

Political Identification and the Différend

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At the end of a long and scrupulous essay addressing the question of Martin Heidegger's politics, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe asks:

Why would the problem of identification not be, in general, the essential problem of the political (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989: 300)?

Rather than end with a statement, a thesis, Lacoue-Labarthe concludes his essay with a question – an interesting question, posed in an unusual way. This question arises out of a reading that carefully situates the difficulty of analysing Heidegger's politics in the wake of the radicality of his philosophy. To the extent that Heidegger grounds his understanding of the political in the ontico-ontological difference, that is to say, in a difference that he claims to have been forgotten from the very beginning of Western thought, Heidegger's particular determination of the political – of 'the essence of the political' – would impose itself as more fundamental (and thus more powerful) than any inherited concept of politics that one might try to oppose to it. Thus, for Lacoue-Labarthe, an external reading is disqualified in advance – unable to grasp either the political implications of Heidegger's thought, or what in this thought made possible his political commitments.

Now the problem of identification (inseparable from that of *mimesis*) appears in the course of Lacoue-Labarthe's essay as one that would not be disqualified by the radical character of

Heidegger's questions. Rather, it would seem to be implied (although in a manner as yet uninterrogated) at the point where his thought and his politics are in closest proximity.

An unacknowledged mimetology seems to overdetermine the thought of Heidegger politically. This remains to be shown. It leaves us, today at any rate, with a question: Why would the problem of identification not be, in general, the essential problem of the political? (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989: 300)

Although this marks the end of the essay, Lacoue-Labarthe defers signing off. He adds a footnote, which situates the question if not 'beyond' the horizon of the problems posed by Heidegger (in every sense), then in juxtaposition to them, at a certain threshold or limit.

This footnote is a self-citation – or more precisely, a citation of self-and-other – in which Lacoue-Labarthe sets the question 'against the background' of work on Freud carried out in collaboration with Jean-Luc Nancy. He cites two texts, of which only one (to my knowledge) is translated into English (Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe 1981, 1997). These texts interrogate the psychoanalytic concept of identification in terms of the Freudian analysis of culture. The analysis of culture (undertaken towards the end of Freud's life) is interpreted as a limit of psycho-analysis, where questions concerning the institution of authority and the emergence of the subject are left unreconciled (Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe 1997: 1-8).

Situated in this manner then, at the end of one paper while directing the reader to two others, Lacoue-Labarthe's question –

that proposing the problem of identification as the essential problem of the political (*le politique*) – marks a point of transition between the analyses of two heterogeneous discourses. In the terms of Jean-François Lyotard, one might say that it testifies to a *différend*.

A *différend* is a limit of discourse which occurs when there is an untranslatability between different kinds of argumentation – at the most elementary level, between different ways of linking sentences, according to specific rules. From this untranslatability there results a conflict, a dispute, which is the consequence of the lack of a single rule (or ‘phrasal regime’ (*régime de phrases*)) having a universal authority to judge between them (Lyotard 1983: 9-10). To consider, for example, the *différend* in question here: Heidegger’s ‘ontology’ – at least the Fundamental Ontology of *Being and Time* – would identify psycho-analysis as a psychology, that is to say, a ‘regional ontology’, inasmuch as it investigates the character of a particular entity (the mind or psyche) without having first clarified the meaning of Being in general (Heidegger 1962: 1-33). With regard to the priority of Heidegger’s investigation, therefore, the concerns of psycho-analysis would remain secondary and derived. And yet, while psycho-analysis does indeed present itself as an empirical science (although of a very special kind, as the science of the unconscious, it distinguishes itself from psychology), there is nevertheless a potent *resemblance* between certain of its topics of investigation and those found, for example, in *Being and Time* (notably, the ‘*Unheimlich*’ and original ‘being-guilty’ (*Schuldigsein*) (Heidegger 1962: 139f). While Freud claimed to have ‘carefully avoided any contact with philosophy proper’ – an avoidance ‘greatly facilitated by my constitutional incapacity’ he wrote in the *Auto-Biographical*

Study – in the same text he nevertheless avowed a tendency to ‘speculation’, which, as a genre of discourse, can *stricto sensu* be understood neither as philosophy nor as scientific or clinical experimentation (Derrida 1987a: 264-272).

If it is plausible to speak of a *différend* between Heidegger and Freud (a single one, between two discourses presumed to be unified and consistent in their argumentation), this *différend* would also have a political resonance. This is most unmistakable in relation to the rise of Nazism in Europe during the 1930s. Although these two thinkers lived and wrote at the same time and in the same language, to all appearances they never read one another or corresponded. If in general a relation between them does take place, it would be in a kind of interval where each remains ‘out of date’ with regard to the other – a ‘singular anachrony’ which allies them perhaps only more deeply and more powerfully (Derrida 1987a: 191). However, with the rise of Nazism, each is forced to respond (albeit from radically different positions) to the same historico-political given. If they are not contemporaries of one another, they are nevertheless contemporaries of totalitarianism, that is to say, in Lyotard’s terms, of a discourse which posits a universal idea as the absolute rule for the judgement of reality (Lyotard 1983: 18).

For Heidegger, as is well known, the response takes the form of a ‘yes’. At once resolute and unambiguous, it is announced publicly by his acceptance of the post of Rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933. In his inaugural speech, ‘The Self-Affirmation of the German University’, Heidegger identifies himself as an intellectual and spiritual leader of the movement – one who would play a vital role in the *historical* refoundation of

Germany, promised by National Socialism.¹ In opposition to the biologicistic and racist doctrines of the movement, as well as to the technical organisation of knowledges in the modern university, Heidegger determines the 'self-affirmation' of the German university as the will to its own essence, which is equally the will to the historical spiritual mission of the German people (*Volk*): 'Science and German fate must come to power *at the same time* in the will to essence' (Heidegger 1993: 30). After 1934, following his resignation from the Rectorship, this 'yes' is attenuated, but it is never denied (Lacoue-Labarthe 1987: 32). He is mistaken about the reality of Nazism, but not its 'internal truth and greatness'.²

In 1945, after the end of Second World War and the liberation of the camps, he will continue to speak of the historical self-affirmation (*Selbstbehauptung*) of Germany (Lacoue-Labarthe 1987: 85-86). In question is still the possibility of the self-identification of the German people, of their accession to history, to the greatness of their historical destiny, but with a certain inflection: this will not be by means of science or knowledge (*Wissen*) but through art, most particularly, through listening to the voice of Hölderlin. The historical mission of the poet is to grant his language (*Sprache*) to a people – a language thought most essentially as myth (*Sage*) – a myth which will permit the people to accede to their own language, and situate itself as such in History. This turn to poetry (*Dichtung*), which apparently depoliticises Heidegger's thought (inasmuch as it involves a withdrawal from direct participation in the regime) is only an inflection in his long-standing interpretation of the Greek *techné*, that is to say, of the essence of modern technology. Not only does this motif traverse all of Heidegger's discourses from 1933

onwards, it will also determine in 1953 the manner in which he explains the expression 'the inner truth and greatness' of National Socialism, ie 'the encounter of global technology and modern man' (Heidegger 1959: 199).

For Freud, the rise of Nazism also involves a political decision or choice concerning his fate, although to employ the terms of Heideggerian existentialism in this regard cannot be without irony. Freud's 'decision' to flee Vienna at the age of eighty-two is a scene whose eventuality is unthought – in fact cannot be thought – in the terms of Heidegger's appeal to the self-willing of the historial spiritual mission of the German *Volk*. Because the Nazis do not recognize Freud as a member of the *Volk*, he cannot accede to the possibility of such a decision. The Nazi call to self-identification has the paradoxical effect of stripping him of his national identity, which is to say also, of civil and juridical rights and protection. From the time of the *Anschluss* onwards (1938), Freud is publicly identified (in a way that he doesn't choose) by his religious origin, as is his science which becomes its decadent and perverted expression.

All of which is to say that if the strategy of the *Rektorats Rede* was precisely to oppose (or at least to correct) the naturalist, biologicistic and racist tendencies of the movement, if in joining the movement Heidegger attempted to 'spiritualize' National Socialism, he nevertheless did so in committing himself to a one-sided voluntarism, grounded in a metaphysics of subjectivity. (Paradoxically, this is just what in *Being and Time* the thought of Dasein as ek-static, as 'originally outside of itself', should have forbidden (Lacoue-Labarthe 1987: 115).) The political effect of such a philosophical commitment (or rather compromise) is that

in seeking to oppose the appeal of the Nazi ideologues to natural, biological, racial forces, Heidegger reinscribes spirit in an oppositional determination, which by the very complicity of opposites comes back to haunt him. If the program of the text seems diabolical, it's because it capitalizes *in a non-fortuitous manner* on two evils at once : the sanctioning of Nazism and the gesture which is still 'metaphysical', ie the mobilization of a concept of the people (*Volk*) which restitutes a subject of history, that is to say, a stable identifiable entity or communal substance which also belies the concepts of *Dasein* and *Mitsein* developed in *Being and Time* (Derrida 1989: 39f).

Following this law of the complicity of opposites, one might suspect that if the rise of Nazism finds Freud and Heidegger occupying polar opposite positions of the dyad Nazi/Jew, there may also be a number of hidden similarities which complicate and refine the *différend* that I am pursuing here. Freud's 'decision' to exile himself from his home in Vienna, and in so doing to displace the centre of the psycho-analytic movement, is also accompanied by the writing of a text. This text, an 'historical novel' says Freud, written between 1934-1938 and published in London in 1939, addresses the enigmatic question of the hidden origin of the Jewish people. Highly unorthodox, even eccentric, in its formal construction and the manner in which it defends its arguments, *Moses and Monotheism* pursues also a kind of intellectual exile, where Freud quite consciously transgresses the boundaries of his expertise as a psycho-analyst, as well as the requirements of the academic disciplines from which he draws his material (anthropology, history and archaeology). This is in order to produce an investigation that 'can give no certainty that we shall arrive at the truth', but 'will perhaps throw light on

problems which have always deserved attention' and which 'recent events have forced on our observation anew' (Freud 1985: 351). Without simply identifying himself with the people of Israel (*das Volk Israel*) (although, as is well known, he never simply eschews this identity), Freud will claim the authority (which amounts to saying the possibility) of thinking the conditions of their existence, the reasons for their survival and the causes of anti-semitism.

In a manner similar to Heidegger then, Freud also responded to Nazism by assuming the role of an intellectual leader, which is to say not only a leader of intellectuals, but a leader inasmuch as an intellectual – responsible not only for his own fate, but also for that of 'his' people in general. Although he never joined a party or political group (throughout his life he resisted appeals to support Jewish nationalism, ie. Zionism), nor did he authorize himself with a concept such as the 'philosopher king' (as did Heidegger), as leader of the psycho-analytic movement, Freud nevertheless saw himself as responsible for the question of the existence of the Jews as a whole – precisely at a moment of imminent crisis or disaster. To this question, he sacrifices the disciplinary requirements which guarantee scientific authority and protection, as he himself writes opening the preface to the third section, 'with the audacity of one who has little or nothing to lose' (Freud 1985: 295) – a gesture which recalls what Bataille labels 'the practise of joy before death', or Blanchot 'the risk of the inessential'. By the circumstances of its publication and the manner in which it breaks with convention (carefully archived in the prefaces to each section, the author being 'unable to wipe out the traces of the work's origin' (Freud 1985: 349)), certain commentators have suggested a hidden identification on the part of the author with the hero of his text, Moses, who, as

leader of the Jews, gives birth to them as a people by delivering them from bondage in Egypt (Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe 1997: 25f, Yerushalmi 1991: 60, 74-76, 79, de Certeau 1992).

Yet this Moses, Freud's Moses, is a stranger to the Jewish people inasmuch as he is not Jewish, but Egyptian – this is the text's starting point and central thesis. In other words, Freud grounds the Jewish tradition in the name of the other, or as one commentator calls it, a 'blasphemous witticism' (de Certeau 1992: 314) in which the originary gesture of separation is expropriated. Of this double origin, Freud will then multiply the figures (he proposes two Moses, as well as two Gods, in fact also two different peoples who came together in Kadesh to receive a new religion (Freud 1985: 310), all of which rests on a hidden murder, whose traces Freud reads in the biblical narrative. Now, if Freud identifies with Moses, or rather identifies himself in the writing of *this* Moses – the double, blasphemous, murdered, perhaps inexistent Moses of *Moses and Monotheism* – then this gesture (which is also a signature) has the paradoxical character of a return to broken tablets. It is the return to a religion that is at once inalienably his own and yet from which he is estranged as a man of science – of a certain science, that of the unconscious. This novel return to the religion of the fathers is also at the same time the re-inauguration of an exodus – not only of Freud and the psychoanalytic movement, but in some sense also of Judaism itself, of a Judaism without God.

In the famous preface to the Hebrew edition of *Totem and Taboo* written eight years earlier (1930), Freud imagines an interlocutor who asks the author, having abandoned the religion of his countrymen, and also unable to share in nationalist ideals:

‘what remains to you that is Jewish?’ (*Was ist an dir jüdisch?*): Speaking in the third person (itself a significant gesture), Freud writes: ‘he would reply: “A very great deal and probably its very essence” (*“Noch sehr viel, wahrscheinlich die Hauptsache”*)’ (Freud 1985: 51). The enigmatic character of this reply opens – from a very particular angle – the question of psycho-analysis as a ‘Jewish science’.³ On the one hand, when Freud testifies to the proximity between his commitment to science and the peculiar importance of his Jewish identity, he reappropriates a certain anti-semitic caricature of psycho-analysis. If psycho-analysis is a ‘Jewish science’, this could not mean (at least for Freud) that it speaks only about Jewish people, or adopts a specifically Jewish standpoint (*jüdischen Standpunkt*). Rather, it gives to read a relation that is more enigmatic, more difficult to grasp – perhaps of greater richness and import – yet also unstable and potentially deceptive. (Notably, in this preface, Freud doesn’t tell the complete truth about himself. Yerushalmi shows convincingly the ‘inaccuracy’ for example of his avowed ignorance of Hebrew, the language of the holy writ (*die heilige Sprache*) (Yerushalmi 1991: 64-79).)

At another level, however, one might say that the deception belongs to the very character of the self-disclosure. By adopting the third person, Freud gives to read that he at once is and is not the author of his text, the ‘Godless Jew’, whose scientific analysis of the origin of religion and morality has now been translated into the language of the holy writ (*die heilige Sprache*) – with all of what this implies. In a manner comparable then to the way in which he describes his relation to Judaism and to the Hebrew language, Freud betrays here also a relation to himself and to his own text that is posthumous.

No reader of this book will find it easy to put himself in the emotional position (*Gefüßlage*) of an author who is ignorant of the language of the holy writ (*die heilige Sprache nicht versteht*), who is completely estranged (*entfremdt*) from the religion of his fathers...but who has yet never renounced his people (*doch die Zugehörigkeit zu seinem Volk nie verleugnet hat*), who feels that he is in his essential nature a Jew and has no desire to alter that nature...Thus it is an experience of a quite special kind when a book of his is translated into the Hebrew language and put into the hands of readers for whom that historic idiom is a living tongue (*eine lebende 'Zunge'*). (Freud 1985: 51)

The proclaimed solitude of this author who remains a figure of identification – a prophetic voice of the ‘new Jewry’ – yet dissimulates another solitude, which appears precisely as the difference between Freud and the author he describes. This solitude is ‘without witness’: the relation to an exteriority without identity, without name, neither that of the scientist, nor the Jew.

Like Heidegger, Freud will also ground the historical existence of a people (*Volk*) in myth, and he will also identify as one of its distinguishing features an advance in spirituality/intellectuality (*Geistigkeit*). (Freud traces the etymology of the word *Geist* to the Hebrew *ruah*, meaning breath (Freud 1985: 361).) In a more general sense, both Heidegger and Freud struggle to delimit the political from the position of knowledge, encountering a limit in which the task is unaccomplished. To be sure, with Freud, it does not take the striking form of the Rectorat, where a thinker in adopting the public role of administrator sought to take an active part in what he believed to be the spiritual

reawakening of his nation, indeed of the West in general. Yet, in a manner at least comparable to the texts following Heidegger's resignation, yet with a resonance infinitely more tragic, *Moses and Monotheism* witnesses the powerlessness of a thought to effect the actual political conditions of those about whom, or in the name of whom, it feels compelled irresistibly to respond. Paradoxically enough, however, in this respect the text reconfirms, in a manner that remains powerful and also moving, the tradition whose origin and durability it seeks to analyse. In the section entitled 'The Advance of Intellectuality/Spirituality' (*Fortschritt in der Geistigkeit*), Freud writes: 'The nation's political misfortune taught it to value as its true worth the one possession that remained to it – its literature.... From the [time of the destruction of the second temple] onwards, the Holy Writ and intellectual concern with it were what held the scattered people together' (Freud 1985: 362).⁴

When Lyotard comes to address in his own way the question of Heidegger's politics, it is significant that he does so by situating a *différend* between Heidegger and 'the jews' (Lyotard 1989a, 1990). In the attempt to find the 'internal logic' which maintains the double assertion – at once of the greatness of Heidegger's thought and the objectionable nature of his 'politics', there is a silence that demands the recognition of another phrasal regime. This other phrasal regime will be that of the Jewish Law, which, according to Lyotard, disputes the Greek thinking of Being. Provoking the *différend* between them is Heidegger's infamous silence on the holocaust. The holocaust for Lyotard (and notably also for Levinas) is an event that cannot be thought in the language of Being. To do so is to deprive the victims of the language to articulate the wrong done to them.

Now, it is important to underline that the existence of a *différend* for Lyotard does not have a simply negative sense. Inasmuch as it testifies to a certain limit of discourse – where ‘what there is to be put into sentences (*phraser*) exceeds what humans presently can put into sentences’ (Lyotard 1983: 30) – the *différend* demands the institution of idioms which do not yet exist. In the most general sense, the *différend* is an invitation to the event – or more precisely to the question of the event (*‘Arrive-t-il?’*). To this question, Lyotard addresses his text – a gesture in a sense exemplary of all texts, all acts of communication and discourse: ‘To do justice (*faire droit*) to the *différend* is to institute new addressees, new senders, new significations, new referents, so that the wrong manages to express itself, and the plaintiff ceases to be a victim’ (Lyotard 1983: 29). In this respect, Lyotard’s concept is very close to that of a certain deconstruction which understands itself in similar terms. As Derrida says, in a motto that can be read in at least two ways: ‘Deconstruction is what happens (*ce qui arrive*)’.

Despite the distance taken by Lyotard from the approaches of both Derrida and Lacoue-Labarthe to Heidegger’s politics (due to what he considers to be their overly dutiful, filial relation to Heidegger and the Greek heritage (Lyotard 1990: 75-77, 83-94)), he nevertheless shares their refusal of a simply internal reading, that is to say, one that analyses only the coherence of a text’s concepts without posing the questions of its margin: of its date, its context, its addressee(s), etc – all of which overdetermine a text historically and politically. Of course, a simply ‘external’ reading is equally problematic (a history or sociology, for example), inasmuch as it is generally powerless to measure itself to the philosophemes it would claim to explain. Hazzarding a

discourse which is 'unstable, divided ... with no status properly defined or prescribed in advance' (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989: 271), these three thinkers distinguish their approaches from that of countless others. But what is more important, particularly for the few steps that I've taken here, is that in attempting to identify the limit between the philosophical and the political in Heidegger, each make a critical reference to psycho-analysis. Each employ psycho-analytic concepts (be it sometimes with a certain hesitation and reserve) to situate the closure of a corpus and trajectory that each recognize to be among the most powerful and important – the 'greatest' (Lacoue-Labarthe 1987: 22) or 'equal to the greatest' (Lyotard 1990: 52), in any case uncircumventable (*incontournable*) (Derrida 1982: 22) for our time.⁵ As noted above, Lacoue-Labarthe employs the psycho-analytic concept of identification ('because it is the only one we dispose of to designate the enjeu of the mimetic process' (Lyotard 1987: 122-3)), Derrida employs those of 'foreclosure' and symptom (see below), while Lyotard's very concept of 'the jews' vitally depends on an appropriation of the Freudian concept of primary repression (*Urverdrängung*) (Lyotard 1990: 15-17).

'The jews' for Lyotard are not a subject of history, but a repressed event of Western civilisation in general. On the first page of *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, in a gesture which measures his distance from the strategy of the *Rectorats Rede*, Lyotard averts confusion between what he calls 'the jews' and real Jews, drawing attention to his use of quotation marks and the lower case. (But can one really trust this distinction? Who after all is a real Jew? Even if 'the jews' are not a people in the Heideggerian sense, they nevertheless *resemble* a people, inasmuch as they are still a means of identification.) For Lyotard, we are all potentially 'jews'

inasmuch as we seek to remember and to bear witness to something constitutively forgotten in the thought of Western Civilisation (Lyotard 1990: 3-5). As inheritors or children, if you like, of the Jewish *Volk of Moses and Monotheism* (Lyotard cites this text authoritatively (1990: 21-23)), 'the jews' are an historical fiction – distinguished from others by the obligation before the Law which is *a priori* unrepresentable.⁶

No doubt, the concept of the *différend* itself is also on the side of the Law, inasmuch as it is constructed in terms of a legal discourse and a scene of litigation. In the most general sense, Lyotard constructs this concept in order to make possible an ethical response to silence, most particularly, to that of the 'victim' deprived of the means to articulate the wrong that is done to him or her. For Lyotard, a silence is always a 'sentence' (*une phrase*). A sentence forms for Lyotard the basic indivisible unit of philosophical analysis (Lyotard 1983: 9). Inasmuch as a silence can only articulate itself within a network of sentences, or rather, within a network where the *linking (enchaînement)* of sentences is *necessary*, a silence always appeals to sentences which are possible in principle. Somewhat enigmatically, Lyotard calls this impersonal necessity of linking: 'time'. 'Time' is the name of that necessity by virtue of which there is no end to language. It is, as one writer testifies, the condition which renders 'the murmur inexhaustible'.⁷

A sentence 'takes place' (*arrive*). How to link onto it (*enchaîner sur elle*).... Now it is necessary to link 'now', another sentence cannot not arrive, it's necessity, that is to say, time, there is no non-sentence, a silence is a sentence. (Lyotard 1983: 10)

At this level, Lyotard is as close to and as far as possible from a certain deconstruction, which also upholds in its own way this elementary necessity of linking (*enchaînement*). Derrida does not call it 'time', but the 'promise', which in general opens the temporal relation to the other:

There is in the simple fact that I speak a sort of commitment to go to the end of the phrase, to link (*enchaîner*), to affirm in making a promise.... Before even deciding what I'm going to say, I promise to speak to you, I respond to the promise to speak. I respond ... I respond to you from the moment that I speak and consequently I commit myself. (Derrida 1992: 397-398)⁸

However, silence, which for Derrida cannot not be an affirmative response, a confirmation of this elementary promise of speech, nevertheless does not have the self-evident character of a 'sentence', as it does for Lyotard. (Lyotard defines silence as a 'negative' sentence (*une phrase négative*) (Lyotard 1983: 29).) Because for Derrida language and speech is grounded in a promissive structure, that is to say in the most general terms in a structural commitment to the future and the other, the event of silence itself is divided. Inseparable from language and speech, silence does not take place in the present as a simple identity, but only in addressing itself *a priori* to the future and to the other. Like speech, silence is a 'trace': erasure belongs to its very constitution, its identity is never assured. Citing Bataille in an early essay, Derrida writes: 'If the word *silence* is, 'among all words', the 'most perverse or the most poetic', it's because feigning to silence (*taire*) sense, it *says* non-sense (*le non-sens*), it slides and effaces itself, doesn't maintain itself, *silences itself* not as silence, but as speech (*parole*). This sliding (*glissement*) betrays at once

discourse and non-discourse' (Derrida 1978: 262, translation modified).

Now this subtle difference between Derrida and Lyotard plays itself out in the manner in which each approach Heidegger's relation to the Jewish tradition and the holocaust. At issue for both is, among other things, an ethical response to a 'silence' that they each at a certain moment call a foreclosure (*Verleugnung*) (Derrida 1989: 100, Lyotard 1990: 29). (Notably, Derrida will put the term 'foreclosure' in quotation marks (Derrida 1989: 100).) Now, whereas Lyotard polarizes the relation between Heidegger and 'the jews', for Derrida the limit between the two is divided precisely at those moments in Heidegger's discourse when he is closest to the tradition he 'forecloses' (Derrida 1989: 100-102).

Limiting myself to only the simplest indications of the complex, subtle, differentiated interweaving of motifs that characterizes Derrida's reading in *Of Spirit*, I recall that it is at the nexus of the word *Geist* and its cognates that Heidegger at once calls to the self-affirmation of the German University in 1933, and also, twenty years later, lets his thought be brought into the closest proximity to the Jewish tradition and the ghosts of the holocaust. In the *Discussion of Georg Trakl's Poetic Work* (1953), Heidegger determines the originary meaning of *Geist* as fire (*die Flamme*), flame, burning (*das Flammende*), which in turn determines the provenance of evil. For Heidegger, evil is essentially spiritual (*geistlich*) (Heidegger cited in Derrida 1989: 103). Now, Derrida points out that this later determination of *Geist* (and in particular of its cognate *geistliche*), on the one hand, deconstructs Heidegger's earlier thinking of the term, but, on the other hand,

also marks the closure of his brutal triangulation of its meaning around the Greek, Latin and German languages: 'Does [this triangle] not remain open from its very origin and by its very structure onto what Greek and then Latin *had* to translate by *pneuma* and *spiritus*, that is, the Hebrew *ruah*?' (Derrida 1989: 100). Derrida then recalls that it is 'possible to read a whole tradition of Jewish thought as an inexhaustible thinking about fire' (Derrida 1989: 101, 137). (Notably, Rosenzweig is here cited as exemplary.) By making manifest in this manner the folds of Heidegger's avoidance or 'foreclosure', Derrida gives to read the complicity, in the name of Spirit, between the fire of the hearth and the fire of the holocaust. Such complicity, of course, brings to mind the concept of the *Unheimlich*. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger characterises Dasein's most primordial affective Being-in-the-world as this 'uncanniness', this original being 'not-at-home' (*nicht-zu-hause sein*) which lurks behind the tranquillity of our everyday (historical) existence (Heidegger 1962: 234).

In comparison with Lyotard then, Derrida's reading involves a suspension of judgement – if not of Heidegger's political commitments – then of the evasions and erasures of his text. Without Lyotard's conviction that a silence appeals to sentences which are in principle possible (Lyotard 1983: 29), Derrida is able to read the performative richness, the duplicity, the abyssal resources of Heidegger's avoidances. (An investigation of the meaning, for Heidegger, of the very term 'avoidance' is announced at the beginning of *Of Spirit* as a major *fil conducteur*.) In the course of an interview, while responding to a question concerning Heidegger's 'silence' about the Nazi concentration camps, Derrida makes the point: 'If we admit ... that the thing remains unthinkable, that we do not yet have a discourse that can measure

up to it ... then let us stop diagnosing the so-called silences and making the 'resistances' and 'nonthoughts' of just about everyone be confessed' (Derrida 1992: 301). From what position is it possible to judge Heidegger's 'silence', if we admit that we do not have a discourse to the measure of the event?

In the light of this question, one might be tempted to judge Lyotard for inadequately addressing the issue, for over-hastily condemning Heidegger (and also Derrida, see above). Yet Lyotard's 'avoidance' – at once of this question, as well as everything that might complicate his bi-polar characterisation of Western civilisation – is itself interesting and may be interpreted as symptomatic. As is the case for Heidegger, Adorno, Derrida, Blanchot and so many others, Lyotard's thought is acutely sensitive to the spectres of the Second World War. What differentiates him, however, (particularly from Heidegger and Derrida) is the unambiguous character of his pre-occupation and concern. It is expressed openly and directly through the philosophical problems that motivate him, as well as the texts he chooses and the events that he comments upon and analyses.⁹

In *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, Lyotard is impatient and sometimes harsh. He condemns Heidegger's 'leaden silence' (*silence de plomb*) and in general everything in his philosophy that sanctions a geopolitics or a geolinguistics, whether it be Greco-Germanic or Eurocentric in form. Further, he reads Heidegger's thought as symptomatic of the complicity of Western philosophy in general with the advent of Nazism. It should be noted in this regard that *Heidegger and 'the jews'* first appeared as a contribution to the debate in France that followed the publication of Victor Farius' *Heidegger et le nazisme* (see Lyotard

1990: xvi). While Lyotard repudiates Farius' reduction of the entirety of Heidegger's thought to Nazi ideology, he nevertheless maintains the fundamental complicity of the thought of the forgetting of Being with a civilization unable to acknowledge an unpayable debt to 'the jews'.

Now, if Lyotard's irritation and impatience – as well as his general inability to forgive – limits his capacity to read Heidegger, blinding him for example to the sophistication of a reading such as Derrida's, this might not be understood as a simple lapsus on the part of the philosopher's sagacity and prudence. Or if it is such a lapsus, it might be interpreted as symptomatic of a trauma unresolved for European thought in general. In psycho-analytic terms, one could understand Lyotard's reading in general as a return to this trauma, a certain experience of it, which polarizes the relation between the Occident (responsible for the emergence of the Nazis) and 'the jews' (for Lyotard, the custodians of the Forgotten, at once the victims and the site of ultimate resistance). All of which would confirm the view that the war is not yet over, but continues for example in the spectral domains of philosophy and literature – as the battle for the means of appropriation of Western thought.¹⁰

'The war's over./ Are you sure?/ Are you sure the war's over?'
(Reich 1988)

Notes

- ¹ Concerning the term 'historial' (*Geschichtlich*) as distinguished from historical (*historisch*), see Heidegger 1962: 30, 444-449.
- ² This statement is left unchanged in the 1953 publication in German of the 1935 lecture course, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Heidegger 1959: 199).
- ³ This expression to my knowledge was never used by Freud. It appears, however, strikingly at the conclusion of Anna Freud's opening speech to the International Association of Psychoanalysis held in Jerusalem (for the first time) in 1977. Speaking of the various criticisms and rejections of psycho-analysis made by academic institutions throughout its history, she mentions finally the label 'Jewish science': 'However the other derogatory comments may be evaluated, it is, I believe, the last-mentioned connotation which, under present circumstances, can serve as a title of honour' (Anna Freud cited in Yerushalmi 1991: 100). The question of psycho-analysis as a 'Jewish science' has formed the topic of at least two recent studies (see Yerushalmi 1991, Derrida 1995).
- ⁴ By this, I wish to suggest that the writing of *Moses and Monotheism* is a response to an irrecoverable loss (at once of the author, of his people and his religion), but as such it is also a testament to the future (through a novel return to the past). This double character of 'the nation's literature' seems to me essential not only for the understanding of Freud, but more generally (de Certeau 1988, notably 316-328).
- ⁵ These inflections of judgement are the index of a silent conversation between three thinkers who share a common language and milieu – and who read one another.
- ⁶ Of course, the claim that 'the jews' are a repressed event of Western civilisation is (perhaps justly) never made by Freud.

However, the use of psycho-analysis to think the origins of civilisation and the diagnosis of cultural malaise nevertheless belongs to the Freudian legacy.

- 7 'Fiez-vous au caractère inepuisable du murmure', 'trust in the murmur's inexhaustibility', André Breton cited in Maurice Blanchot (1955: 238-239).
- 8 'I believe one must be able to say, beyond these determined promises, that all acts of language carry a certain promise structure (*structure de promesse*), even if they do something else at the same time. All language is addressed to the other in order to promise to speak to him/her. Even if I do it to menace, to injure, to hold a scientific discourse, to do anything but promise, there is in the simple fact that I speak to the other a sort of commitment to go to the end of the phrase, to link (*enchaîner*), to affirm in making a commitment (*engagement*). This general structure is such that one cannot imagine a language which is not in a certain way caught in the space of the promise' (Derrida 1992: 397). Significantly, Derrida will also find this thought of the promise in Heidegger (Derrida 1989: 92-94, 129-136).
- 9 Besides the text on Auschwitz given at Cerisy-la-salle (Lyotard 1989b: 360-392), consider the countless examples from revisionist historians in *Le différend* (Lyotard 1983: 2, 26-27, 33, 48-9). Even among the earliest political essays, one finds for example that Lyotard addresses the question of German guilt and responsibility (Lyotard 1989: 125-131).
- 10 From this perspective, one might consider the strength of Lyotard's intellectual identifications with Jewish thinkers such as Freud, Levinas and Wittgenstein, who he understands as contesting the traditions borne from the thought of Hegel and Heidegger. Consider also Lyotard's accusation in *Heidegger and 'the jews'* that Derridean deconstruction is not Jewish enough, 'still too pious, too respectfully nihilist', unable in any way either

to address or to identify with the question called 'Auschwitz' (Lyotard 1990: 75-76). It might be said that Derrida also occasionally expresses a similar disquiet about himself! For he identifies himself as a Converted Jew, for example as Judas in *Glas* (Derrida 1986: 240b-242b), or more persistently as a Marrano (Derrida 1995: 69-70).

Dedication

For Nicholas Strobbe

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