

Peter Krapp

## **Derrida Online**

A century ago, Wilhelm Dilthey urged the collection of philosophical papers and literary scripts of "persons of intellectual distinction" whose heritage he considered in peril of disappearance. With envy he noted the rich archives of history, even of contemporary political studies, and called for comprehensive means of collection and preservation for the sake of those studying "poetry and philosophy, history and science" in context. To this end, Dilthey propagated a return to two virtues he saw as dating from the latter half of the 18th century: philology in its methodological aspect on one hand, and on the other, a Hegelian history of humanity culminating in philosophy. To recognise the historicity of human nature through the 84 generations since Thales, Dilthey argued, should require an archive of philosophy and its exegesis according to philological strictures. Presupposing an already constituted objective spirit, Dilthey wished for the significations and values of this objective milieu to be interiorised and assumed as such. He concluded, "the collation of manuscripts somewhere in a state archive of literature has to begin as soon as possible", expressing his confidence that "in the rooms of such an archive, a spirit of the house will appear that watches over these papers, at once opening and preserving, tending and communicating them".<sup>1</sup>

There is now, as of spring 1996, an archive hosted by the University of California at Irvine that has begun to collect Critical Theory, including the remains, as it were, of a Derrida, while at the same time qualifying its relation to Dilthey's parameters. There is a considerable resistance in Derrida's work against appropriations of any kind, a distrust of "state archives" and institutions, a suspicion against notions of continuity and method, and an uneasy relation, at best, to the history of philosophy. What spirit would be needed or able to tend and open, today and tomorrow, the texts signed "Jacques Derrida", in order to prevent their disappearance? Recently, computers appear to promise an open archive, but the relationship of deconstruction

---

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey (1889): "Archive der Literatur in ihrer Bedeutung für das Studium der Geschichte der Philosophie", *Gesammelte Schriften* IV, Stuttgart: Teubner 1959, pp. 555-575, here: 574 (my transl.). Arguably, Jacques Derrida's texts put the supreme reign of an objective spirit into question; e.g., Edmund Husserl's *Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1989, p. 63

to computer writing, and to hypertext in particular, needs yet to be determined: does deconstruction somehow 'theorize' hypertext, or hypertext 'literalize' deconstruction?<sup>2</sup> Either way, if in the "nonspaced space or spaced-out space of the internet, everything is in a sense everywhere at all times", as J. Hillis Miller writes, "and everything is juxtaposed to everything else"<sup>3</sup>, it ought to be possible for activities as wide-ranging as Derrida's to be collected, opened, tended to and communicated via the internet, allowing an almost instantaneous access to any page or work or mark in store - while at the same time remaining open to a logic of the unforeseeable.

### The Internet as Archive?

Until recently, theorists made comparatively little use of the possibilities of the world-wide web which allows for a combination of text, image, sound and animation on the basis of hypertext markup language. At a time when many interface-metaphors on "the net" turn out to be merely empty thoroughfares, it seems necessary to summon some resistance to the endless streams of tele-phatic chatter.<sup>4</sup> Suspended between the old-fashioned desire for an encyclopaedic grasp of "Derrida", and the surmise that such a project must appear to go diametrically against the claims of deconstruction, we encounter in Derrida's texts a strong concern with the archive, with memory and dispersion in relation to the reception or non-reception, assimilation or rejection, digestion or exclusion, absorption or expulsion, incorporation or foreclosure, of issues of hypomnesia and forgetting. However, in order to find out what such an archive could be, one must try not to know "always already", but pay heed to the constant tele-technological deferral

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gregory Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1985, p. 303: "Derrida's texts ... already reflect an internalization of the electronic media"; Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1990, p. 128: "computer writing instantiates the play that deconstruction raises only as a corrective"; George P. Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1992, p. 2: "When designers of computer software examine the pages of *Glas* or *Of Grammatology*, they encounter a digitalized, hypertextual Derrida"; Mark C. Taylor and Esa Saarinen, *Imagologies*, London: Routledge 1994: "Deconstruction theorizes writerly practices that anticipate hypertexts" (Telewriting 9). - Elsewhere, I argue that the repeated attempts to render the columns clamped together in *Glas* readable as hypertext 'avant la lettre' more often than not tend to pre-empt reading and dismiss the commentary found in *Glas* on the Hegelian bias against the machine; it would then only be hypertext 'avant la lecture'. Cf. Peter Krapp, "Screen Memory", *Medien des Gedächtnisses*, eds. A. Assmann et al. Tübingen: forthcoming

<sup>3</sup> J. Hillis Miller, "The Ethics of Hypertext", *diacritics* (fall) 1995, p. 27-39, here: 31

<sup>4</sup> Not that there was nothing on "Derrida" or, for that matter, on "deconstruction" online; search engines will point users to the archives of an email discussion list (listserv@cfrvm.cfr.usf.edu) and to various e-zine articles in *Seulemonde*, *Postmodern Culture*, and *Foreign Body*, to name but few.

of information or communication.<sup>5</sup> It is less a matter of archeology than of that which is yet to come.<sup>6</sup>

These questions in their relation to computerised textuality are addressed in Geoffrey Bennington's *Derridabase*, the linear version, as he puts it, of a book without prescribed order of reading, written in hypertext, to appear subsequently in electronic form. Claiming that if writing had for Derrida a privileged empirical version, it would be the computer, Bennington set out to "systematise J.D.'s thought to the point of turning it into an interactive program which, in spite of its difficulty, would in principle be accessible to any user."<sup>7</sup> It would appear, then, that the "discontinuous jumps establishing quasi-instantaneous links" attempt to make manifest what other ways of presentation must fail to do, having "absorbed Derrida, his singularity and his signature, the event we were so keen to tell you about, into a textuality in which he may well have quite simply disappeared." However, I do not subscribe to Bennington's apparent suggestion that one day it will no longer be necessary to cite Derrida, because he will have passed into the language. On the contrary, it seems necessary to cite, and cite again; and to keep the citations circulating - therefore, the archive will have to be an open one, facilitating access and storage: a website, for instance.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> See the interview conducted in Paris in August 1993 to mark the publication of Derrida's *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Galilée 1993), first published in the monthly review *Passages* in September 1994, and in English as "The Deconstruction of Actuality", *Radical Philosophy* no. 68 (autumn) 1994, p. 28-41

<sup>6</sup> However, see E. M. Henning, "Foucault and Derrida: Archeology and Deconstruction", *Stanford French Review*, Fall (1981): 247-264; extended repr. as E. M. Henning, "Archeology, Deconstruction, and Intellectual History", *Modern European Intellectual History. Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, S. Kaplan and D. LaCapra eds., London: Routledge 1982, p. 153-196

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Bennington, "Derridabase", Bennington/Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, Chicago UP 1993, pp. 1, 14, 313-316 and passim

<sup>8</sup> There are websites offering deconstructive material and texts by, or on, Derrida, e.g. [www.susx.ac.uk/Users/sffc4/](http://www.susx.ac.uk/Users/sffc4/), [www.cas.usf.edu/journal/fobo/](http://www.cas.usf.edu/journal/fobo/), [www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/](http://www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/), [www.lake.de/home/lake/hydra/](http://www.lake.de/home/lake/hydra/) - with numerous links to other sources. The complicated issue of copyright infringement in digital media remains as yet unsolved. As Derrida demonstrates, there is a distinction between good and bad repetition, and one can always parasite the other. For instance, one day in September 1995, I had advertised free web offerings to a discussion list, and a few hours later it was duplicated and re-broadcast under a different address, but with my name carefully erased. A simple link would have provided the same information without changing the documents. Several lawyers contacted me online and suggested that although it might not be worth filing a suit, I should certainly put a copyright notice on the site, even if theoretically, every document published after April 1, 1989 is automatically copyrighted, whether it has a notice or not. An exemption for fair use is made; see the MLA-Style Citations of Electronic Sources, [www.cas.usf.edu/english/walker/mla.html](http://www.cas.usf.edu/english/walker/mla.html). Had the documents remained intact, the copied site would merely have been considered a "mirror", such as the ones maintained, in the wake of this event, at [www.cee.hw.ac.uk/~johnm/Archive/jd.html](http://www.cee.hw.ac.uk/~johnm/Archive/jd.html) in Britain and at [www.cas.usf.edu/journal/fobo/jd.html](http://www.cas.usf.edu/journal/fobo/jd.html) in the USA. There, the National Humanities Alliance is preparing a document of basic principles for intellectual property ([www-ninch.cni.org/ISSUES/COPYRIGHT/](http://www-ninch.cni.org/ISSUES/COPYRIGHT/)) derived, with permission, from the University of California's draft document,

At first, to represent Derrida online must appear preposterous. How to "collect Derrida", how to consign "Derrida" to an internet archive? The net, as master trope of computer mediated communication and storage, holds a promise: it gestures toward what is coming tomorrow. It comes as no surprise, however, that disgruntled talk abounds of a challenge of the new media (computer, CD-rom, but also CNN and MTV etc.) to literature and culture, fulfilling, perhaps, Derrida's surmise that "an entire epoch of so-called literature, if not all of it, cannot survive a certain technological regime of telecommunications".<sup>9</sup> In all reiterations of the Platonic suspicion of writing, new media are perceived as apparatuses of forgetting from the perspective of the old mediascape. But the uncannily prescient writer of the Post Card could not be said to be a technophobe; as Derrida admits a decade before the invention of the world wide web, he is one of those who

[w]ant to write and first to reassemble an enormous library on the courier, the postal institutions, the techniques and mores of telecommunication, the networks and epochs of telecommunication throughout history - but the 'library' and the 'history' themselves are precisely but 'posts', sites of passage or of relay among others, stases, moments or effects of 'restance', and also particular representations, narrower and narrower, shorter and shorter sequences, proportionally, of the Great Telematic Network, the 'worldwide connection'. What would our correspondence be, and its secret, the indecipherable, in this terrifying archive?<sup>10</sup>

The archive is terrifying not least because it appears irresistible: indeed, to summon the force of that which is 'off the record' will be the impossible task of deconstruction.<sup>11</sup> The stress lies on the "effects of restance". At stake here is no simple opposition between interiorization and

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond, Chicago: Chicago UP 1987, p. 197

<sup>10</sup> Post Card, p. 27; compare *ibid.* 105

<sup>11</sup> Derrida, Résistances de la psychanalyse. Paris: Galilée 1996, p. 66: "*Off the record*, cela veut dire hors enregistrement, hors archive. Nous voilà donc reconduits à la difficile question du 'record', de l'histoire et de l'archive. Y a-t-il du 'hors-archive'? Impossible, mais l'impossible c'est l'affaire de la déconstruction."

technical-mechanical hypomnesia; rather, one comes to haunt the other in a non-dialectical movement of what remains.<sup>12</sup>

Websites might be among those "sites of passage or of relay among others". What Derrida offers is not a techno-positivism which argues in favour of a radical presentism in the absolute archive, believing with Nietzsche in the forgetting of history.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Derrida has affirmed that what concerns him is something "homogeneous with a development of the techno-mathematical kind that no longer allows one to treat the techno-scientific as Heidegger does".<sup>14</sup> Navigating thus between Heideggerian nostalgia and Nietzschean force, he proposes a consideration of the archive inasmuch as it would not exist without a place of consignment, a technique of repetition and a certain exteriority. What is more, the archive is not just a prosthesis or stockroom, it contains its own principle of selection so that "there is no meta-archive" for Derrida either - thus the question of the archivable concept of the archive becomes "a question of the future".<sup>15</sup> No mere Derridean philology or philography, then - although it is not entirely without interest if the archive informs us that a passage from "Archive Fever" echoes another in "The Gift of Death", that the Marx passage in the Postcard (which is taken up again in Specters of Marx) was already in an interview from 1977, or that another passage of "Archive Fever" takes up a morsel from Glas - and so forth.<sup>16</sup> This kind of dynamic archiving puts on the line the most pivotal concern. On one hand, Derrida sketches his work as follows:

As for a book project, I have only one, the one I will not write, but that guides, attracts, seduces everything I read. Everything I read is either forgotten or else stored up in view of

---

<sup>12</sup> Derrida, Mémoires: for Paul de Man, New York: Columbia University Press 1989, p. 35-38 and passim; also, this concern is a dead ringer for Glas. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1986

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Friedrich Kittler, "Vergessen". Ulrich Nassen ed., Texthermeneutik. Aktualität, Geschichte, Kritik. Paderborn: UTB 1979, p. 195-221; trans. in Discourse. Berkeley Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture, 3 (1981), p. 88-121

<sup>14</sup> Les fins de l'homme: à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida, eds. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, Paris: Galilée 1981, p. 486; cf. Timothy Clark, "Computers as Universal Mimics: Derrida's question of Mimesis and the status of Artificial Intelligence", Philosophy Today, Winter 1985, p. 302-318

<sup>15</sup> Derrida, "Archive Fever", diacritics summer 1995, p. 9-63, here: 45 and 27; repr. as Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression. University of Chicago Press 1996, pp. 76 and 36

<sup>16</sup> Compare p. 50 of "Archive Fever", diacritics (summer) 1995, p. 9-63 (p. 77 in the book) and p. 82 of The Gift of Death (University of Chicago Press 1995); compare Postcard, loc. cit., p. 267, and "Ja, ou le faux bond", Digraphe 2, 1977; compare p. 49 of "Archive Fever" (i.e. p. 74 in the book) and Glas. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1986, p. 82a (i.e. 95a in the French, Paris: Galilée 1974).

this book. [...] It would be at least a crossing of multiple genres. I am looking for a form that would not be a genre and that would permit me to accumulate and to mobilize a very large number of styles, genres, languages, levels... That's why it is not getting written.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, it is Derrida who confesses: "I forget, in a certain, way, everything I write, doubtless also, in another way, what I read."<sup>18</sup> Arguably, to be unable to forget would be the ultimate semiotic mishap. But a sense of dislocation and of the problematics of memory would seem to suit the desire "to make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words 'proximity', 'immediacy', 'presence' (the proximate, the own, and the pre- of presence)" that Derrida proposed, early on, as his "final intention".<sup>19</sup> The site of the archive, then, becomes displaced to the extent of turning into a para-site.

What produces the accelerated development of teletechnologies, of cyberspace, of virtuality is questioning and dislocating the traditional and dominant concepts of state or citizen in their relation to the actuality of a territory, a "practical deconstruction", as Derrida says, of the process of the political.<sup>20</sup> This taking place of the event affects the experience of place itself. Following Derrida, one cannot make a promise but in terms of erasure. Deconstruction, then, that surprisingly successful word, will have been erased in many ways.<sup>21</sup> And although he is a savvy critic of mediatic "actuvirtuality", Derrida has made ample use of television, radio, telephones, and the computer in interviews and publications.<sup>22</sup>

Electronic media, however, always harbour a potential for surprise, as is illustrated by the following example: a short interview with Elisabeth Weber on German radio was broadcast and

---

<sup>17</sup> Derrida, "Dialanguages", *Points... Interviews 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, Stanford University Press 1995, p. 142.

<sup>18</sup> Derrida, *Glas*, p. 192b

<sup>19</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1976, p. 70

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Échographies de la télévision. Entretiens films*, Paris: Galilée-INA 1996, p. 45

<sup>21</sup> See also Derrida, *Mémoires: for Paul de Man*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 123

<sup>22</sup> E.g., *Échographies de la Télévision*; "Language: *Le Monde* on the Telephone", in: *Points... Interviews 1974-1994*, ed. E. Weber, Stanford UP 1995, p. 171-180; and on the occasion of the Artaud centenary in 1996, Derrida's presentation was broadcast to a lecture hall in Australia via internet video conferencing. Cf. also Derrida, "Le toucher: Touch/to touch him", *Paragraph* 16/2 (July 1993): p. 124-157, e.g.: "Tangent IV (a supplementary touch or past retouching, long ago left stalled on my computer, that is, in a place where the relation between thought, weight, language, and digital touch will have undergone in the last ten years an essential mutation of ex-scribing. A description would be necessary of the surfaces, the volumes, and the limits of this new magic writing pad which exscription touches on in another way, from the keyboard to the memory of a disk said to be 'hard')." )"

subsequently published in a transcription.<sup>23</sup> Although the notes to that first transcription state that the reader is presented with the "completed text" of an introduction and conversation that took place on May 22nd 1990<sup>24</sup>, the English translation, published in 1995, contains a passage that was not included in the "complete" German version, and when quizzed about this, neither the interviewer, nor Derrida, nor the translator, Peggy Kamuf, could tell whence it came; it is a double betrayal of the original, a forgetful and strange growth in translation that I quote here at length:

Yes, if there is anamnesis, it is not just a movement of memory to find again finally what has been forgotten, to restore finally an origin, a moment or a past that will have been present. One would naturally have to distinguish between several kinds of anamnesis. And every philosophy in history has been an interpretation of anamnesis. The Platonic discourse is essentially anabasis or anamnesis, that is, a going back toward the intellegible place of ideas. The conversion in speleology, the Platonic cave, is an anamnesis. The Hegelian discourse is an anamnesis. The Nietzschean genealogy is an anamnesis. Repetition in the Heideggerian style is an anamnesis. Today, to want to remember philosophy is already to enter into an interpretive memory of all that has happened to memory, of all that has happened to anamnesis, of all the anamnesiac temptations of philosophy. It is naturally a very complicated operation since these anamneses are enveloped in each other. But it is also an interminable operation - there is precisely one of the motifs of deconstruction, let us say to go quickly - for if there is anamnesis, it is because the memory in question is not turned toward the past, so to speak, it is not a memory that, at the end of a return across all the other anamneses, would finally reach an originary place of philosophy that would have been forgotten. The relation between forgetting and memory is much more disturbing. Memory is not just the opposite of forgetting. And therefore the anamnesis of the anamneses I just mentioned will never be

---

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida/Elisabeth Weber, "Im Grenzland der Schrift. Randgänge zwischen Philosophie und Literatur", *Spuren in Kunst und Gesellschaft* 34-35 nr.4 (1990), p. 58-70; English translation as "Passages - from Traumatism to Promise", *Points... Interviews 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, Stanford UP 1995, p. 372-395.

<sup>24</sup> I.e., on p. 70: "Dieser Beitrag stellt den vervollständigten Text einer Einführung und eines Gespräches dar, das am 22. Mai 1990 im *Abendstudio* des Hessischen Rundfunks gesendet wurde." The missing, or additional, passage would have been at the end of the first column on page 65.

able to lift an origin out of oblivion. That is not at all its movement. To think memory or to think anamnesis, here, is to think things as paradoxical as the memory of a past that has not been present, the memory of the future - the movement of memory turned towards the promise, toward what is coming, what is arriving, what is happening tomorrow. Consequently, I would not feel, let's say, at ease in a philosophical experience that would simply consist in practising anamnesis as remembering. It is not just a matter of remembering but also of something altogether other.<sup>25</sup>

An internet archive might be an attempt at a memory of such forgetting, offering an uncanny place for such strange growth in translation. But a memory of forgetfulness remains a paradoxical recuperation. Forgetting is precisely not just the other of memory, because a forgetting as forgetting would already turn forgetting into something phenomenal and thus deny it. It would seem that the movement is not merely one of growth in translation, but at the same time one of loss. Thus when Derrida remarks in recent texts on saving texts on his "bloc de macintosh", one may think not only of disk drives<sup>26</sup>, but also of the death drive - Derrida calls it "archive fever" - and the peculiar "retrospective science fiction" of what might have happened to the psychoanalytic archive, had technological gadgets such as telephonic credit cards, portable tape recorders, computers, printers, faxes, televisions and computer-mediated communication interfaces existed earlier.<sup>27</sup> "Plus de dehors" - the boundary violently inscribed between living and non-living, inside and outside, extant and extinct also separates, as Derrida writes, "not only speech from writing, but also memory as an unveiling (re-)producing a presence from remembrance as the mere repetition of a monument." The folding in of a resistance, then, is

---

<sup>25</sup> "Passages - from Traumatism to Promise", p. 382-383

<sup>26</sup> Saving the text: the computer-age metaphor suggests that this can be accomplished by pushing a button... "A l'occasion de la manifestation 'Les Immatériaux' conçue par Jean-François Lyotard et Thierry Chaput et présentée de mars à juillet 1985 au Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, un réseau d'écriture sur micro-ordinateurs reliant vingt-six auteurs fut mis en place. Jacques Derrida était l'un d'eux. Il s'agissait pour ces auteurs de donner des définitions de mots relatifs au thème de la manifestation. Les définitions ont été publiées sous le titre *Epreuves d'écriture*, par les éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, sous la responsabilité de Thierry Chaput, Chantal Noël et Nicole Toutcheff. Nous avons isolé et reproduit ici les définitions données par Jacques Derrida auxquelles Jean-François Lyotard fait référence dans ses 'Notes du traducteur', qui viennent à la suite. - C[atherine] M[alabou]." Derrida's "Epreuves d'écriture" and Lyotard's comments "Notes du traducteur" were published in *Revue philosophique*, N. 2, avril-juin 1990, p. 269-284 and following

<sup>27</sup> "Archive Fever", here: pp. 17 and 22 (repr.: 16 and 25-26); repetition can, as Freud has it, push itself to the front as a resistance against remembering.

possible only in repetition, deferral, trace - which is to say in a double gesture of preserving life, and death at the origin of life.<sup>28</sup> Here, the line is more than subtle: "On both sides of that line, it is a question of repetition."<sup>29</sup> To this extent, the archive is a transgression in and of itself; saving the text, it eats itself and repeats itself. But at the same time, it also gestures towards itself as an opening to the future. In its complicity with and complication of such divisions, the archive must be a memory of the future so as not to cancel itself out.

### Transclusion or Paleonymy?

If the archive is intricately linked to the institution, to that which authorises it, then the law of selection, inclusion or exclusion, would appear to be a quasi-transcendental, dark "outside"; although this law is itself implied in the archive, it decides what is represented in it, and what is not. Yet hypertext, it is claimed by its champions, accomplishes a virtually universal memory as envisioned by Vannevar Bush and Theodor Nelson.<sup>30</sup> Claiming to have foreseen in 1960 the development of personal computing, word-processing, hypermedia, and populist network publishing, Nelson protests that nobody has understood as yet how this structure could supposedly organise, beyond mere inclusion or exclusion, every kind of connection and use. Hence his neologism, transclusion.<sup>31</sup> Transclusion would enable one to re-use information with its identity and context intact. However, just what the identity of context would be is at stake here: such a limitless memory would not be a memory at all, but simply infinite self-presence. Only if it constantly revives the aposemiological corpse of the sign in referential paraphrases can memory recall the non-present with which it is necessarily in relation.

---

<sup>28</sup> This fold announces itself early on: "since everything begins in the folds of citation (you will later learn how to read this word), the inside of the text will always have been outside it" ... "[e]verything 'begins', then, with citation, in the creases [faux plis] of a certain veil"; Derrida, *Dissemination*, University of Chicago Press 1981, p. 316

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 108-111; compare "Freud and the Scene of Writing", *Writing and Difference*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1978, p. 196-231, esp. 228

<sup>30</sup> There are by now countless quasi-canonical publications about hypertext; see George Landow ed., *Hyper/Text/Theory*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1994. For a selective overview of hypertexts, see Hilmar Schmundt, "Autor ex machina. Electronic Hyperfictions: Utopian Poststructuralism and the Romanticism of the Computer Age", *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 19:2 (1994), p. 223-246

<sup>31</sup> Theodor Holm Nelson, "The Transclusion Paradigm", d8, Project Xanadu/Sapporo Hyperlab 1995; compare also his "A File Structure for the Complex, the Changing and the Indeterminate", *Proceedings of the ACM 20th National Conference*, ed. Lewis Winner 1965; and "What is Literature?" in *Literary Machines: The Report on, and of, Project Xanadu*. South Michigan 1987

Geoffrey Bennington recently pointed out that any theory that claimed that hypertextuality somehow realised the supposed aims of deconstruction must be mistaken, for "hypertexts can just as well be presented as a fulfilment of a metaphysical view of writing".<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the hypertextual structures make its strictures only more tangible, and anyway, dispersive reading would not depend on textual design: "the 'hypertext' aspect of *Derridabase*, which is constantly sending the reader forward to further forward references, many of which go nowhere", as Bennington says, "tries to dramatise that fact." And in a recent interview<sup>33</sup>, Derrida delineates the evolution of calculating machines, thought machines, translation machines, and formalization in general up to a culture dominated by technical apparatuses of inscription and archiving; he does not, however, interpolate these machines back onto the history of reading, and he writes:

I remember having put this question to Paul de Man in the form of a virtual objection: if this be so [that deconstruction is always already at work in literature, e.g. in Rousseau], then there would be nothing left to do; yet how would we interpret the fact that deconstruction, in spite of all this, constitutes a topic, that it influences certain events and something happens? [...] Deconstruction is not a memory which simply recalls what is already there. The memory work is also an unforeseeable event, an event that demands a responsibility and gestures, deeds. This act is caught, however, in a double bind: the more you remember, the more you are in danger of effacing, and vice versa. Deconstruction cannot step out of this aporia, of this double-bind, without diffidence.<sup>34</sup>

As Derrida warns against the mechanism of the de Manian "always already", so he warns against the Heideggerian attempt to sanitize and keep separate an essence of technology from technology itself, recognizing this traditional gesture as a protection against the risk of parasitical

---

<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Bennington, Interview with the *Seulemonde* Online Journal, Tampa/Florida 1994: [www.cas.usf.edu/journal/bennington/gbennington.html](http://www.cas.usf.edu/journal/bennington/gbennington.html)

<sup>33</sup> Beatrice & Louis Seguin, "Entrétien avec Jacques Derrida sur le *traitement de texte*", *Quinzaine Littéraire* n. 698 (8/1996)

<sup>34</sup> "Zeugnis, Gabe" (Jacques Derrida interviewed by Elisabeth Weber), *Jüdisches Denken in Frankreich*, ed. Elisabeth Weber. Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag 1994, p. 63-90, here: 77-8 (my transl.)

contamination or an-oppositional difference.<sup>35</sup> The inscription of deconstruction into the world-wide net of computer mediated communication will not simply have "always already" have taken place; it remains unforeseeable, its technicality must be interrogated without reducing such an interrogation to a participation in the same order.<sup>36</sup>

Nelson claims that "the transclusion paradigm is a fundamentally different way of thinking about almost all computer issues. If we use more conventional terminology, it will anchor our thinking in a different system of conventions, and it will be harder to understand this fundamentally different paradigm." Nelson's penchant for neologisms like "structangle", "docuverse", "teachotechnics" or "showmanshipnogy" illustrates this attitude.<sup>37</sup> Derrida, on the other hand, argues in favour of what he calls paleonymy, keeping the old name despite the radical displacement and grafting of its connotations; demonstrating the fundamental impossibility of the transparent immediacy that McLuhan and Nelson believe in, he advocates a powerful historical expansion of general writing: "To leave to this new concept the old name of writing is tantamount to maintaining the structure of the graft, the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective intervention in the constituted historical field. It is to give everything at stake in the operations of deconstruction the chance and the force, the power of communication."<sup>38</sup> The difference between the two approaches lies not just in the strategies of naming them; to Derrida, communication, "if we want to retain that word", is not transference of meaning but inscription or grafting, and its effect a dissemination that is irreducible to the mere polysemy Nelson would like to believe hypertext embodies. Moreover, hypertext is not the sublation of a system of traces and marks into fully manifest context, but rather an extension of the same structure.

Writing, therefore, is not dead. If death, as radical absence, constitutes the condition of media, but is not represented by them, it will sneak back in as catastrophic spectrality. What,

---

<sup>35</sup> See *Mémoires*, p. 140

<sup>36</sup> "[W]ithout taking into account the obvious fact that deconstruction is inseparable from a general questioning of *tekhne* and technicist reasoning, that deconstruction is nothing without this interrogation, and that it is anything *but* a set of technical and systematic procedures", as Derrida warns, "certain impatient Marxists nevertheless accuse deconstruction of deriving its 'power' from the 'technicality of its procedure'." *Mémoires*, p. 16; conversely, one might point out with Derrida that "Socrate" is also the name of a corpus of system routines (cf. *Postcard*, p. 242).

<sup>37</sup> "The Transclusion Paradigm", loc. cit., p. 4; the other neologisms in Theodor Nelson, "Opening Hypertext: A Memoir", in *Literacy Online. The Promise (and Peril) of Reading and Writing with Computers*, ed. Myron C. Tuman. University of Pittsburgh Press 1992, p. 43-57

however, happens to media which are diagnosed as dead? They too will return. The internet is a text-based environment, and hypertext as condition of possibility for hypermedia is the ironic return of the purported "metamedium" of writing which had already been declared obsolete for a icon-based global village. Since the inauguration of the world-wide web in 1992, hypertext markup language has given a new lease of (spectral) life to that paleonym, writing; looking back on the technology of the book, the net comes to be seen as an extended book review. The law of its composition may not be harboured in the inaccessibility of a secret, but neither can it be booked into a presence.<sup>39</sup> Only then, it seems, can hypertext allow for survival by dint of decentered, dispersive storage on the internet. Images for some, text for all is now the inverted formula, and its dispersion does not entail complete disappearance, but, as Nicholas Royle put it, "[t]o talk about writing in reserve is to engage with the thought of a critical glossolalia, a poetico-telephony or computer network operating multiple channels simultaneously. A sort of hydrapoetics, in effect."<sup>40</sup> Arguably, in the name of such monstrous *écriture*, Derrida online may be presented as a structure of many heads, the totality of which cannot be retrieved and is perhaps indeed saved by its irretrievability.

---

<sup>38</sup> Derrida, *Limited Inc*, Evanston: Illinois UP 1988, p. 21

<sup>39</sup> See Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing", *Writing and Difference*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1978, p. 202, as well as *Dissemination*, p. 63

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida*. Manchester: Manchester UP 1995, p. 40