, of course, also the discourse of humanism.

Derrida’s position with regard to humanism is well known, accusing as he does the more or less “essentially” humanistic thinking of much post-war French philosophy for failing to examine the unity of “man” (115), for failing to inquire into the history of the concept of “man,” or to interrogate the all-too-ready linkage between the “we” of the philosophers and the “we” of humanity, “the *we* in the horizon of humanity” (116).<sup>205</sup> *We*<sup>206</sup> should pause here long enough to notice that the issue Derrida is raising is what we might venture to call (not without some trepidation) a *philosophical* one: that a concept central to an entire tradition, a value at the heart of any number of discourses here in the “West,” has, despite or maybe because of its centrality and importance, largely escaped interrogation and questioning. At the very least, as he will go on to argue, its “presence” runs so deep as to escape the notice of even the most vigilant of thinkers. Though clearly not humanist, let us note, Derrida’s position is also not dogmatically *anti-humanist* (which would return us to the problems surrounding any “oppositional” logic). The problem for philosophy as Derrida uses the term in this essay (we will see that it becomes more complicated in other texts) lies rather in a complicity with the very idea of “man,”

<sup>204</sup> See Leonard Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007), p. 6.

<sup>205</sup> Were we to interrogate this term “man” ourselves, it is not at all clear that we would find it to be as inclusive of all humanity as is sometimes assumed. At any rate, *l’homme* is the word Derrida uses in this essay; I have chosen to retain “man” in order to remain faithful to Derrida’s language, but to place it in quotation marks in order to suspend any commitment to it.

<sup>206</sup> And what is the nature of *this* “we,” the one that I so readily invoke in the course of this writing? Perhaps, invoking Derrida at the precise moment he is invoking Lyotard, we might oppose one “we,” the “we” of the critique itself, the “thinking we” that “survives all the *we*’s it thinks,” to another, one that relates to “a subtle and infinitesimal excess of thinking” (Derrida) in what Lyotard calls a “reflective movement” of the impossibility of gathering together all the I’s, you’s, and s/he’s of any totality, Auschwitz or any other. A respectful we, the we, as Lyotard puts it, “composed at least of *I* who write and *you* who read.” See WM 240-1; D 102-3.



the assumption that it is understood what such a term means, that it is known what it includes and excludes, and that, indeed, its referent is unified. We remain, then, circling around the question of frames and borders, here regarding the lines to be drawn between what is proper to human being and what is not.

To some extent this complicity is to blame for the anthropologic readings, in France at least, of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, readings that Derrida, we know, goes some length to counter. And yet, in spite of the critiques of anthropologism and humanism that each German author undertakes, Derrida also recognizes that there exists what he calls a “subterranean” justification for viewing their thought as “essentially *anthropic* or anthropocentric” (119), a “*relève*”<sup>207</sup> of humanism at work in each one’s critique and delimitation of that very humanism.

For now, let us consider only Hegel, since it is in discussing Hegel that some of the more important general issues Derrida raises in this piece become explicit. As Derrida points out, anthropology has an internal, an essential relationship to phenomenology for Hegel. In the *Encyclopedia* he places it at the beginning of spirit’s development:

Spirit can be called subjective insofar as it is in its concept. Since, however, the concept is the reflection of its generality originating from its differentiation in itself, the subjective spirit is (a) immediate, the spirit of nature – the object usually treated by “anthropology” as “the soul”; (b) spirit as the identical reflection into itself and into others, relationship or

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<sup>207</sup> As Alan Bass notes, *la relève* is Derrida’s proposal for a translation of Hegel’s *Aufhebung*. Here’s how Bass glosses it: “The word comes from the verb *relever*, which means to lift up, as does *Aufheben*. But *relever* also means to relay, to relieve, as when one soldier on duty relieves another. Thus the conserving-and-negating lift has become *la relève*, a ‘lift’ in which is inscribed an effect of substitution and difference, the effect of substitution and difference inscribed in the double meaning of *Aufhebung*.” See M 20, n.

differentiation – consciousness, the object of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; (c) spirit existing for itself or as subject – the object of “psychology.”<sup>208</sup>

“Anthropology” finds its place in the Hegelian system *before* phenomenology, which takes over once the “soul,” through an external corporeality that operates as a “sign” for it, achieves reality and “becomes consciousness.”<sup>209</sup> What this tells us, according to Derrida, is that for Hegel “Consciousness, i.e. the phenomenological . . . is the *truth* of the soul, that is, precisely the truth of that which was the object of the anthropology. Consciousness is the truth of man, phenomenology is the truth of anthropology” (M 120).<sup>210</sup> But this means that phenomenology is also “the *relève* of anthropology” (121) – it surpasses it but also conserves it, “lifts it up,” absorbs it and its structures. “In this sense, all the structures described by the phenomenology of spirit . . . are the structures of that which has *relevé* man” (ibid.).

“Man,” then, “remains in relief” in Hegelian phenomenology (ibid.). The ambiguity of this “in relief,” suggesting at the same time both finite “man” relieved of its place and function in relation to phenomenology and yet still visible in the very philosophy that claims to supersede it (perhaps, paradoxically, even more so in its *relevance*), is precisely the ambiguity that Derrida is trying to capture with the term *la relève*. This ambiguity is related to another, the one he identifies, in a famous gesture, in the two senses of the “end of man” that are both necessarily at work in this movement, end as completion (or death) and end as purpose or goal. This is linked to the interplay of finitude and infinitude in Derrida’s thought, an interplay we have discussed at some

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<sup>208</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*, trans. Steven A. Taubeneck (New York: Continuum, 1990), § 307, p. 203.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., §§ 326, 328, pp. 212-3.

<sup>210</sup> Understanding truth here, as Derrida puts it, “in a rigorously Hegelian sense,” as the “presence or presentation of essence as *Gewesenheit*, of *Wesen* as having-been” (120).

length (§ 2.4). The end of anthropology marks the end of “man” taken as a finite being, the end of a human being that is out of touch with its “higher nature,” the end of Spirit’s isolation in absolute finitude.<sup>211</sup> It marks a move from “man” taken as mortal being toward a humanity open to infinity, to absolute knowing and even to God. It is thus, in a sense, “the end of man, man past,” as Derrida puts it (ibid.). But phenomenology also “marks the achievement of man, the appropriation of his essence” (ibid.). It marks humanity’s telos: “The *relève* or *relevance* of man is his *telos* or *eskhaton*” (ibid.). The end of “man” is to move toward its end. And with this end of finite “man” arrives a humanity that, through self-consciousness, is in infinite relation to itself, a humanity that is in touch with its infinity, which, strangely, is also its essence. Its end, its telos, is thus inextricably linked with its completion, its accomplishment – and thus its death. The implications go right back into the history of philosophy itself, since these two “ends” form a unity that Derrida associates with “the Greek thinking of *telos*” and indeed with metaphysics in its entirety, which “indissociably coordinates teleology with an eschatology, a theology, and an ontology” (ibid.). In the case of Hegel, phenomenology may begin where anthropology ends, but it itself is only a further stage in the forward projection of this humanity toward an ultimate fulfillment. And we should note that Hegelian phenomenology remains, in this capacity, a science of “man,” the essence of whom “rests” there (ibid.) – the “rest” operating here as ambiguously as the “relief” mentioned above.

In this, according to Derrida, Hegel follows the entire tradition of metaphysics, a tradition marked by this ambiguity between, on the one hand, the attempt to recognize and draw out the final or ultimate aim of humanity, the actual accomplishment of which

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<sup>211</sup>See Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, §326.

would result, on the other, in the completion, end, or death of humanity so conceived. And Derrida suggests that any such thinking on what is true or essential to humanity *must* contain this ambiguity. To speak of the truth of humanity is necessarily to give it an end, a purpose – and therefore a (very specific) future. It is to define what is and also what is not proper to being human. Human beings, understanding what is proper to them, should strive towards the fulfillment of this Idea. But were that purpose ever fulfilled, it would bring about the end of humanity in the second sense, that of completing or fulfilling its function. The idea of a fulfillment presupposes the end of something, the end, at least, of the striving towards its end by which a humanity that is in relation to its own purposes would be characterized. If it is a part of human essence that humans be in relation to their purposes, the fulfillment of those purposes would, in closing the gap between humans and their ends, bring about the end of humans, make them gods, or at the very least bring them much closer to a divine infinity. The end of humanity in this second sense is inscribed, therefore, in any thinking on the truth of humanity.

We return again, then, to the movement between finitude and infinitude, a movement we have already discussed in terms of the Idea in the Kantian sense (§ 2.4). We have also seen this “middle position” of humanity in Kant’s thinking on history, which for Kant can be seen as a kind of movement (importantly, a movement that is never fully accomplished – at least not in this world) of the finite human toward its infinite end (§§1.4, 2.1). It is, in a sense, the movement from fact to right, *de facto* to *de jure*.<sup>212</sup> It is invariably linked to a number of oppositions that we have seen and that will continue to return: nature/culture, nature/history, human/animal, human/divinity. In this movement, humanity is meant to leave nature and move towards infinity, towards God.

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<sup>212</sup> See Bennington, “Derridabase,” p. 117.

Indeed, it is its essence to do so. All that is ethical or political resides in this movement – the animal is not ethical; God is essentially so in being essentially good. Only the human can or even has to make the attempt. It *can* try (indeed, it *must*, in the sense of “ought to,” *sollen* rather than *müssen*) because it has infinite reason, it recognizes (or ought to recognize) its calling, its vocation. It can only *try* because it is finite, interested, embodied, subject to time and to the gaps, the chasms, that it is thought’s task to try to bridge. When Derrida refers to the linking of humanity and God it is through the dynamic of this interplay, which takes many forms. But always there is this necessary gap between finite, conditioned particularity and the infinite, the unconditioned. It is this gap that allows for a movement between what is and what ought to be. And it is this gap that allows ethical and political questions to have always intervened in metaphysics.

It is thus essential that the teleology in question here is one of the “first person plural,” one of the *we* of humanity. According to Derrida, it is this *we* which connects Hegelian phenomenology with humanism: “The *we* is the unity of absolute knowledge and anthropology, of God and man, of onto-theo-teleology and humanism” (ibid.). It refers us back to the “we” of the philosophers, the “we” of the tradition of philosophy, even if Derrida will speak here of “the necessity which links the thinking of the *phainesthai* to the thinking of the *telos*” (122), specifically invoking phenomenology in the reference to *phainesthai*. We know that he is about to go on to claim that the same can be said of Husserl and of Heidegger. But not before he indulges in a long footnote that verifies “the necessity of the framework of this ambiguity or *relevance*” even in what he calls “pre-Hegelian systems” (121 n. 15). The “pre-Hegelian system” that stands in for all the others is that of Kant. In Kant, according to Derrida, “the figure of finitude

organizes the capacity to know from the very emergence of the anthropological limit” (ibid.). This Derrida attempts to show by marking an ambiguity in Kant’s thinking. On the one hand, Kant rejects anthropologism at the precise moment that he tries to think the “end” in its final sense (*Endzweck*), which for Kant, we know, is the moral end (see §§ 1.4, 2.1). The principles of morality are to be derived solely from pure reason, and must never depend on the particular nature of distinctly *human* reason (GW 411-2/65). The end, as Derrida puts it, must be determined “in itself (as an unconditioned principle of morality), independently of any anthropological givens” (M 122, n.). This is, of course, well-known. But Derrida argues that precisely in this thinking of the “end” as *Endzweck* is revealed at the same time “man’s specificity, man’s essence as a rational being, as a rational animal (*zōon logon ekhon*)” (ibid.). What’s more, this essence

announces itself to itself only on the basis of thinking the end in itself; it announces itself to itself *as* the end in itself; that is, equally, as an infinite end, since the thinking of the unconditioned is also the thinking which raises itself above experience, above finitude. (ibid., italics given)

Humans are finite, and as finite must not be used as the standard by which the rational is measured or defined – since to do so would risk mirroring rationality (erroneously) in the particularity of human existence. On the other hand, in thinking this infinite end human being reveals itself to be rational, and reveals its rationality to have no limits. As rational moral beings, human beings rise above their finitude in thinking the unconditioned, an unconditioned that is, indeed, a “calling,” a “vocation.” This vocation opens the way to a return (*relève?*) of the anthropos in Kantian thought. For despite the critique of anthropologism to be found there, says Derrida,

man is the *only example*, the only case of a rational being that can ever be cited at the very moment when by all rights one distinguishes the universal concept of a rational being from the concept of the human being. It is through the offices of this *fact* that anthropology regains all its contested authority. This is the point at which the philosopher says “we.” . . . (ibid., italics given)

What examples does Derrida himself give for this? Two passages from the *Groundwork* serve to illustrate the point: “Now, I say, man *and in general (und überhaupt)* every rational being, *exists* as an end in himself, and not merely as a means” (GW 428/79; M 122 n.; the first italics are given by Derrida); and again, “This principle of humanity and of every rational creature as an end in itself” (GW 430-1/81; M ibid.). It is the *and* that links “man” and every rational creature – but it is “man” who comes first, who precedes the general category of rational beings. Humanity serves as the example, if not the exemplar, of the rational creature. Whenever Kant’s discourse requires that an example of rational being be given, humanity arrives, linked to the rational through the conjunction “and” or *vel* (M 122, n.). Its suspension, therefore, is according to Derrida only ever temporary and never fully complete. At the limit of anthropology, at the limit of finitude, the infinite as the true end of rational humanity opens. The telos of a universal, unified, and essentially rational humanity appears in reason’s unfolding. Though this is not in fact Kant’s claim, Derrida’s argument is that, despite appearances, reason not only remains human but begins as such, or at the very least, is always already distinctly “human.” A certain understanding of the human comes “before” and gives impetus to the thinking of the *Endzweck*.

This places Kant’s discourse within a certain political framework, one that plays out, precisely, in terms of Kant’s political thought – in terms, for instance, of his

conceptions of progress and of cosmopolitanism. Indeed, could there even be a notion of “progress” without this sense of a unified, rational humanity, the one we have seen described, in very similar ways, in the historical thought of both Kant (§§ 1.4, 2.1) and Husserl (§§ 2.2, 2.3)? And without a notion of progress, what becomes of politics? Is it possible to have a politics that is not progressive, that is, one that does not describe past and present in terms of a certain (ideal) future? And in turn, to have a robust sense of political progress without a clear conception both of the unity of the humanity that pursues such an end, and a clear conception of the rationality of that humanity, a rationality that enables this very pursuit and all of the aspects that make it worthwhile across cultures and throughout history (universality, disinterestedness, etc.)? What happens to politics, indeed, if one takes away the very notion of an end, a purpose or goal – or at least challenges the supreme authority of such an end? But is not this notion of an end only possible if it can be identified and posed as one “proper” and even necessary to the human?

Such is the complex of problems raised by the issue of humanism. Derrida’s attention to what he considers to be a humanist anthropology at work in the likes of Kant and Husserl can no doubt be attributed to the famed “antihumanism” that is often said to characterize much late twentieth century thought, particularly that thinking described as “poststructuralist” or “postmodern.”<sup>213</sup> Given the centrality of humanist conceptions of self and subjectivity to modern (as opposed to contemporary or even “postmodern”) theories of ethics and politics, this notion of “antihumanism” carries with it considerable evaluative baggage. At the very least there lingers a suggestion that the entire

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<sup>213</sup> See, for instance, Peter Sedgwick, *Descartes to Derrida: An Introduction to European Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 167 ff.; Tony Davies, *Humanism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 46 ff.



moral/political edifice of modernity is at risk in any attack on humanism. What will ground an ethics, if not an autonomous, rational subject, the subject of Descartes' *cogito*? What politics is possible if not one that respects the dignity of humanity or the human person? How is it possible to think an end, and specifically a moral end, for humanity if the human occupies no special place in the cosmos? And is not any "critique" of humanism a critique of this central value, a value that underlies and supports any ethics or politics worthy of the name?

Of course, we already have some sense for why this very humanism might be troubling in Derrida's reference to the "violent relationship" of the West to its other (M 134). It is a violence to which we have already referred in discussing Husserl's privileging of the idea of Europe in the *Crisis* and Kant's suggestion in the "Idea for a Universal History" that Europe will likely legislate over all other continents due to the advanced state of its political progress (UH 52; see § 2.3). For what is to unify "man" if not a particular, preconceived idea of what is proper to humans, a faculty or a power that would be common to human beings and lacking in all other beings? This faculty, we know, is reason, and its power lies, as Husserl suggests, in its universality. It is what permits people to leave their particular interests and pursuits behind and contemplate the universal human and its proper ends. It takes humanity beyond the finite, it opens it to the infinite. It thus permits progress, brings about Enlightenment and emancipation. But its stakes are ambiguous, as we know. Reason legislates, it lays down the law. But what if others do not recognize its law, what if there are alternative ways of thinking, a plurality of reasons? What will come to adjudicate, if not reason itself? Given that philosophy – still taken as it is construed in the "West" – is the discipline that concerns

itself with reason, does it not run the risk of legislating, of passing judgment, over these others? If reason finds its universality challenged, might it not run the risk of becoming a tyrant of sorts?

We recall Lyotard's discussion of universal history and cultural differences, his question whether the multitude of events can continue to be organized according the idea of such a universal history (§§ 1.1, 3.1). He too links the entire problem we are opening here in terms of the status of the "we" who asks this very question, a "we" that has become increasingly problematic in the face of the cultural differences he invokes there. One could suggest that these differences have thrown reason into crisis. And this crisis is political, given that it is reason that has ground philosophy's conception of the human at least since the Enlightenment, and has thus ground philosophy's conception of the emancipation of that humanity. Let us recall too that Lyotard speaks there of the "défaillance" of modernity, of its failing but also of its default in the legal sense, and that he suggests that this has to do with the very multiplicity of worlds and diversity of cultures that have come to challenge its hegemony (319). We may remark on the resonances with Derrida, who opens his essay on Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* with the question whether "we" can say "we" and debate together in a common language today (MCF 87) – an essential possibility for a politics based on rational discourse. Indeed, the very need to ask this question is a sign of what Derrida calls there the "being-ill" (*mal-être*) that characterizes what gets referred to as "our time," today. This being-ill is characteristic of our time, but is so precisely insofar as it is based on the difficulty of saying "our" time: "our time is perhaps the time in which it is no longer so easy for us to say 'our time'" (TS 7). But to resist this being-ill, to suggest that there is no crisis of

reason and to insist that the issue is simply one of not being reasonable – not to say rational – enough, to insist, then, on this “we,” is to risk being violent to the multiplicity of cultures and worlds invoked by Lyotard and referred to by Derrida in “The Ends of Man” under the name of philosophy’s other. This multiplicity or diversity has shaken humanism, has caused the name of “man” to “tremble” (M 133) – and has thus shaken the very foundations of political philosophy.

But this does not lead unproblematically to any “anti-humanism” for either Lyotard or Derrida. The entire problem of “humanity” is of considerable import in Derrida’s work, a fact that should make us cautious about such hasty conclusions regarding his thought. Rather, in keeping with his talk of a malaise or “being-ill” of our time, we should note that Derrida has spoken, and in some very public political forums, of what in one of those forums he calls “a worldwide shake-up in which humanity is in search of itself” today, and suggested that the concept of humanity is not only still very new (at least “for philosophers who aren’t sleepwalking”), but that the “old question about what is specifically human needs to be entirely reworked,” especially with regard to “all the traits that metaphysics restricted to humans, of which *not one* is resistant to analysis.”<sup>214</sup> Nonetheless, humanity remains the “promise” of humankind (ibid. 103). We ought not to be surprised when Derrida, invoking in *Of Spirit* what he calls a “humanist teleology” in Heidegger’s thought, objects that he is not criticizing this teleology, since “it has remained *up till now* (in Heidegger’s time and situation, but this has not radically changed today) the price to be paid in the ethico-political denunciation

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<sup>214</sup> All of these quotes are taken from the piece entitled “My Sunday ‘Humanities,’” published in the newspaper *L’Humanité* on the occasion of its centenary on March 4, 1999, a text which appears as Chapter 9 of Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005), pp. 100-8. For the references, pp. 105 and 103 respectively. The italics are Derrida’s.

of biologism, racism, naturalism, etc.”<sup>215</sup> Derrida is aware of the power of this discourse, this program, even if it also operates according to “terrifying mechanisms” of its own (ibid.). Christina Howells has characterized this as a “humanist aporia or impasse” for deconstruction, since “it seems that the weapons to oppose racist, fascist, or totalitarian conceptions of man are only to be found in those very areas deconstruction has been trying to leave behind.”<sup>216</sup> But the question is whether Derrida is really trying to leave humanism behind in any unproblematic way. In the passage in *Of Spirit* in question here Derrida suggests that the humanist program “will not be avoided all at once and without reconnoitring it right down to its most tortuous ruses and most subtle resources (56)” – a passage Howells sees as “a pessimistic acceptance of the inevitability of humanism” (ibid.) but which might just as well describe deconstruction itself, which would see the need to go through such notions, interrogate them, and remain open to what will come of them. We recall the well-known final passages of “Structure, Sign, and Play,” where Derrida describes “two interpretations of interpretation.” The first seeks to decipher a truth or origin that “escapes play and the order of the sign” by grounding it in “man,” which is the name of that being that “has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play” (WD 292). We have seen the threats Derrida finds to the fulfillment of such a dream. The second “tries to pass beyond man and humanism,” a passage whose way is indicated by Nietzsche (ibid.). Nonetheless, Derrida is very clear here that while these two positions are irreconcilable, there is no question of choosing between them: “we must first try to conceive of the common ground, and the

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<sup>215</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago & London: U of Chicago P), p. 56, italics given.

<sup>216</sup> Christina Howells, *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 139.

*différance* of this irreducible difference. Here there is a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose *conception, formation, gestation, and labor* we are only catching a glimpse of today” (293, italics given). In this moment, a moment in which there is no possibility of choice, Derrida invokes what he calls “the as yet unnameable” that is yet to come, a kind of question whose form is not yet recognized, that is not yet fully formed. One will not travel so easily between humanism and a “beyond” of humanism. The work of coming to terms with what humanism and its “beyond” may mean has hardly begun. What will come is not yet recognizable, and this in itself is not an easy thing to face, since it falls under “the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity” (ibid.).

This unrecognizable and formless nonspecies does not indicate “our” species, the human species. Derrida is here referring to the coming of that which cannot be anticipated or fully programmed – something to which we shall return. What we can be sure of, with regard to the question of the human, is that no clear resolution is indicated because we do not yet know what humanity is. But Derrida is not pessimistic about this – rather, this is an affirmative moment. The “monstrous” is formless – not (necessarily) a monster. If one does not know what the human is, one’s work is ahead. Speaking in another but related context and referring to what he calls “unconditional hospitality,” Derrida offers a suggestion of how this formless, mute, as yet unnameable “monstrosity” might be conceived with regard to the human:

to be suspicious about the limits of man is not to be anti-humanist, on the contrary, it’s a way of respecting what remains “to come,” under the name and the face of what we call “man.” You have to be more and more human, and it’s not obvious what it means. We are not human enough, we are never human enough, so from that point of view unconditional

hospitality is not restricted by what one knows under the name of man or what is proper to man. We have to be hospitable to what is coming, and to a new figure, a new shape of what one calls humanity.<sup>217</sup>

Humanism taken in most of its traditional guises (there are many) does not respect this new shape, and is not attentive to what remains unknown regarding what is or is not proper to the human. But so-called anti-humanism ignores the political debt owed to humanism, to notions of human rights, to the possibility of a crime against humanity, even to democracy itself. Derrida is obviously critical of humanism and the underlying and unquestioned assumptions that motivate so much philosophical discourse. But he is more cautious of the debt owed to the concept of humanity – and more cautious toward its remaining promise, the promise that resides in this unknown shape of what is to come under its name. And in this we can make a certain link with Lyotard, for this promise resides in a formlessness, in an incompleteness, that Lyotard relates to what he calls the *inhuman*.

## 5.2 A Strange Remainder: Lyotard's Inhuman

Humanism, says Lyotard at the outset of *The Inhuman*, administers lessons, and it administers them to an “us” (1). It takes many forms and it is by no means “over.” Thus, Lyotard provides a list, significantly, of contemporary and not historical figures he associates with some version of humanism: Apel, Rorty, Habermas, Rawls, Searle, Davidson and the “French neo-humanists.” But in whatever guise it appears, it always proceeds as though “man” were a value that has no need of interrogation, which indeed

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<sup>217</sup> “A Conversation with Jacques Derrida,” *Theory & Event*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2001. No page numbers are given for the on-line version of this text, but the paragraphs are numbered. The quote is taken from paragraph 44.

“even has the authority to suspend, forbid interrogation, suspicion, the thinking which gnaws away at everything” (ibid.). The very questioning of what “man” might be is considered dangerous, an opening to “anything goes,” to nihilism and meaninglessness. This basic and central value must be assumed if the loss of *all* value is to be avoided. Kant’s presence here is immediate, for Lyotard even suggests that what is “properly transcendental” in Kant, what Lyotard calls the “critical tension” that “goes so far as to break up the (human) subject” (as is the case, for instance, in the analysis of the sublime, see §§ 3.3, 3.4), is threatened with expurgation: “On the pretext of a return to Kant, all [these humanists] do is to shelter the humanist prejudice under his authority” (ibid.).

We can see very quickly the “movement of restoration,” the “call to order” that Lyotard is so suspicious of in his discussions of the “postmodern” (see especially § 3.1). And this movement is directly linked to the entire problem of philosophy as well, for philosophy, too, must not be interrogated and for very similar reasons. To question philosophy is to fall into the unknown, the “who knows what” (2). It is to become vulnerable, to be made susceptible to the “monstrous” that Derrida invokes. Of course, we can see why philosophy might be concerned about falling into the unknown, if, in fact, what *is* know – certain totalitarian regimes, for instance – be kept in mind. At least a part of what motivates philosophical thought and political thinking when it resists the interrogation of certain of its grounding values (truth and reason first and foremost) is the desire to avoid the kind of irrational politicking that produced the Nazi catastrophes for a start.<sup>218</sup> But in fact, it is precisely such totalizing politics that Lyotard has in mind when

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<sup>218</sup> Such a line of argument is what pushes Sartre, perhaps more quickly than he was ready, to assert that existentialism is a humanism. Erwin Panofsky makes a direct appeal to humanism (linking it, along the way, to Kant’s cosmopolitanism) as the only real resistance to totalitarianism in his “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline,” published as the Introduction to *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (London: Penguin,

he invokes what he calls the inhuman. Contrary to this piety regarding the value of the “human” and the nature of philosophy, however, Lyotard raises a two-sided question: on the one hand, “what if human beings, in humanism’s sense, were in the process of, constrained into, becoming inhuman?” and on the other, “what if what is ‘proper’ to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman?” (ibid.).

In the two-sidedness of this question is revealed two kinds of inhuman. On the one hand, there is the inhumanity of the system that is presently “being consolidated under the name of development.” This is the system Lyotard often refers to under the rubric of the “techno-scientific” and in a certain sense this is precisely the inhumanity of the totalitarian (§ 3.2, and below). But to this inhuman, Lyotard opposes another: “the infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage” (ibid.). This inhuman is directly linked to what Lyotard says about the “affect,” a discussion we shall have to keep in mind (§ 3.4). It is what gets left out of the first inhuman, what is forgotten, put aside. But it haunts the mind as “a familiar and unknown guest,” sending it into delirium but also “making it think” (ibid.). That it can be forgotten or ignored does not mean it can be excluded – and it occupies an important place in Lyotard’s political thought, which is a thought always against the totality of the first inhuman.

But what is this other inhuman? And how does it relate to the “human”? It is linked with what Lyotard calls the “child” or “childishness,” infancy, *infantia*, or *infans*. This childhood or infancy is what does not speak; it is neither a stage of life nor something that passes.<sup>219</sup> It haunts discourse as its remainder, as what is left over. The

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1955), pp. 23-50. See particularly p. 25. For Panofsky’s link with Kantian cosmopolitanism, see Mark A. Cheetham, *Kant, Art, and Art History: Moments of Discipline* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), pp. 73 ff.

<sup>219</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Lectures d’enfance* (Paris: Galilée, 1991), p. 9.



example Lyotard gives in the opening of *The Inhuman* is that of education. Humans are not born human in the way that cats are born cats, ready within a few hours or days to live cat-life. They require education in order to prepare them for the life of the social animal, the *zoon politikon*, although we already see here that Lyotard wants to “split” these natures in a way that Aristotle did not. For Aristotle, the state, famously, “is a creation of nature,” while “man is by nature a political animal.”<sup>220</sup> For Lyotard, the “nature” at work in Aristotle’s definition is precisely what is at issue. According to him, the human is not *simply* a political or social animal – whatever the “adult” human is or may be (the “adult” taken in the sense of Kant’s enlightened majority, or in terms of the possessor of “articulated language” in Freud, and taken in any case as the exemplar of the human), it becomes this through the acquisition of language and the process of education, which superimposes this “nature” onto another. It is thus a kind of second “nature,” and it does not necessarily conjoin with the first, creating a locale for potential conflict and unrest.

What, then, shall we call “human,” the “initial misery” of childhood or the rationalized, educated adult? If what is called “human” is adulthood, sociality, it is precisely this “humanity” that the child lacks, a lack that education is meant to compensate for. (It is this, presumably, that makes Emma susceptible to an affect that she cannot, initially, bear witness to, § 3.4.) Education provides communication and intellectual skills, norms for conduct and interaction – in short, all that is a part of culture, which comes to supplement what nature is lacking: “That children have to be educated is a circumstance which only proceeds from the fact that they are not completely led by

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<sup>220</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. B. Jowett, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984 [1995]), p. 1987, 1253a3-4.

nature, not programmed. The institutions which constitute culture supplement this native lack” (IH 3). Culture here is that which provides the child with the capacity to take part in “communal life, adult consciousness and reason,” but this second nature depends upon the existence of the first (ibid.). And this second nature, precisely in its status as a “second,” carries with it a debt to a first that not only largely goes unrecognized, but that holds within it nothing less than what is left of the political in the political animal.

I will try to explain. The relationship between these two “natures” is not dialectical – in this process of education (in which what is inhuman in the child, this “native lack”, is meant to be satisfied, filled in) Kant’s Enlightenment ideal of a total “emancipation” from “minority” through the free use of one’s reason cannot help but leave something over of the child, some “remainder,” in Lyotard’s terms (IH 3). The emancipation is never complete. What’s more, it is precisely this remainder, this “childhood” perpetuating into “adulthood,” that generates the very pursuits that we most commonly think of as “human”: literature, the arts, even philosophy itself (ibid.). The struggle to conform to institutions, the impulse to resist and to criticize them, “the pain of supporting them and the temptation to escape them” – for Lyotard all these facets of “human” existence indicate some remainder, some persistence of the child even in the very heart of what it means to be “adult.” There is a kind of primordial unprogrammability in this infancy. (And we would not be wrong to associate this unprogrammability with what is called “affectivity” in the work on Freud, as we will see.)

This gives an important energy to this strange remainder. It is perhaps surprising (coming from the quintessential “postmodern” thinker) that Lyotard follows these

observations with the claim that we can actually take pride in the title “humanity,” his reservations about its “completion” notwithstanding – and for reasons that appear to oppose each other:

Shorn of speech, incapable of standing upright, hesitating over the objects of its interest, not able to calculate its advantages, not sensitive to common reason, the child is eminently the human because its distress promises and heralds things possible. Its initial delay in humanity, which makes it the hostage of the adult community, is also what manifests to this community the lack of humanity it is suffering from, and which calls on it to become more human. (Ibid., 3-4)

It is perhaps the child, then, that is the human precisely in its inhumanity, in the promise it always entails of *becoming* human. And it serves, too, as a reminder that all humanity *lacks* humanity, a reminder that draws us forward to ever more attempts, ever-changing, at becoming more human. There is at stake here nothing less than the very *possibility* of change, the conditions for the possibility that something will happen, that we will attempt to make our world and ourselves more beautiful, more complete, more moral, more “human.” Thus, the other reason for taking pride in “humanity”: “That it always remains for the adult to free himself or herself from the obscure savages of childhood by bringing about its promise – that is precisely the condition of humankind” (IH 4).

As with Derrida, then, Lyotard’s claim is that in a strange way we are not human enough. Such a position is not obviously humanist insofar as it withholds any (metaphysical) commitments that would unify or close off that entity known as “humanity.” If it seems to imply a kind of universalism of its own, this at least might best be compared to the legacy of Freud or Lacan than to the humanist tradition (and we will return to this). This not-human-enough is an openness, a promise and a debt. And

this means that this resistance to humanism is something to be affirmed rather than denied. It is not, however, without its risks, risks that are not themselves unrelated to the first inhuman and to the threat of totalizing discourses or politics.

How so? Taking a cue from Lyotard's reference to the "condition of humankind," let us turn to his essay on Arendt, "The Survivor." There Lyotard again invokes the remainder, the forgotten, here in the sense of the continuing survival that constitutes life itself. My past me's are dead, but they survive in me as memories or as retentions; I am made up of these past dead me's, these survivors which let me, in turn, survive (we should recall here Lyotard's interest in Descartes' claim in the early moments of the cogito that I am so long as I think – but that I might well cease to be in the moment that I stop thinking, § 3.4). Such is the understanding of memory from the point of view of a philosophy of the subject: spirit or consciousness continually takes up the lost moments of the past into an ever-present now. This constant relationship with what is dead and gone brings us back into the thematic of mourning, since for Lyotard the attempt by spirit or consciousness to internalize and idealize the past has the Freudian structure we have already seen. Whether this mourning can be accomplished (e.g., Hegel) or turns to melancholia (e.g., Benjamin), the stress is placed on the past as an "irrevocable loss of presence" (TPM 146). In a certain sense, Lyotard will lean himself toward the side of melancholia, suggesting that the liveliness and contingency of the immediacy of any past moment is something that cannot be brought up once that immediate bursting forth is past – the moment of "birth," of beginning, of happening, must be lost in the grey necessity of what-has-been. This means that the moment of beginning *already* carries the promise of its loss and forgetting: "What comes to life – the instant as event, emerging from

nothingness – is already doomed to return to nothingness” (ibid.). But Lyotard wants to reverse the stress, from disappearance (of past presence, of past event) to appearance: “Rather than nothing, being gives entities, instants, objects. Since being appears in ‘objects,’ it gets forgotten. Yet it *gives* objects, something *happens*” (147, italics given). Lyotard will go so far as to suggest that this is not only an impugment of melancholy but a refutation of nihilism: “If the truth is that there is truly nothing, how is it that there appears to be something?” (ibid). The question becomes one of relating to this something, of making sense of it, of finding phrases that will link to it and that will link it to other somethings. Science is of course one way of doing this. But scientific or cognitive discourse misses what is enigmatic about this event. Science is empirical; it deals only with what is. It attempts to describe facts. The problem of the event is that, stripped of scientific or cognitive denomination, it is simply “the enigma of there being a relation with what has no relation; that is, in knowing that it is born and dies, the soul (aptly named) bears witness to the fact that there is not only what is (what it is) but the other of what is” (148).

What is it to have a relation to this “other of what is,” to what, then, has no relation? We recall Lyotard’s interest in the sublime and in the affect (§§ 3.3, 3.4) and his claim in each case that when the affect is there the mind is not (see also HJ 32). This relation follows that pattern – it is to be in relation to an absolute, which is by definition without-relation. One cannot relate to either birth or death when it happens. And as we have seen, one relates to these things in the way that Emma relates to the trauma of the shopkeeper’s assault (§ 3.4): “this relation does not take place when it takes place, it has taken place and it *will* take place. Thus it *will have taken place* all at once, appeared to

late, disappeared too soon” (TPM 148, italics given). In this “will have taken place” we recall the modality of what in other places Lyotard calls the “postmodern” (AQ 81; see § 3.2). One cannot experience the absolute, the without-relation, affectivity. It cannot be brought up into consciousness, sublated, retained or memorialized. Thinking must try to come to terms with it a little before or a little after it “takes place.” I learn about my birth from others, and I learn about my death through the death of others, through stories of birth and death. It is only through others that I relate to nothingness – “whence I come and where I’m going” (TPM 148). It is only through others (for instance, the psychoanalyst) that I relate to trauma.

What this enigma of the event taken in this sense reveals is a kind of susceptibility, as we have seen, a kind of “passibility” or “probity,” as Lyotard puts it in other places – the mind or thought is vulnerable to what, like the sublime as described by Kant, does not come to it in good and true form. But this does not plunge us into nihilism. If thought as yet has no form to give to the enigma of the event, it can follow the *as if*, it can work analogically, following Kant, it can judge reflectively, which is to say, judge without pre-given rules for deciding the issue. For Lyotard, reflection in Kant is “a sensitivity to singular cases” (Per 8) – this is what makes Kant “childish” (TPM 151). But thinking must be prepared to be sensitive to this singularity, to respect this enigma. Childhood, which is not simply one’s own (temporary and temporal) infancy, is the state of the “soul” that is open to the event, that is obedient to a debt, the debt to this “something” that inhabits it, but “to which no answer is ever given” (149). Respect for this debt is what will save the adult from being no more than the dead survival of its birth

(148), “from being no more than a survivor, a creature living on reprieve from annihilation” (149).

But does this talk of the “enigma” and the “event,” of the “child” of feeling as opposed to the “adult” of reason and discourse, not plunge us in turn into the worst kinds of irrationalism and relativism? What does it mean to be “open” to the event? What would it mean to have a debt to a something that is outside of any relation? What would it entail (if anything)? Is it not the world of culture and tradition that helps prevent the worst political atrocities, the worst crimes?

And yet this is precisely what Lyotard is suspicious of. Following certain passages in Arendt, he concedes quickly enough that as a tradition becomes more enriched “it gains authority,” so that “children are born less and less from nothing – less naked. They may even lose the feeling of non-being” (156), so that they become further and further removed from what we might think of as a kind of primordial susceptibility in the “nature” referred to under the name of childhood. More cultured, further from nature, as Kant might put it. But Lyotard suspects that in fact this kind of susceptibility is inescapable:

Yet, even in the most “augmented,” authorized, and “linking” tradition, the enigma of a something to which there is no response must continue to inhabit the mind secretly (“why me?”), the enigma of the singularity of birth, which cannot be shared, like that of death. The persistence of this enigma can make the mind accessible to something that is prior to the world of culture and tradition, keep it in a state of childhood, that is, unprepared. (Ibid.)

The problem lies in the fact that the “I,” the subject, which recognizes other subjects and is able, in so recognizing, to say “we,” is not born – “it comes afterwards, with language, precisely on leaving infancy,” as Lyotard puts it in the essay “Prescription” (TPM 179).

Birth, infancy, *infans*, cannot be experienced directly and thus cannot be brought up into consciousness. The “I,” then, is constantly indebted to something that marks it indelibly without that marking being available to experience, since it “comes” before the mind is there to experience it. One has no access to this something, but neither can one break free of it.<sup>221</sup> Following Kant, Lyotard claims that this is what the “aesthetic” means – an exposure to the touch of something that is before concept or representation (TPM 179). The term “childhood” tries to capture this susceptibility, this exposure to a “first touch” – one that comes before “I” am there. Not only in trauma, although there also. We can see, in fact, that the enigma of birth or death exemplify this susceptibility, but in his discussion of the sublime or of Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* Lyotard relates it to a constant and continual “passibility” of the mind. Just as the “postmodern” does not come “after” the modern, so adulthood does not come “after” childhood: “this infancy, this body, this unconscious” remains there “my entire life” (*ibid.*). Thinking comes “after,” too late, and is thus a kind of response to this first touch, to which, claims Lyotard, it remains indebted. And this structure will have its effects on politics, and particularly on law. Given that the law, taken literally but also taken in the sense of the laws of reason, of discursivity and communicability, are associated with adulthood, “with the ego and language,” the law thus *always comes too late*. This makes the touch “necessarily a fault with regard to law,” since it occupies a “savage or alien space” outside of it (*ibid.*). And it cannot be escaped because it is bodily: “it is always there as a potentiality of the body” (*ibid.*).<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> See Rudi Visker, *Truth and Singularity: Taking Foucault into Phenomenology* (Dordrecht/ Boston/ London: Kluwer, 1999), pp. 381 ff.

<sup>222</sup> On the relation of childhood or infancy to the body in Lyotard, see Christopher Fynsk, “Jean-François’s Infancy,” *Yale French Studies* 99, 2001: *Jean-François Lyotard: Time and Judgment*, pp. 44-61.



The touch is outside the law and is thus unconditioned – without form, to invoke the language of Lyotard’s analysis of the sublime. It is therefore, in its obscure way, absolute. And the mind, the embodied “I” of adulthood, cannot relate to it, cannot be in relation to it, but it must be troubled by it. It cannot *not* think it (or try to think it), which is why Kant recognizes the need of thought to regulate itself in terms of Ideas of reason. But for Lyotard, Kant does not go far enough – the reference to Freud here, as we have also seen above, is essential. For there is a sense of anxiety in this debt to the enigma, something “internal” to the mind itself. Nothingness, birth, death, indivisible singularity are all “present” in the susceptibility of childhood. And this anxiety is what links this entire problematic to the problem of politics and of the totalitarianism that this discussion of Arendt invokes. For the movement of totalitarianism is the movement to forget, and to make others forget, “the terrible nakedness constituting childhood” (TPM 157). It does this by trying to change reality, by trying to filter out the anxiety caused by this vulnerability to what one does not know. The totalitarian totalizes in a very literal sense – and here Kantian thinking regains its importance for Lyotard’s understanding of this phenomenon. For if, following Kant, Lyotard insists that the whole, the absolute, cannot be an object of cognition, “the principle affirming the contrary,” that is, that the whole can be known, “could be called totalitarianism” (D 5, § 5). It is an insistence that all that is is knowable, and that all that is known is all there is. The totalitarian has full access to the law – nothing falls outside of it, nothing challenges its hegemony. What *does* fall outside of it (disagreement, dissidence) is immediately relegated to error; it can be and indeed must be violently put down, since it is by definition outside the law, illegal, lawless – a threat to the governing power of the law.<sup>223</sup> According to Lyotard, this is the

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<sup>223</sup> Lyotard’s thinking here has many similarities to the way that Claude Lefort describes what he calls the

origin of totalitarianism: an attempt to escape the anxiety associated with this “savage childhood,” this vulnerability towards the unknown and unformed, through the total authority of law – including the law of Nature, or the law of History, the law that governs the metaphysics of “man” (Nazism) or that of the material dialectic (Stalinism, Leninism). The inhuman in the second sense, the one to which Lyotard adheres, is thus inhuman in the dual sense of being “unhuman” (if the human is taken as the reasoning, languaged “adult”) while at the same time being *in*-human, an other to myself that is nonetheless in myself.<sup>224</sup>

The totalitarian is the most extreme version of the attempt to downplay what might happen that is outside of the law, what comes to challenge and disrupt the smooth running of the system that the law governs. That tries to downplay *crisis* – and this links the concerns we are circling around here to the issues Lyotard argues are most prevalent for thought “today.” For there is no sense that what we are calling “totalitarianism” here will have come to an end with the defeat of Nazism and the fall of the Soviet Union:

For if it is true that the totalitarian tendency has to be grafted onto a heightening of anxiety unequaled in the cultural, political, and philosophical history of the West, then the defeat of the totalitarian regimes alone will doubtless have been insufficient to exhaust the source of totalitarianism’s spirit. (TPM 158)

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“logic of totalitarianism,” in which he identifies a “condensation” between law and knowledge. The totalitarian has supreme access to the law, which means that disagreement is immediately relegated to error or lack of knowledge, while the ultimate criteria of law or knowledge lie completely within the realm of power itself. For the reference to this “condensation” between power, law, and knowledge, see Claude Lefort, “The Question of Democracy” in his *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988), p. 13; for reference to the “ultimate criteria of law or knowledge,” see “The Logic of Totalitarianism,” trans. Alan Sheridan, in Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA.: MIT, 1986), p. 286.

<sup>224</sup> A notion that is not as esoteric as it might at first seem. See Rudolf Bernet, “The Other in Myself,” *Tradition and Renewal: Philosophical Essays Commemorating the Centennial of Louvain’s Institute of Philosophy*, Volume 1, ed. David A. Boileau and John A. Dick (Leuven: Leuven UP, 1992), pp. 77-93.

Though Lyotard wants to resist, for obvious reasons, the temptation to tell a new narrative, one that would place “our” era as a stage (one of heightened anxiety “unequaled” in the history of the West) in a particular progression, he also wants, and for equally obvious reasons, to take seriously the possibility that the political issues and crises of today are new, irreducible to what has gone before. This would be an integral part of recognizing the “failure” of modernity and the validity of the claims of the plurality of cultures and rationalities that have, at least in part, precipitated this failure. In this sense, it is possible to see the present time as one of heightened tension in the face of the threat to universality and to political emancipation that the crisis of modern narratives represents. The “call to order” Lyotard refers to, then, is a reaction to this anxiety, and it hides a tendency to totalize according to a certain “totalitarian” logic. And it isn’t hard to figure out what he has in mind. We have already seen the logic of what he calls “development” (§ 3.2), “an entity no less abstract or anonymous than Nature or History,”<sup>225</sup> and one whose “law” is both enabled and at the same time masked in “democratic forms” (TPM 159). This is the totalitarianism of “Wall Street’s Dow Jones Average and Tokyo’s Nikkei Index” (ibid.). Its “worldwide expansion” (the word Lyotard uses is “*mondialisation*”) has no need of war, but proceeds through economic, technological and scientific competition. It thus appears democratic. But Development (Lyotard capitalizes this word, too, in the French version of “The Survivor”) is ideological, according to him, “because it forecloses the anxiety of birth and death as an ontological enigma” (160). It is not open to the enigma of non-being that plagues being, to the debt of what calls from outside of programmable experience. On the contrary, in

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<sup>225</sup> The English translation omits the capital letters that Lyotard uses for “Nature” and “History.” See *Lectures d’enfance*, op. cit., p. 82.

its anxiety it tries to heighten the predictability of experience through an even more total programming, so that nothing of surprise may come to disrupt the machine or challenge its seemingly “natural” order. Thus, “what is extinguished by our contemporary totalitarianism is the very inquietude of appearance and disappearance” (162).

This returns us to the question of time. Lyotard refers to Freud’s claim that time, and in particular sequential time, must be viewed as a kind of “protective shield” against stimuli.<sup>226</sup> The notion of sequential time in Lyotard is inextricably linked with that of narrative, with the organizing of time into a sequence of interlinked events that follow one another according to a specific logic, that is to say, a specific law. In the narrative genre of discourse, heterogeneity, in particular the heterogeneity of other discourses, of other genres of discourse, is most easily covered over, hidden away, ignorable (D 151, § 219). Narrative imposes an end on all differends (ibid.). This means that it “swallows up” what we have here been calling the event, along with the differends that are always carried along by the event: “narrative drives the event back to the border” (152, § 219). Following the logic of Freud’s discussion of time as protective, narration protects from the event, which means it also protects from the differend.

We recall Lyotard’s definition of the differend: as distinct from a litigation, in which there exists an agreed upon rule of judgment that could equitably resolve conflicts between two or more parties, the term “differend” refers to an instance in which no such “rule of judgment” would apply to both arguments of the dispute (D xi, see also § 3.3). The legitimacy of one side of the argument would not imply the non-legitimacy of the other side. This is politics, for Lyotard (at least, for the Lyotard of *The Differend*), which

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<sup>226</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York & London: Norton, 1961), p. 32; also, “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad,’” trans. Strachey et al., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19.

is not itself a genre of discourse, but rather “the threat of the differend” (138, § 190). It consists in what the totalitarian does not recognize: the plurality and heterogeneity of the phrases that make up “language.” This heterogeneity – and the violence associated with the refusal to recognize it – is made all too evident under the name of the crime called “Auschwitz,” where the link between prescription and norm is irrevocably severed. The “legislator,” the SS, decrees that the “obligated,” the deportee, die – but those who give the order, who create the obligation, are themselves exempted from it, while those who undergo the obligation are exempted from its legitimation (100-1, § 157). This is what shatters the very possibility of the “we” of humanism, for Lyotard:

The SS does not have to legitimate for the deportee’s benefit the death sentence it apprises him or her of. The deportee does not have to feel obligated by this decree. . . . My law kills them that has no relevance to it. My death is due to their law, to which I owe nothing. Delegation is complete, it confirms the suspicion cast upon the we that supposedly assures the linking of the prescriptive onto the norm, namely, that it is a fiction. Were this *we* called humanity . . . then “Auschwitz” is indeed the name for the extinction of that name. (101, § 157)

What “Auschwitz” “shows” is that the “we” of universal humanity, the subject of universal history, is a fiction – not because the Nazis simply refused to recognize the universality of humanity, but because they showed that there is no necessary link from any one prescription to any particular norm that would be guaranteed through the “we” itself. The “we” is itself only a part of a particular discourse, a particular way of phrasing. What follows on any phrase is contingent, since there are always many possibilities. This is what opens each phrase to the differend, and what makes politics dependent on the question of how “we” “follow on from one sentence to the next” (UCD

319). But this does not preclude the possibility that a particular law, say the law of the SS, ignore the contingency of such linkages – and in so doing ignore the differends their own phrase produces, following only their own law. It might even do so under the name of another “we” – that of the Aryan race, for instance. And it is *this* “we” that permits the violence of acceding only to its own legitimation, that would in fact seek to purify this law of what comes to challenge it. In this way, the Nazis, in fact, avoid “politics” in Lyotard’s sense.

The Nazi narrative is mythic, not modern. It is at the extreme of the narrative downplaying of the event. But the modern narrative does not escape this problematic – although it hides it in the discourse of universality. The modern narrative, the narrative of universal history, depends on a “we” that does not purport to exclude, as the Nazis’s “we” explicitly does, any part of “humanity.” But in order to accomplish this universalization of the “we,” the modern narrative must move from local or traditional narratives to the universal narrative that takes “humanity” as its referent. This is the gesture that Derrida refers to in the opening passages of “The Ends of Man,” for instance. And as Derrida there also points out, this cannot be done, according to Lyotard, without doing violence to the heterogeneity of those local or traditional narratives: “The universalization of narrative instances cannot be done without conflict” (157, § 227). (We see, then, that it cannot be done without politics.) This is, of course, the import of the essay on universal history. And it is linked to the way that time is organized. In the modern narrative, it is the teleology of the final end that governs the flux of happenings and events in such a way as to control the unforeseeable and unexpected. It does not respect the differences that would challenge its hegemony, but dismisses them as

anomalies, contingencies, even errors. This is not to accuse it of its own “totalitarianism,” of course – it remains more open than the totalizing program; it accepts a high rate of contingency (IH 68). A project is not a program, the latter being more open and flexible, as well as cultivating “a more political than ritual attitude” (ibid.). But it shares with the more programmatic version the designating of “a diachronic series of events whose ‘reason’ at least is judged to be explicable” (ibid.). It situates the “now” in terms of a past that is understood and described on the basis of a particular future. It organizes history in terms of periods of movement toward this future, which is a way of “placing events in a diachrony” (25).

What remains ambiguous is the “now” that is to be situated by this past that is governed by a specific future. The “now” cannot be grasped because it is always fading away, disappearing and coming into being. Lyotard is here very close, in his way, to Derrida’s suspicions regarding the “presence” of any object. The “thing itself” is linked irrevocably to this appearing and disappearing of temporal flux, coming “too early” in what we might call for convenience “protention,” “too late” in “retention,” never quite “there” for consciousness. This becomes a problem for history, for at any given moment, this now must be situated according to what has come and what is to come. For Lyotard, if it is the narrative that does this organizing, the narrative of a universal history of all humankind, it does so at the expense of the enigma of this continual coming into and out of being, and thus at the expense of whatever in this enigmatic happening might be new, unfamiliar, unrecognizable, whatever might exceed its discourse.

This is what is threatening and even unjust about the modern narrative. And yet it does not itself escape this problem of the now entirely. If what characterizes the

“modern” for Lyotard is, as we have seen (§§ 1.1, 3.1, 3.2), its projection toward an ideal future, this means that in any given “now” there *already* resides this ideal future, this projection, this movement out of the now toward the ideal, the telos. Modern temporality “comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself,” a state of “ultimate stability” in the political project of emancipation (ibid.). In a movement that is very similar to Derrida’s discussion of ideality, then (§ 2.4), the modern keeps interrupting itself in this movement to exceed itself, to exceed the present state of things by achieving a more ideal state in the future. In this sense, the modern narrative is always already outside of itself. It in any case cannot be clearly circumscribed as a historical entity (ibid.). This may go some way to explaining its vulnerability to its own delegitimation, since it has never been able to successfully contain the totality it tries to think and organize. It is thus always already “postmodern” in this continual attempt to establish what is to (i.e., what will have) come. But it does not strive, as does the avant-garde, to find a new idiom or form for what is to come.

Temporality, then, has a “double gesture,” a forward movement and a backward movement (30). The enigmatic moment in which things happen, take place, slips out of this movement. This moment cannot be captured. It demands to be thought, but it makes this demand from outside of any organizing narrative. This is why Lyotard turns to Freud’s “working through” (*Durcharbeitung*) and “freely floating attention,” the rule of which states: “do not prejudge, suspend judgment, give the same attention to everything that happens” (ibid.). Attend, in other words, to what is happening now, to its uniqueness, its singularity – to the event. The mind needs to be patient, “passible,” open and responsive to what comes. It is attentive to the “lost time” of childhood, to its own



suffering due to its dispossession, its subjection to the heteronomy that is constitutive for it – the *infans* that is in it, irreducibly (33).

This attention will not avoid what comes to disrupt the narrative – it will not avoid the future taken as “an uncertain and contingent ‘afterwards’” (65). It will not rigidly follow the rule of any pre-given law, even the law of the Idea, but will rather learn to respond to what comes now, to a demand always made in the immediate present. The question is how all of this transfers to politics. How does this affective susceptibility of the child relate to a political realm of difference and plurality? How are “we” to be just, if we have no recognized narrative of liberation or emancipation according to which we may act and decide? How is political judgment to know, indeed, who or what is worthy of political consideration if there is no recognized “we” of political subjects? This is, arguably, precisely the issue for Lyotard, the problem that he presents for us “today” – how to think the political outside the influence of the traditional narratives of emancipation.<sup>227</sup> The key for Lyotard will reside in the fact that, in order to avoid the dangers and injustices associated with the narrative in any of its forms (mythic, modern, etc.), judgment needs to become more flexible. One must learn to judge when what is ethical or just is not (yet) known, but must be established. It is to judge in Kant’s sense of reflective judging, without the rule given before hand. It is to find the rule, or idiom, necessary. Lyotard’s is not a politics of consensus, but one that accepts the plurality of “language games” or “phrase universes” along with the attending difficulty of reaching assent between such games or universes. On the one hand, this is broadly Kantian as Lyotard conceives it – there is a difference, for instance, between the proper or acceptable

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<sup>227</sup> See David Carroll, “Rephrasing the Political with Kant and Lyotard: From Aesthetic to Political Judgments,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Autumn, 1984, pp. 73-88, this ref. p. 75.

conditions for obtaining assent between cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic discussions.<sup>228</sup>

But it can be taken across the “multiplicity of worlds of names” and the “insurmountable diversity of cultures” he invokes in the paper on universal history also (UCD 319).

Importantly, this is not an “irrationalist” move. On the contrary, Lyotard’s claim is that it is “the only one respectful of the specificity of reasonable procedures.”<sup>229</sup> *Contrary* to Kant, then, reason cannot retain its unity: “Rationality is reasonable only if it admits that reason is multiple.”<sup>230</sup> If it does so, however, then it opens the way for a politics that is adequate to the task of following on from the differend.

In a gesture reminiscent of Derrida’s talk of the “being-ill” of our time (§ 5.1), Lyotard claims that the “postmodern” state of thought suffers, it suffers from a lack of finality. This suffering is what constitutes what “by agreement” is called the “crisis,” “malaise,” or “melancholia” of the present state of thought.<sup>231</sup> But perhaps in this insistence on the multiplicity of reason, by this focus on a more flexible judgment, and certainly in this resistance to what might totalize in the narrative, a new sense of resistance to this suffering might also be glimpsed? Is it possible that this “postmodern” state need *not* consist in suffering? That what is called thinking’s crisis is not one? Let us take one final turn, back to Derrida, who also raises the entire question of reason in terms of the problem of plurality. By bringing these two thinkers together a little more firmly, perhaps we will be able to form at least a few tentative conclusions about the “state” of thought and of politics in a time that is still thought of as one of crisis.

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<sup>228</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis & London: Minnesota UP, 1997), p. 126.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.* Gérald Sfez also points to this passage, and discusses this question of different procedures (although he refers to the wrong text). See his *Lyotard: La partie civile* (Paris: Michalon, 2007), p. 99.

<sup>231</sup> *Postmodern Fables*, p. 100.

### 5.3 Derrida: The “Enlightenment” to Come

Derrida begins the essay called “The ‘World’ of the Enlightenment to come” by invoking a possible injunction for philosophy “today,” “to save the honor of reason,” an injunction that echoes Lyotard’s famous claim at the outset of *The Differend* that his problem in that text is, if nothing else, to “save the honor of thinking” (D xii). Such questions or problems may well come as some surprise. What would such a thing mean – coming, especially, from thinkers who have largely been accused of having destroyed reason, undermined thinking? What “honor” do these things have, and what would it mean to save it? And to save it from what? This last question at least provides an opening. For the issue that gets Derrida moving in this text is whether those that call themselves philosophers (which would not necessarily be those invoked in “The Ends of Man,” as we shall see) do not have a task, a responsibility: to save the honor of reason, and to do so “in these times of danger or distress” (WEC 119). In these times of crisis and anxiety, of political and religious unrest, in these times of cultural conflict in which there is little hope that a rational, universal legislator will come to adjudicate according to norms or values agreed upon by all – in such a time Derrida suggests that it is necessary (that it “would be a matter” of saving the honor of reason means that *it would be necessary* to do so, *ibid.*) to save the honor of reason, and precisely in the face of danger, distress, anxiety, and crisis.

For reason is adrift. It was founded – in its philosophical conception, its “Western” conception – in the Mediterranean, but it has been cast adrift, has gone out from its place of birth. Or perhaps there is a better metaphor, that of the colonizer, armed or unarmed: it has “unfurl[ed] its sails for a geopolitical voyage across Europe and its

languages, across Europe and the rest of the world” (ibid.). And the question is just how it has fared on its voyages, whether it will return, and return unaffected. Indeed, is reason first of all Mediterranean? Does it remain tied to its shores, even in all of its wanderings? Can it break, “in a decisive or critical fashion, from its birthplaces, its geography, and its genealogy” (ibid.)?

Such questions clearly place this issue into the context of the diversity of worlds and cultures we have been tracking in Lyotard. The issue is what reason is, what it still might be, in this “global,” “worldized” world. A world whose first characteristics appear to be divisiveness, dispersion, conflict, disagreement, dissensus, conditionality, eventfulness. The story is well-known, but remains pressing, perhaps precisely because of the anxiety this division continues to produce. And indeed, Derrida wastes no time in invoking Kant and his claim that reason is “practical, speculative, and architectonic, though *first of all architectonic*” (120, italics given). The risks that threaten such an architectonic today are not only the moments of antithesis in the antinomies of the transcendental dialectic. There is also, in a statement that echoes Lyotard and the essay on universal history, “the just as rational necessity, rational, that is, from the point of view of a history and of a development [*devenir*] of the sciences, to take into account plural rationalities” (ibid.). The necessity to recognize cultural differences and the “plural rationalities” that are part of this difference is itself a rational one. And a very “rational” inference can be drawn from their existence, since these plural rationalities “resist, in the name of their very rationality, any architectonic organization” (ibid.). Is it such pluralities that throw reason into crisis? Or only a particular view of reason? In an essay that speaks of the “apocalyptic tone” adopted by a philosophy apparently

profoundly anxious about such pluralities, Derrida goes so far as to suggest that, precisely in the spirit of illumination and demystification of the Enlightenment itself, it would be necessary (for an “*Aufklärung* of the twentieth century”) “to begin by respecting this differential multiplication [*démultiplication*] of voices and tones that perhaps divides them beyond a distinct and calculable plurality” (AT 156). The deconstruction of this apocalyptic discourse of crisis, of the end, and the end of everything<sup>232</sup> (in the face of the collapse of the dreams of universal emancipation of the Enlightenment) might just be required, called for, precisely in the spirit of the *Aufklärung* itself (148).

This would have to be, however, a strange Enlightenment, which puts reason in the rather uncomfortable position of challenging its own unity and coherence. Let us note the nature of these “rationalities.” As with Lyotard, the diversity is not entirely to do with a plurality of peoples or cultures but also (and in Derrida’s essay, initially) with a plurality of discourses, for example, between mathematics, life sciences, human sciences, law, political economy, biology, psychoanalysis or literary theory (WEC 120). Each has its own distinct historicity, configuration, institutional communities. To organize them architectonically would be to do violence to their “untranslatable heterogeneity.” The issue here would be on the order of Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties*, although Kant still has faith in the authority of reason as an ultimate arbitrator in this conflict. Reason will organize the hierarchy teleologically. We have seen Derrida’s distrust of such organization (Chapter 4). His claim here is that the analogy, the “as if” that would be required to inscribe this plurality into a “world” understood as an Idea in the Kantian sense, is impossible given this heterogeneity – the reason of analogy, as we have seen in Derrida’s reference to it in “Economimesis” (§ 4.1; E 277 ff.), is organized on a model of

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<sup>232</sup> See AT 145 for this list, which would include the end of history, class struggle, philosophy, God, etc.

*logos* that is not respectful of such differences, is not respectful of what falls out of the analogy as irrelevant to the similarities the analogy is focused on.

Such an institutional situation, however, immediately introduces the entire problematic of the “world.” One single, unified world, the Idea on which all politics of emancipation depends, the cosmopolitical realm of Kant’s rational *Aufklärer*, depends in its turn on this unity, not a unity that does away with all states, as we have seen (§ 2.1), but one that recognizes the possibility of that unity in the ability of everyone to make free use, precisely, of a common reason. What happens to such a realm and to such a notion in the face of these “plural rationalities”? What happens to the Idea of a “world” in such a circumstance? And here the entire problem of globalization or “worldization” comes in:

Is it not then in the name of these heterogeneous rationalities, in the name of their specificity and their future, their history, and their “enlightenment,” that we must call into question the masterly and mastering authority of architectonics and thus of a certain “world,” that is, the unity of the regulative Idea of the world that authorizes that world in advance? Which presupposes, therefore, a veritable genealogy of the world, of the concept of the world, in the discourses concerning *mondialisation* [worldization, or as the translators have it (perhaps more literally), “worldwide-ization”] or, what should be something else altogether, *globalization* or *Globalisierung*. (WEC 121, italics given)

We recall Husserl’s warnings in the *Crisis* (Chapter 2). The threat to the meaning and humanity of the world, the threat to the sciences and the crisis of reason that this heterogeneity of meaning constitutes, these form the register in which Derrida is working here, and indeed he invokes Husserl to do so. But the question for Derrida is whether this threat to the Idea of the “world” is really a moment for despair or anxiety – or whether it

is not really what is *called for* in order to be just to the heterogeneity we are discussing. Whether the threat to a particular Idea of the “world” really means a threat to meaning and even to a particular conception of “humanity” or to the humanity of this world. Whether, indeed, we can continue to go on referring to “our time,” to this time, to the times, to *any* time (including, perhaps pre-eminently, the time of any philosophy) as one conceived of as “a *critical*, dangerous, but provisional or periodic, passage,” that is, as one of crisis (124). It may be time, indeed, to begin to think of our time, of this time, as something other than a crisis. And we will see that the plurality of cultures invoked by Lyotard is also implied here, in the very idea of the Idea of the “world.”

The question for Derrida revolves around the distinction between the conditioned and unconditioned, the calculable and the incalculable. In one sense, both Kant and Husserl – the two philosophers who are, and not for fortuitous reasons, of central importance for Derrida in this essay – are respectful of and even called by a certain unconditionality. This takes a few forms, but Derrida’s primary interest is in the normativity of each philosopher’s call for an increased, critical rationality, a normativity which comes out most explicitly in the notion of the *task*, of philosophy’s infinite task, a task and a duty (*Aufgabe*) that, despite the forms philosophical thought takes at any given time, is itself unconditional (126). There is in both authors the sense of an “ought” and of a “duty” to be rational that is itself beyond any conditioned manifestation of that rationality. To see this unconditionality, we need only look back at Kant’s claim that we do not learn philosophy but only (?) to philosophize because any concrete attempt to do so is inadequate to the archetype of philosophy itself (KRV A838/B866; § 1.3); or Husserl’s very similar claim in the “Vienna Lecture” that a distinction must be made

between philosophy as an historical fact and philosophy as an idea (of an infinite task) (VL 291; § 2.2). Nothing conditions the call to reason in this sense. In an interplay that we will see is important for Derrida, we can say that reason is possessed of an “honor” that governs theoretical or scientific thinking but at the same time exceeds it (WEC 126). (Which raises the question of whether this honor remains entirely “reasonable”?)

Nonetheless, Derrida invokes the “powerful teleology” of the Idea itself, and of this Idea of an infinite task of reason first and foremost. If this Idea does not condition philosophy or the attempt to think (say, the attempt to think “our” time) in the sense that it provides no concrete form for such thinking to take, it does govern that thinking from afar. It gives it certain conditions, for instance, the unity, which is, in this instance, the unity of reason itself. The “infinity totality of truths” that such an Idea takes as its horizon, that it gives to thought as its horizon, resists the possibility of the plural rationalities and “regional ontologies” that stem from the “specialization of multiple knowledges” (128). In a gesture that returns us to the orbit of Lyotard’s concerns regarding the modern narrative, Derrida argues that this *telos* not only governs history, but does so in a way that, paradoxically, reduces and resists the “happenings” of history itself:

Whenever a *telos* or teleology comes to orient, order, and make possible a historicity, it annuls that historicity by the same token and neutralizes the unforeseeable and incalculable interruption, the singular and exceptional alterity of *what* [*ce qui*] comes, or indeed of *who* [*qui*] comes, that without which, or the one without whom, nothing happens or arrives. (Ibid., italics given)

Such is Lyotard’s concern with what he calls the “modern narrative.” In Derrida’s reference to what “comes” we see the relevance that this thinking has for the possibility



of a future. And Derrida, too, becomes interested in what he calls the “event,” which he glosses as

*what comes to pass* only once, only one time, a single time, a first and last time, in an always singular, unique, exceptional, irreplaceable, unforeseeable, and incalculable fashion, of *what* happens or *who* happens by precisely there where – and this is the end of the horizon, of teleology, the calculable program, foresight, and providence – one no longer *sees it coming*, no longer horizontally: *without prospect or horizon*. (135, italics given)

This event is that which happens for which the mind or thought is unprepared. It lacks any immediate category – thought needs to approach it. In this way it is very similar to what Lyotard means when he speaks of the event of the sublime, of affect, or of the susceptibility or vulnerability to touch in “childhood.” If what the future means is a ceaseless “opening onto an uncertain and contingent ‘afterwards,’” the event is the possibility of this uncertainty and contingency: “What is already known cannot, in principle, be experienced as an event” (IH 65).

The teleology of the Idea downplays this future, which is what prompts Derrida in his turn to ask whether the “great transcendental and teleological rationalisms” “expose themselves” to the thought of the event (WEC 135). That is, whether they expose themselves to a thought of the *future*, of what is, in a phrase that is very important to Derrida’s thinking, “to come.” Derrida invokes the “semantic link” between the French *avenir* (the future) and *devenir* (to become, becoming), both linked to *venir* (to come), to “the ‘viens,’ the *venir*, or the *venue* – that is, the ‘come,’ the coming, or the arrival” (143). In this same register, the register of the event, of advent, also belong terms we have already seen: the monstrous, the unrepresentable (144). What does not speak to thought, as Lyotard puts it in an expression we have now seen many times, “in good and

due form” (LAS 54). The question is, in a certain sense, one of temporality, and of the limitations that time puts on conscious thought, which is why we have seen Lyotard put it in the context of being and non-being. Thinking has its limitations, its susceptibilities. It is not God-like, as he puts it on an essay called, significantly, “Time Today”: “God has nothing to learn. In the mind of God, the universe is instantaneous” (IH 65). This is clearly not so for mortals, who are open to a future for which they cannot prepare, even if, through the teleology of the Idea or – worse – the program of “techno-scientific systems,” they attempt to do so. This is why Derrida says in “The Ends of Man” that the thinking of the telos always links “man” to God (M 121, § 5.1). A thinking of the event, on the contrary, is one that recognizes the experience of the death of thought (§ 2.4), the experience of its limitations, its openness to the contingency of the “happening” of the event. A thinking that separates “man” from the ground of any divine infinite: “Only a mortal can speak of the future in this sense, a god could never do so” (TS 23).

What lingers here is the unconditioned, what is not conditioned even by the governance of the Idea in the Kantian sense – nor conditioned for rational humanity through its link to a divine nature. There is a demand to think what exceeds calculation. To do it *justice*, which is, of course, that which makes this entire problematic political. For there is always an excess to justice, an unconditionality that exceeds any manifestation of the law. Law is “an ensemble of determinable norms, positively incarnated and positive” (21). It is present in the sense that it is written down, determined and verifiable. Justice, on the other hand, “has to be thought of as what overflows the law” (ibid.). It is associated with the future because it is associated with the “incalculable singularity of the other” (WEC 150). That is, it is associated with the event, with what is

“to come” in Derrida’s sense. It is not present in the sense that law is present – indeed, it must be distinguished not only from law, “but also from what *is* in general” (TS 21). It never comes to presence in the phenomenological sense. If there can be no future without radical otherness or alterity, the otherness of that which comes or arrives without clear and recognizable form, then justice would, in a sense, be the respect for this radical otherness, it would tie together “as non-reappropriable the future and radical otherness” (ibid.). It would thus participate “analytically” (in a way that is, perhaps not surprisingly, “a little enigmatic”) in the future (ibid.). It would mean, at the very least, an openness to that future.

To classical philosophy this sounds like risky business, and so Derrida would admit that it is. But it is not an unreasonable risk, nor even an irrational one. For while justice needs the law, so law also needs justice, in an interplay of calculability and incalculability that we have already seen at work in various forms, for instance, in what would constitute the philosophy of history of either Kant or Husserl. The question is whether or not one chooses to privilege the calculable and to downplay the incalculable. For Derrida’s claim is that *reason* is to be found on both sides:

there can be no justice without an appeal to juridical determinations and to the force of law; and there can be no becoming, no transformation, history, or perfectibility of law without an appeal to a justice that will nonetheless always exceed it. . . . According to a transaction that is each time novel, each time without precedent, reason goes through and goes between, on the one side, the reasoned exigency of calculation or conditionality and, on the other, the intransigent, nonnegotiable exigency of unconditional incalculability. (WEC 150)

It is necessary to think both the heterogeneity of justice and law *and* their inseparability. The only possibility of transformation, of perfectibility of law, resides in the possibility

that there be something that exceeds the law, to which the law itself never quite matches up. It is here that the “rationality” of this reason, the reason that calls us to think the unconditioned, resides. We can link it to the concern over a totalization that would itself turn quickly enough into a “totalitarianism” of right or law without this excess:

I think that the instant one loses sight of the *excess* of justice, or of the future, in that very moment the conditions of totalization would, undoubtedly, be fulfilled – but so would the conditions of the *totalitarianism* of a right [*droit*] without justice, of a good moral conscience and a good juridical conscience, which all adds up to a present without a future [*sans avenir*].

(TS 22, italics given)

There is in this “good moral conscience” more than the danger of a complacency with one’s own norms (though there is that too). This “good conscience” is one that has achieved what it set out to do, has done all that it can, has no more to learn and no need to fear what comes. It is not unrelated, in its way, to the smug assurance of those who urge the end of experimentation and a return to communicability and order that Lyotard attacks at the outset of “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?” There is here a kind of tyranny of the norm. But what is a norm that is not open to the possibility of improvement? A norm invokes an “ought” and that “ought” depends for its legitimation on the very possibility of improvement. If one reaches perfectibility, would this not, paradoxically, be the very destruction of normativity itself? If my law or my right is the perfect realization of law or right, has my law or right not in fact become a kind of tyrant, even a “totalitarian” in the sense that we have been using it here?

This means that the move toward totalization has its own risks, its own very serious political stakes. If the “totalization” that Derrida invokes here can be said to constitute what makes up most political philosophies, then Derrida’s claim is that this

totalization has significant (and possible “unreasonable”) consequences of its own – and necessarily so. This would mean that Derrida’s political thinking could at least in part be said to consist in challenging this totalizing move fundamental to most politics – and the same can be (and has been) said for Lyotard.<sup>233</sup>

But perhaps we should remind ourselves that this unconditionality is in fact no stranger to political philosophy. Derrida reminds us of Kant’s claim in the *Groundwork* that everything in the kingdom of ends has either a price or a dignity (GW 4:434). Anything with a price on the market is replaceable by something that is of the same value, i.e., has what Derrida calls “calculable equivalences” (WEC 133). What has dignity, however, has no equivalent, is “raised above all price” (GW 4:434). That is to say, its dignity is incalculable. A rational being capable of morality has such value: “the human person, for example, and this is, for Kant, the only example” (WEC 133; see § 5.1). This incalculable dignity of the human person returns us to the theme of humanism in a way that links it more concretely to the political issues at stake here. For quite apart from the difficulties or questions that Kant’s humanism might raise, “we must recognize that this incalculable dignity, which Kant sometimes calls ‘sublime,’ remains the indispensable axiomatic, in the so-called globalization [*mondialisation*] that is under way, of the discourses and international institutions concerning human rights and other modern juridical performatives” (WEC 133). The concepts of human rights, or of crimes against humanity, remain the legacy of this incalculable dignity – which is why I suggested earlier that one will not escape certain legacies of humanism so easily (although this notion of incalculability will have its effects on any so-called “humanism” also). Indeed, Derrida suggests that this incalculable dignity might even serve as a form of resistance to

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<sup>233</sup> Geoffrey Bennington, *Lyotard: Writing the Event* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988), p. 9.

the very “globalization” at issue here. For the context that “we” inherit today is one characterized in part by this word, one whose politics, it might be fair to say, must largely be concerned with whatever it may mean. But this “globalization” is not so unproblematically “global,” as Derrida argues, but rather produces a situation that is “more inegalitarian and violent than ever, a globalization that is, therefore, only simply alleged and actually less global or worldwide than ever” (155). Less global and worldwide because of the hegemony of certain nation states and their interests, because of the hoarding of resources and wealth to a very small and select part of the globe. A globalization, then, that is a poor substitute for the cosmopolitical realm, though it may disguise itself as such. A sham globalization or *mondialisation* that “confiscates to an unprecedented degree and concentrates into a small part of the human world so many natural resources, capitalist riches, technoscientific and even teletechnological powers,” including “those two great forms of immunity that go by the names public health and military security” (ibid.).

As with Lyotard, then, the “globalization” of capitalist technoscience is not cosmopolitical but regional and even national at base (see § 3.2). What will trace a line of resistance, to use Lyotard’s language, to *this* failing of modernity? Derrida suggests that there is at least a tension in the legacy of the incalculable dignity of the human and, surprisingly, in the universality that is a part of this legacy:

For it is often precisely in the name of the universality of human rights, or at least of their perfectibility [that is, and this is important if we are not to make too hasty a conclusion about Derrida’s “humanism,” their incalculability] . . . that the indivisible sovereignty of the nation-state is being more and more called into question, along with the immunity of sovereigns, be

they heads of state or military leaders, and even the institution of the death penalty, the last defining attribute of state sovereignty. (157-8)

If our so-called globalization is in fact the result of the hegemony of certain nation-states, then the discourse on human rights, international trials and tribunals for crimes against humanity, and all other discourse that depend upon such notions produce a tension that runs contrary to the authority of such states – and often from within those states themselves. This is not, of course, to attack all forms of state sovereignty. Nation-states can also form a protective “bulwark” against internationalizing forces at the service of particular interests. But it produces a responsibility, and one that is, indeed, neither relativist nor irrational: to negotiate a passage, each time singular, between on the one hand, the legitimacy of the law and of the sovereign state that administers and governs it, and on the other, the unconditional or incalculable, the “exigency” of the unconditioned (158) that might just be termed a “voice” or a “call” of something that is otherwise “inadmissible [*irrecevable*] in general collocation, everything that is no longer identifiable starting from established codes” (AT 160, for the “voice,” *passim*). And in describing this negotiation, Derrida sounds very close to Lyotard, since it would require “orienting oneself without any *determinative* knowledge of the rule,” the invention of “maxims of transaction” that would resemble “the poetic invention of an idiom” (WEC 158). It would be to *decide* in Derrida’s sense of that term.

Indeed, decision is linked to responsibility, for Derrida – it neither can nor ought to be controlled or programmed by previous knowledge. To decide is to negotiate the gap between knowing and doing. One must prepare to decide through knowing, calculation, one ought to be as clear as one can be before a decision is made. But when one decides, a leap is made between these “heterogeneous” moments. No amount of

knowledge can do away with the need for this leap into the unknown. A decision is always made, to some extent at least, in the “night.”<sup>234</sup> This is why a decision is a responsibility, and indeed, an infinite one, since the “abyss” between knowledge and action is itself infinite. This is for Derrida the very definition of decision, which, if it is worthy of this name, always requires a moment of unknowing, and a commitment in the face of this unknowing: “you take a decision only in a situation when there is something undecidable, when you don’t know what to do . . . if you knew what to do, there would be no decision.”<sup>235</sup>

Such, for instance, are the kinds of decisions called for in ethics, in juridical matters, and in politics (*ibid.*), and they correspond to what Lyotard calls, following Kant, “reflective” judgments, as we have seen. In both authors the question is one of deciding or judging without clear rules or procedures that would program thought and in fact do away with the need to judge, decide, commit to a course of action at all. The teleology at work in the Idea tends to downplay and neutralize the possibility of any judgment or decision in this sense – “the future conditions the present,” as Lyotard puts it (IH 66), but only by coming “before” it (65) in the sense that it is projected from the now towards an ideal. This runs the risk of neutralizing what both authors call the “event” – with all of the attending political concerns that we have been considering.

Derrida’s “Enlightenment,” then, is not a simple retreat back into traditional categories like “reason” or “universality,” though he thematizes both in “The ‘World’ of the Enlightenment to Come.” If deconstruction is a “demystification” that not only accepts but even insists upon what it inherits from the Enlightenment (AT 148), it also

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<sup>234</sup> See the interview “Justice, Law and Philosophy – An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” *South African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 18, No. 3, August 1999, pp. 279-86. The on-line edition is unpaginated.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*



seeks to demystify, to illuminate the Enlightenment itself, to elucidate its ends, including its seductions, trickeries, and maneuvers (160). To push the logic of its own reason, to query this reason, to reason – if possible – with this reason. To what end? This will take some time to calculate – but perhaps we can say a few things in closing.

#### 5.4: The End(s) of Crisis

We began this chapter with a consideration of Derrida's concerns about the potential violence of philosophical discourse in "The Ends of Man." Derrida will not change his mind about a certain kind of philosophizing, but "The Ends of Man" is not, as it were, his last word on the subject – as is well known. In the essay entitled "On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy," which takes both its title and its point of departure from Kant's "On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy," Derrida plays on the apocalyptic tone of crisis that we have been pursuing in some fashion here. What interests Derrida in Kant's combat with the "mystagogues" that are the occasion for Kant's essay is what happens to the term "philosophy" in this debate. Let us remember that Kant is concerned in this article with a particular kind of "philosopher," personified by one Schlosser, for whom the truth is revealed in intuition. This means that the truth is, of course, a kind of secret, whose owners "have it *in themselves* but unfortunately *cannot* express and universally communicate it in language."<sup>236</sup> Such a state of affairs is of course of considerable horror for Kant, who twice speaks of this "surrogate of cognition," this "exalting vision" in terms of the very death of philosophy.<sup>237</sup> This potential death,

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<sup>236</sup> Immanuel Kant, "On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy," trans. Peter Fenves, in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*, ed. Peter Fenves (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), pp. 51-81. This ref., p. 51, italics given.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62 and 71 respectively.

this fear of apocalypse, is what interests Derrida, who points to a claim that Kant makes at the outset of the essay regarding the meaning of philosophy itself. According to Kant, philosophy has relinquished its “first meaning,” a meaning which he describes as the “scientific wisdom of life” (51). It is this relinquishment of an original meaning that makes it susceptible to being taken over by these mystagogues, who adorn themselves with it in spite of the inherent irrationalism hiding in their exaltations. Such an event, says Derrida, tells us something about the name “philosophy,” that it “can circulate without its original *reference*” (AT 126, italics given). The name can wander, its relation to its originary sense is not insured against accident.

That Derrida might be happy to draw such a conclusion is not very surprising, given what we have seen. But let us note that this possibility, which is a possibility that Derrida’s entire thought opens, is what itself opens philosophy to what, in “The Ends of Man,” it still appeared closed to. And the question of this opening is linked to another, one that is very pressing for us today, those of us who still try to think and study what are called the “humanities.” What is the place of the humanities and of the philosophical discipline today, in this age of crisis and among these calls to order (which I take it we have seen anything but the end of)? The place of these pursuits in this age of “technoscience” and of “globalization”? If the narrative of emancipation is no longer legitimated, if the discourse of a certain reason is ineffectual or, worse, violent in the face of a plurality of rationalities? If humanism is dead? And if the discourse of Development has no room for the endless debates, musings, readings, cul de sacs, indecisions, of a discipline that provides nothing to technoscientific advancement?

Perhaps its place is nowhere. But if it is a question of justice, and of justice in a time of a “globalization” that ignores both the reason of the Enlightenment and the ever prominent plurality of discourses, then there will at the very least be a need for a thought – and we might still call it, following Derrida, “philosophy” – of the world, or better, worlds, that such a program misses. Such a philosophy, however, would depend precisely on the ability of this name to wander from its originary sense.

A philosopher, according to Derrida, “is always someone for whom philosophy is not given, someone who in essence must question him or herself about the essence and destination of philosophy” (HPD 9). This questioning is a duty, and it is perhaps more pressing than it at first appears. The context of the essay we are tracking here is a talk originally delivered at UNESCO, and Derrida refers to UNESCO and to all the other international institutions that, in invoking notions like human rights and international law, “imply a philosophy, indeed, imply philosophy in the discourse, and I would even say in the language, of their charter” (ibid.). We return to the “tensions” such concepts create for a particular kind of globalization referred to above – and to their philosophical history. It is thus no surprise that Derrida uses Kant’s “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” as a starting point for his considerations, a text that, as Derrida puts it, can be described (among others of Kant’s historical and political writings) “as *announcing*, that is to say, predicting, prefiguring and prescribing a certain number of international institutions which only came into being this century” (7, italics given).

It is perhaps no surprise that we end back at a text that can be said, in its way, to have informed the whole of this study from the beginning. We will not escape the Idea in the Kantian sense so easily – and Derrida is aware of it. But he is also aware of the issues

that it poses for a philosophy that must attempt to think today. We will not go into the limitations of the philosophical approach to universal history that informs Kant's conception of this cosmopolitan history. Let us only note that what he calls the "teleological axis" of Kant's discourse "has become the tradition of European philosophy" (14), a discourse and a teleology that, as we have seen in both Kant and Husserl (§ 2.3), has consistently put Europe at the top of the hierarchy or at the end and purpose of universal history. This leaves the thought of both a philosophy for today and of the institutions it has been fundamental in founding (institutions that may even be becoming increasingly urgent) with a problem: "This eurocentric discourse forces us to ask ourselves . . . whether today our reflection concerning the unlimited extension and the reaffirmation of a right to philosophy should not both *take into account and de-limit* the assignation of philosophy to its Greco-European origin or memory" (ibid., italics given).

Contrary to how philosophy is treated in "The Ends of Man," Derrida invokes here a "right to philosophy," the right of *all* people, "men and women," to philosophy. This right is "cosmopolitical" (6), not European and not national, "no longer simply national, less national today than ever" (8). But the concerns of "The Ends of Man" remain relevant – eurocentric philosophical discourse remains violent to the very difference of the "other" that presses down upon it, the difference this other threatens this discourse with. The difference that makes it anxious. The question, then, is whether it is possible, in invoking this cosmopolitical right of *all* people (men and women – Derrida repeatedly insists on this) to philosophy, to conceive of a philosophy that neither denies nor surrenders to this "Greco-European origin or memory." A conception of philosophy

that would nonetheless avoid “the old, tiresome, worn-out and wearisome opposition between Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism” (14).

The question of this possibility returns us to the event. For Derrida’s claim is that philosophy “is no longer determined by a program, an originary language or tongue whose memory it would suffice to recover so as to discover its destination” (ibid.). It is, it always has been, open to the event, to what happens to it, including a kind of “appropriation” that would not be a process of making one’s own what belongs to others. Philosophy can be turned to different ends, is already turned away from its end. It defies ends, saturable contexts, the limits of any parergon. It is not a question simply of doing philosophy another way – “philosophy, if there is such a thing, is the *other way*” (15, italics given). Even its birth, its origins, are suspect, “bastard, hybrid, grafted, multilinear and polyglot” (ibid.). It does not have a sole memory. Which means we must adjust our practice of the history of philosophy, the practice of history and of philosophy more generally, “to this reality which was also a chance and which more than ever remains a chance” (ibid.). One cannot and must not deny its history, its attachment to a particular set of cultural and linguistic traditions. But one must also resist the temptation to simply oppose this history, these attachments, as though one could simply “get past” or “get over” them. One must forget neither their dangers nor their promise. It is not a question of “inclusion” or of “exclusion,” but of recognizing that no telos can control what happens to philosophy, which is always already open, for instance, through the logic of the parergon, to its own interruption, to the event of what will happen to it. To what is happening to it (AT 168).

Against the “globalization” that he is so distrustful of, Derrida, perhaps surprisingly, speaks of “a new cosmopolitics.”<sup>238</sup> Such a cosmopolitics would not be a simple return to the modern version of this tradition, of which Kant is perhaps the most famous exponent. This new cosmopolitics is interested in “forms of solidarity yet to be invented” (ibid.), forms that remain a task for political thought, for a certain kind of *philosophical* thought today. It would not be a thought that simply adhered to or tried to re-establish an old or existing law. It would accept that ours is a time that is calling for the establishment of a new law (MCF 110). The question that remains, in the face of this demand and in view of the fact that no previous law is up to the task, is how to “transform and improve the law” in order to establish this new cosmopolitics?<sup>239</sup> It will be a question of judgment or decision in the way we have been describing them here, of what Derrida calls that abyssal leap between knowledge and doing, of negotiating between the law and the unconditional demand for justice that exceeds that law. It would not be responsible to deny the claims of either. But if there is to be an “Enlightenment” to come (and in this respect, Derrida tells us, he remains Kantian, HPD 17), it will have to follow a new reason.

Philosophy tries, and has always tried, to think the “world,” to think its world. How is this to be done in a world characterized by “plural rationalities” or “regional ontologies” (Derrida) or by “micrologies” or “local determinism” (Lyotard)? The most obvious question is perhaps whether philosophy needs to or can think this world at all – and yet we have seen Derrida explicitly urging a “right to philosophy,” while Lyotard, at the outset of *The Differend*, claims that, in response to the “miserable slackening” of our

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<sup>238</sup> For instance, in the essay “On Cosmopolitanism,” trans. Mark Dooley, in Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London & New York: Routledge), 2001, pp. 1-24. This ref., p. 4.

<sup>239</sup> “On Cosmopolitanism,” p. 22.

time, “The time has come to philosophize” (xiii). But if this is so it has a problem, for if philosophy must continue to think the world, this demand comes at the time in which the tools it has traditionally used to do that are most in question. Philosophy, too, will have to mean something other than it has. But it cannot simply be abandoned. We have had some suggestion why this might be the case for Derrida but I think the same can be said for Lyotard, and we have seen hints in his work also, particularly in his urging for us to begin to trace a line of resistance to modernity’s failing (UCD 323). What would be “postmodern” about that? Perhaps it is simply a question of responding to the call to decide or to judge, now, so as to welcome what is yet to come.

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