

The Adventure of Difference

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Notes are included.

IN exploring the history of philosophy, Heidegger showed that the inheritance we receive from a given thinker is the nucleus he leaves us of what is still to be thought, not acquired results but ways thinking feels called on to follow again and again. Is ontological difference, which Heidegger undoubtedly held to be quite central to his own thought, a nucleus of this kind? Ontological difference seems of late to have been following a downward curve, especially in relation to what has been called the philosophy of difference, a particular feature of French philosophical culture since Derrida. It is not simply that in recent times the subject of difference as discussed by authors like Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault has undergone, on the level of a chronology or sociology of culture, something of an eclipse in its popularity (probably connected with the decline in fashion of structuralism, with which it does have certain limited affinities). Even on the level of theoretical development there seem to be various signs that the idea of difference, having run round the whole curve of its possibilities, is declining and fading away into other philosophical standpoints. Jacques Derrida's 1968 Paris lecture on *différance*(1) may at the time have looked like a straight manifesto of the philosophy of difference, but today it looks more like a kind of epitaph or memorial for it.

Even at the time of its delivery this discourse was symptomatic and indicative of the decline of difference. (Is this too perhaps a peculiar destiny of difference, an 'effect of difference'?) If we retrace the theoretical path followed by thinkers like Derrida and Deleuze, this decline looks inevitable. But my point is that this phenomenon is very far from signifying any decline in or exhaustion of the idea of ontological difference put forward by Heidegger; it is precisely in such adventures and in such a dissolution of 'the philosophy of difference' that ontological difference taps into its still productive core, a core that constitutes an authentic future for thinking.

At the end of his 1968 lecture Derrida distanced himself from Heidegger; if we analyze closely how he did this, we can observe at one and the same time the reasons for both the decline of difference (and Derridean *différance*) and the 'persistence' of Heideggerian ontological difference. First of all, Derrida exhibited the play of two meanings of the term difference, which he spelt *différance*, wishing thereby to show how the differential element that constitutes the sign is not at the same time something that can be grasped as 'different'. (Of course it needs to be borne in mind that in French the sound of the word remains the same whether it is written with an *e* or an *a*.) Derrida then went on to show how the two meanings that the word *différer* has in French – 'being distinct or divergent' and 'deferring' in time – play a crucial role for some great thinkers of difference, such as Nietzsche, Freud, Levinas and above all Heidegger. Finally, Derrida asked whether his idea of difference could in some way be related to what Heidegger calls ontological difference, the difference between Being and beings. Although Derrida is aware of deep connections between his notion and Heidegger's ontological difference conceived as the difference between Being and beings, the latter seems to Derrida to remain imprisoned within the horizon of metaphysics, or at least within a metaphysical nostalgia. He thinks some confirmation

of this nostalgia may be found, for example, in the part of Heidegger's *Holzwege* that deals with Anaximander. Derrida comments on a few sentences in this which assign to thinking the clearly impossible task of 'finding a single word, the single word ... to name the essence of Being', and therefore the relation of presence to a present being.(2) But to think of the possibility of finding the single word to name the essence of Being is still to be thinking in terms of full presence. For Derrida, however, the philosophy of difference signifies above all a recognition 'that there has never been and never will be a single word, a *master-name*'(3) for difference is prior to everything. 'In the beginning was the trace' we might say, to sum up Derrida's position in a sentence. A trace, then, and never a presence to which the trace can be related; for the differences that structure the field of human experience originate from the start in a difference, a difference that is at the same time divergence and indefinite deferment, and in which what is there beforehand is always a trace and never an original. But it is such an original that ought to be named by the single word, by the supreme proper and non-metaphorical term. The scope of Derrida's development of this declension of the concept of difference is well-known, especially his polemic against phenomenology as thinking that privileges presence, the giving of essences in flesh and blood, the preference for *phoné* over *grammé*. It is as though presence summed up in itself all the 'authoritarian' features of metaphysics as (alleged) knowledge of first principles. In setting difference against presence, Derrida wants therefore to destroy the authoritarianism of the *archai*. This is exactly why difference cannot presume to be another name to indicate origin; nor can talk of differences which assumes them to be the centre of a constellation of other ideas be legitimized by reference to such an origin, in the way that metaphysical discourse draws its validity from the fact of being able to state principles. Talk of difference can in fact be only a totally arbitrary decision, a 'gamble' that for

Derrida responds to 'a strategy without objectives' or 'blind tactics' that relate only to play.

And yet there is a contrast between the emphasis placed on the choice of difference as pure play and the affirmation to be found on the same pages that there is a 'correspondence' between difference and the present situation of thinking. The idea of deference looks like 'the most proper one to think, if not to master . . . what is most irreducible about our "era"'.(4) This is a 'small contradiction', one might call it a 'wrinkle' or a margin in the Derridean text, and yet underneath it a far from marginal question is being smuggled away. The question is: 'who and what makes such a difference?' All Heidegger's thinking on difference, for example, may be read as the development of a problem Derrida never stops for a second to consider – the problem of how difference can seem to be the most appropriate term for conceiving our epoch. The fact is determined by reference to the metaphysical oblivion of Being, and so by reference to the distance of thought from that *Frühe* in which this oblivion has not as yet been rigidified in the forms of accomplished metaphysics; and by reference to the possibility that another epoch might follow that of metaphysics thus defined, another kind of connection between man and the relations between presence and being-that-is-present. These are the various features of what Heidegger calls the *eventual* nature of Being, which vanish completely in the Derridean interpretation of the idea of difference.

According to Derrida, all the differences internal to the differential relation between Being and beings, and in the first place this difference itself, ontological difference, name something that cannot have a name. "'Older" than Being itself, such a *différance* has no name in our language.' We are not talking here about a lack or a defect in language; in reality, 'there is no name for it at all, not even the name of essence or of Being, not even that of *différance*, which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly

dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions.’(5) The moment difference is enunciated it disappears, it declines, becoming identified with the differences that effectively constitute the concatenation of the signifier. To name difference is merely to open up the system of differences that constitutes the symbolic in its effective differential structure; it discloses differences as *différance*, that is, as *simulacra*.

The difference produced by the gamble that chooses to say *différance* is both important and insignificant at the same time: it shows differences in their purely differential character, i.e. as *traces* for which there has never been a corresponding presence, and therefore precisely as simulacra. But to say *différance* in this way makes no difference, inasmuch as the differential structure that characterizes the symbolic is left to be what it has always been, and yet, in its totality the symbolic has also been revealed as a pure system of simulacra, traces without originals, and is thus subjected to a kind of *epoché* or suspension of that metaphysical assent that the *archai* have always claimed in the sphere of the representative mentality.

If difference does not have a name, it none the less seems both in Derrida's theoretical statements and even more so in his actual practice of thinking, that there are certain ways it is given, certain dislocations, that are not strictly equivalent to each other:

Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself. It erases itself in presenting itself, muffles itself in resonating. The annunciatory and reserved trace of this movement can always be disclosed in metaphysical discourse, and especially in the contemporary discourse which states, through the attempts to which we just referred (Nietzsche, Freud, Lévinas), the closure of ontology, and especially through the Heideggerian text.(6)

In the text of metaphysics, and that means in every text characterized by the trace and by the disappearance of the

trace, there are wrinkles, margins, zones in which the trace of this movement of disappearance is easier to pick up. As a retracing thought (picking up traces, but also reducing everything to a trace) the philosophy of difference works on, texts by searching in them for what Derrida elsewhere calls *undecidables*: terms, ideas, simulacrum concepts such as, for instance, *pharmakon*, supplement, hymen, mark/margin and, of course, *différance* itself. Terms like these make the difference without in their turn being differentiable, decidable and distinguishable from others. Working on undecidables, as Derrida does, means deconstructing the text of metaphysics by showing that the oppositions in terms of which it is articulated are only differences. They are at once less and more than oppositions: less, inasmuch as the opposed terms are given not in relation to a fractured primordial structure, but only by virtue of a de-cision, a gamble, which constitutes them as oppositions without foundation; but this de-cision is not the place for a possible reconciliation, for it is a non-place, in its turn a pure trace of an original that is not given and cannot be given, and in this sense the undecidable reveals that the opposition is more than opposition, since it shows it to be insuperable. Duality irreducible to unity is thus infected with a delirium that multiplies it in a process without end. In spite of this delirium, however, undecidables remain a kind of privileged place in which the movement of difference as *différance* can be rehearsed.

Such are the two characteristic features of the Derridean philosophy of difference: first, *différance* is unnamable as such; it shows itself only in the moment when it declines into the infinitely open chain of differences, the simulacra that constitute the history of Western culture and of every culture, insofar as we can no longer talk of an epoch of metaphysics or of particular moments within it once the Heideggerian articulations of the history of Being have been abandoned. Second, even if only in a very limited sense, it is

possible to 'speak' *différance* by working on undecidables, it is what 'makes the difference' and distinguishes Derridean writing from that of the metaphysical texts it aims to deconstruct. But precisely as a function of the first of these points, it is possible to speak difference only by remaining within metaphysics in such a way as to erode its margins, or rather, to rewrite the text of metaphysics *parodistically*. The philosophy of difference has an eminently contemplative character; in fact it unfolds as a pure parodistic reduplication of metaphysics precisely insofar, as a matter of 'principle, as it cannot fall to share the status of simulacrum that is characteristic of every metaphysical text, and indeed definitively of texts in general. The distinguishing mark of deconstructive thought is merely a different attitude in the exercise of the play of simulacra, or, in other words, a different position of consciousness, the production of simulacra or metaphor that are aware of being such.

All this can be seen expounded and perhaps oversimplified in those of Derrida's disciples who have devoted themselves to the interpretation of the works of Nietzsche,⁽⁷⁾ in their eye the initiator of this practice of parodistically rewriting the metaphysical text. Parody is the only way of 'making the difference' in a situation in which all differentiation is always only the process of duplicating the trace, that is a situation in which the absolutization of difference has taken away all possibility of differentiation. But parody is defined solely in terms of a position of consciousness and this is a classic element in the arsenal of metaphysics and of presential thinking. This return of consciousness corresponds merely to the 'return' of another classic element in the thought of presence, the idea of structure. Speaking of the Nietzschean figures of Apollo and Dionysus in his 1963 essay 'Force and Signification', Derrida writes that the divergence between Apollo and Dionysus, or rather the internal difference that works Dionysus himself as a divergence between *élan* and structure, 'is not *in* history. It too, in an unexpected sense, is

an original structure.’(8) Both Derrida's predilection for structural linguistics, so explicit in his essay on *La différance*, and for Lacanian psychoanalysis, take him further in the direction of a metaphysical rigidification of the idea of difference. Even if only in a somewhat unusual sense, *différance* is in every respect an archstructure, diametrically opposed to Heideggerian ontological difference as an aspect of the eventuality and therefore also of the historicity of Being. *Différance* as archstructure is not in history, it never comes to pass, but then again constitutes a return to the most classic qualification of metaphysical Being, eternity. (Whether - this be an eternity of the trace, an eternity that is not homogeneous, or an eternity marked by an irremediable absence, it does not offer an alternative to metaphysics.) Thus in Derrida *différance* seems to dissolve through its own absolutization, which tends to confer on it again the very features of metaphysical Being. Gilles Deleuze, on the other hand, starting from the same premises as Derrida, moves towards the eradication of any possibility of an equivocal return to structures and metaphysics. Of the two poles between which Derridean difference moves – archstructure and simulacrum – Deleuze isolates the second. For him, repetition is not repetition of a primordial difference or first trace, but gives rise itself to the only difference, 'that is, to the ever diverse differences of simulacra. From the start, Deleuze attributes to difference the same meaning as Derrida: it means that every alleged immediacy is always already a duplication, the duplication of an original that is not there. ‘To overturn Platonism,’ he writes, means ‘to deny the primacy of an original over its copy, or of a model over its picture. It means to glorify the reign of simulacra and reflections.’(9) This is also the meaning that Derrida attributes to his own idea of an archtrace. However, for him the idea does not have only this meaning. Derrida's stress on undecidables, on those zones in the text of metaphysics where difference's movement from appearance

to disappearance is most readily discernible, signifies that this thought has a further sense beyond that of a bare negation of any form of presence of the origin. To be distinguished from metaphysical thinking pure and simple, and therefore also from the thought of presence, deconstructive thinking must necessarily refer to an archstructure; even when such a reference can be made only as a parodistic rewriting of the metaphysical text, the position of the consciousness constituting the parody exists only insofar as it opposes to unconscious differences a sort of primal *différance*. But if on the other hand difference is affirmed as the universality of the simulacrum or of a duplication that has no model, every distinction between simulacra, every hierarchy among traces is arbitrary, and if not explicitly acknowledged as such, only reproduces metaphysical mythologies. On this basis, in the work he wrote in collaboration with Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*(10) Deleuze undertakes a radical critique of Marx and Freud; for although they lay the foundations for the unmasking of the real as simulacrum (ideology or sublimation), at the same time they ‘recodify’ privileged sites of its constitution: the economy of the relations of production, the economy of familial relations. Even Lacan, who according to Deleuze made a crucial move in liberating Freudian recodification from its mythical tinsel (Oedipus), in separating the function of the Father from the real father and the Phallus from the penis, still clings to a rigid structure of symbolic functions.(11) Thus Deleuze's polemic against psychoanalysis and Marxism is again a variation of the interpretation of difference as a purification of the simulacrum from all structural reference.

What has happened to difference here? Is there any sense in which we can still apply the phrase ‘philosophy of difference’ to a philosophy of the simulacrum that glorifies the duplication operated by a libido with no canalization or code on a ‘body without organs’? Perhaps so, but only on condition that difference becomes a question of pure energy, assimilable

to that inequality of forces which creates the possibility of fluxes, the exchange processes of life. This is in fact the outcome of Deleuze's thought, and it is strongly suggestive of a return to Bergsonian vitalism, a constant source of inspiration for his work. As long as difference is reduced to nothing more than an indication of the inequalities that make possible the movements of life, there is no real discussion of the other difference, the difference between the institution and the de-stitution of codes. Vitalism is at work here, in the sense that the alternation of codification and de-territorialization, of canalizing rigidification and the liberation of fluxes, is simply referred back to life and its rhythms, without a real discussion of the problem.

The dissolution of difference both in Derrida and Deleuze refers legitimately to key aspects in the Nietzschean philosophy of eternal recurrence. Difference as archstructure of an infinite process of repetition is eternal recurrence understood as a law of Being, as fate, as a negation of Judaeo-Christian, linear historicity in favor of a Greek type of circularity. Difference as a glorification of the simulacrum is rather the dance and the laugh of Zarathustra, recurrence as the innocence of becoming, the Will to Power.(12)

However, these two aspects of eternal recurrence are ones that Zarathustra brands as features of a partial and superficial interpretation of the idea. When his animals put forward the idea of recurrence in the form of the eternally recurring dance of all things, his response is: 'O you buffoons and barrel-organs – ... you – have already made a hurdy-gurdy song of it' (pp. 234-5). What the animals have transformed into a ditty is the suffering that Zarathustra had to endure in biting the head off the snake that crawled into his mouth.(13) This is the same snake that appears in 'the vision and the riddle' in this third part of *Zarathustra*; here too the shepherd into whose mouth the snake has crawled has to free himself by biting off its head. This bite is the moment of the institution of eternal recurrence; and it is this that is repressed

and disappears in the interpretation of eternal recurrence put forward by the philosophy of difference. This bite, and Nietzsche's probable intention in using such an image, certainly cannot be identified with a pure and simple parodistic rewriting of metaphysics, definitively canonizing the archstructure of difference by making it the object of a Spinozistic consciousness. Nor can it be identified with the glorification of the simulacrum, in which even the final differentiating element of Derridean *différance*, the distinguishing of an archstructure, is suppressed in favor of the mere practice of difference as indefinite repetition.

By contrast, it seems to me that if we leave aside all psychological or voluntaristic connotations, the de-cisive meaning of the Nietzschean parable is not repressed in the Heideggerian conception of ontological difference, and I believe this is what makes the difference between Heidegger and the philosophy of difference (or of the dissolution of difference). The crucial distinction is precisely the one mentioned by Derrida in the conclusion of his lecture on *La différance* referred to above. In his effort to think ontological difference, Heidegger is inspired by nostalgia for a relation with Being distinct from the forgetting that is characteristic of metaphysical thought. This is not, of course, the nostalgia for a self-offering of Being in the dimension of presence. The essence of the Being that ought to be named by the word, as discussed in the essay on Anaximander, is a *Wesen* that is always already the *Ereignis* of the establishment of a relation of difference between Being and beings. Naming difference, or as Heidegger puts it elsewhere, 'thinking difference *as* difference' (ID p. 47) does not mean becoming aware of a structure in repeating it. The worry that to name difference by calling it ontological difference already amounts to a relapse into the horizon of metaphysics leads to the evacuation of all content from difference and effectively to its losing all distinction. If the difference in question is not one between Being and beings we are faced with a mere affirmation,

and a metaphysical one at that, of the non-homogeneity of that which metaphysics calls real, one or Being. This non-homogeneity is – or is differentiated, is given, unfolds – since the beginning and for ever. All that can change is the attitude of consciousness towards it; rather than accepting Being as homogeneous, the point is to deconstruct it. But deconstruction is not part of difference, for difference as archstructure is always deployed and available; deconstruction is concerned rather with the speculative and representative relation that metaphysics has always established between Being and thought. In Heidegger's eyes, however, the fact that difference is ontological, that it concerns Being in its relation with beings, means rather that this relation, and therefore Being itself, encloses even and above all the mode in which Dasein relates to difference. Difference is the history of Being, it is eventuality: as such it involves man, and concerns him in *Brauch*, in that 'maintenance' by which Heidegger translates Anaximander's *chreon*.

What can it mean – for man and his history, and for the history of Being as the event of Being (and not as the repetition of an immutable archstructure) – to think difference as difference? The word Heidegger uses most consistently to describe this type of thinking is *An-denken*. The chief meaning of *An-denken* is remembrance, memory, recollection. *An-denken* is the thinking that, in recalling difference, recalls Being. This is not, however, a recollection that makes present something which was but is no longer present, it is not an 'ephemeral presencing of the past'. We cannot recall Being in the sense of making present once more, since it has never been present; recalling it has more to do with taking one's leave of it (*verabschieden*) (WT p. 146). Up to this point it looks as if the philosophy of difference as a philosophy of the trace remains faithful to the Heideggerian reading. But what interests Heidegger in the idea of *An-denken* is certainly not merely the affirmation of a primordial absence that constitutes Being by destituting it. If we look at what

prompted Heidegger in *Being and Time* to initiate the thinking about difference that he was to develop substantially in later years, we can see that his concern (as Gadamer points out in *Truth and Method*)(14) is to locate the Husserlian problematic of constitution in a domain which overcomes transcendentalism definitively. What is given in presence to a knowing subject is given to him within a horizon that is not the horizon of the transcendental I, it is a historically constituted horizon, thrown and finite. The place where Heidegger becomes aware for the first time of ontological difference is the non-coincidence between the horizon of presence and Being as present being; this non-coincidence is at the basis of the relation Heidegger marks out between Being and time. It is something that comes out clearly in his subsequent writings when he talks about the need to conceive *Anwesen* as *An-wesen-lassen* (cf. TB p. 5). It is not so much that by reducing Being to beings, metaphysical thought forgets difference as a structure of absence that is both constitutive and de-stitutive of all presence. Rather, it forgets the making-present that governs and makes possible every determinate presence. From this point of view, ontological difference coincides with Dasein's finitude and historical thrownness. The importance already attributed to hermeneutics in *Being and Time*, and then increasingly in subsequent works, gives a clear enough indication of the direction taken by Heidegger in his efforts to find a thinking that would recollect Being and difference. If Being is given and occurs as the institution of historical horizons within which Dasein encounters beings, and if it is in this way deployed as temporality, then to think Being by recollecting it means above all to relocate that which is present within those horizons that governs it in its being-present. This collocation (*Er-örterung*) is the recollective thought which can be substituted for metaphysics and its claim that it defines all the structures of Being once and for all. Hermeneutical *Er-örterung* is thinking that cor-responds to Being as *event*.

But what is the purpose of *Andenken*? Why should we think *An-wesen* as *An-wesen-lassen* rather than reducing presence to being-that-is-present? In *Being and Time* Heidegger is still deeply moved by the effort to grasp the *ursprünglich* in every phenomenon, and this ‘primordially’ is given only when we grasp the totality of the phenomenon in question (which is how, for instance, the discussion of being-unto-death is introduced). The search for the totality of the structures of the phenomenon, and above all those of Dasein, has however a double significance, illustrated by two of the meanings of the term ‘drift – ‘meaning’ and ‘direction’.(15) Striving to grasp the drift of each phenomenon, and in particular the drift of Being as the horizon within which the constitutive structures of beings are given, and hence as the totality of what is available to knowledge, Heidegger discovers the drift of Being to be the *direction* in which Dasein is drawn away from any centre, in a dispossession he sees Being as a drift in which Dasein moves without being able to find a fixed point. The primary meaning of the search for the drift of Being is evident in the stress in *Being and Time* on ideas like those of authenticity and decision: the point is to grasp the prevailing horizon so as not to be ‘placed’ within it passively any longer, and above all so as to avoid being staked by the uncritical assumptions of the anonymous ‘they’. As a first approximation, then, we may say that recollecting the difference between Being and beings means appropriating the horizon within which we are thrown. Although we never grasp it completely, of course, the research of primordial structures, totality, decision and authenticity in *Being and Time* shows that this is broadly the direction in which Heidegger is moving.

From this point of view it is understandable that the outcome of thinking about ontological difference should be hermeneutical thought, understood as the effort to constitute the drift of that which is present on the basis of its connections with past and future. But that which allows Dasein to

be constituted as a totality, both as a continuity of individual existence and as a continuity of this with other existences, is its constitutive capacity for dying. The ownmost possibility of Dasein - that of the disappearance of all other possibilities - also constitutes the various possibilities that are given on this side of that one in their very nature as possibilities, conferring on existence the capacity for passing from one to the other in a *discursus* that makes it possible as unitary texture. The possibilities that are presented to Dasein in the *continuum* of individual existence are always in their turn linked to what is commonly called history (they are, for example, conditions, professions, works, languages, together with their specific contexts, developments and destinies) and this is always by virtue of the historicity of Dasein opened by its own being-towards-death.

The hermeneutics that interprets all these components of facticity is very far from that deconstruction of the metaphysical text to which the philosophy of difference devotes itself, repetitively retracing the basic structure of absence. Nor is this hermeneutic to be identified with the delirious production of more and more new simulacra, without any rootedness or 'responsibility'. In the Heideggerian hermeneutic, the bond with the human sciences and with the problem of their method remains determinant even if the sphere of their methodology is overcome. Precisely insofar as it is conceived as ontological difference - or as the difference between Being and beings, between *Lichtung* or horizon and being-that-is-present - difference does not simply give rise to the repetition of eternally equal structures; rather, it is deployed as the divergence - ever historically qualified - between the de-terminative, *be-stimmend* horizon, or a given historical epoch and what is given as present within it.

But the drift of Being is also a drift in the second sense I have suggested, the direction in which Dasein drifts as it is drawn along and dispossessed, a process which makes the entire context of existence - as a context of meanings, as a

concatenation of founding and founded - depend on a basic discontinuity. Dasein is in fact constituted as a whole on the basis of an anticipatory resolve with respect to death, in other words on the basis of a relationship with its own annihilation. In this way hermeneutical thinking, whether as a reflection on the question of interpretation or as an actual exercise in the reconstruction of historical/cultural horizons, is ultimately exposed to a condition of ungrounding. However, not only is the totality of meaning as constructed by hermeneutics *ultimately* dependent on this ungrounding condition, which suspends it in its definition. Also within the ambit of hermeneutics as a pure effort of *Er-örterung* – i.e. as primarily an effort to integrate presence within the horizon of making-Present – we can already see an instance of ungrounding which suspends the completion of the *recollection du sens* (to use Ricoeur's term), setting Dasein adrift in a drift that can neither be embraced nor mastered. Even purely on the level of the reconstruction of meaning or the integration of the present within that horizon of past and future which offers it forth, there is something that resists and makes integration impossible, and that is *the other*, the other Dasein who always sets his or her mark on the 'elements' - the meanings, works, events or institutions which one tries to integrate within the horizon.

Although in *Truth and Method* Gadamer does not say much about ontological difference (a fact which is in itself worth pondering), the centrality for Gadamerian hermeneutics of dialogue testifies to the persistence there of this fundamental element of Heidegger's thought. It is the presence of a plurality of Daseins that makes it impossible to conceive of the hermeneutical integration of the horizon of presence as a dialectical *Aufhebung*. The resistance of the other to integration, which means that the *Horizontverschmelzung* is always only provisional, is by no means a historical accident that has to be justified and explained on the basis of the ideal of a fundamentally integrated society (as Habermas views it in

his discussion of Gadamer's hermeneutic in *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*).(16) Rather, Schleiermacher(17) was right to point out that *Missverstehen* is the natural condition with which all interpretation begins; at the same time, in a certain sense at least, it is also interpretation's destination, to the extent that the other never allows himself or herself to be absorbed within the horizon of the interpreter. A better way of putting this is to say that the fusion of horizons takes place to the extent to which each of the interlocutors 'renounces' his own horizon, not by renouncing the fact of having a horizon, but by renouncing the fact of managing it as his own or disposing of it as he pleases. This phenomenon of permanent 'renunciation' is attested by the modes in which the integration of individual horizons into anonymous suprapersonal horizons (which in turn also stand at the basis of the constitution of individual horizons) actually takes place in society. Gadamer aptly describes these modes in terms of the concept of *play*, emphasizing its expropriating dimensions. All social communication is a locus for the unfolding of ontological difference, to the extent that communication realizes that twofold game of integration and ungrounding, the game of *Anwesen* and *Anwesen-lassen*, the game to which *Andenken* pays attention, and only thus sets out to think Being authentically again.

This nexus between ontological difference, social dialogue and ungrounding no doubt needs further elaboration; but I think we can already say that Heideggerian ontological difference may be the difference which can indicate a way towards radical rethinking of hermeneutics, allowing it to become an 'ontological' theory of social communication. I am thinking in particular here of the steps taken in this direction by Karl Otto Apel, for whom the concept of communication is central, and also of more recent attempts to integrate the idea of difference into a philosophy of communication using systems theory, for example, in Wilden's *System and Structure*.(18)

But today Heidegger's idea of ontological difference, when read with an eye to its original intentions and implications, suggests yet another avenue for thought. I have already remarked that there is a second and more fundamental sense in which ontological difference seems to signify an ungrounding, rather than an integration, of the horizon of presence, and that is in its connection with being-towards-death. Difference is what originally distinguishes *Anwesen-lassen*, the temporally articulated horizon, from being-that-is-present. Dasein only manages to locate present being within a horizon and to free itself from the domination of pure presence, to the extent that it is constituted as a historical continuity endowed with meaning; and this in virtue of a resolute anticipation of its own death. As a possibility that is authentic (and as authentic possibility), this makes the other possibilities of Dasein able to be ordered within a context. But although it functions primarily in this way, constituting the historicity of Dasein as a *continuum*, and hence as an *Andenken* that recollects the difference between *Anwesen* and *Anwesen-lassen*, being-towards-death also shows that the historical continuity of Dasein is undermined by a discontinuity, for this continuity is founded on the (possible) annihilation of Dasein.

There are some allusions to this ungrounding dimension of death in the last part of *Der Satz vom Grund*, where the *losende Bindung*, the liberating bond that binds us to the tradition of thought, or the integration of the present into the hermeneutical horizon that governs it, is invoked to 'justify' the leap, which, based on the Heraclitan image of the *aion* as a playful divine child, seeks to think the nexus between Being and *Grund*, Being and *Ab-Grund*, by reference to the *game* into which we 'are brought as mortals, as those who are only to the extent that we dwell in proximity to death ...' (SVG p.186). Although I cannot linger here to make a detailed analysis of this passage from *Der Satz vom Grund*, it does seem to me that we can view it as affirming the presence

of another more primordial call within the call of the principle of reason and within its appeal to construct the texture of experience as a grounded concatenation; this is a call to recognize the whole context as depending on an '*ab-gründlich*' or bottomless condition. The *aion* is a playful child, but we cor-respond to this call of the *Ab-grund*, of abysmal play, only insofar as we are mortal. The anticipatory resolve with respect to death which in Being and Time functions so as to constitute existence as a historical continuity, also functions to hang the continuity of existence on abysmal play. There is a question that has to be asked if we are to begin to pursue – in addition to the radicalization of hermeneutics in a general theory of communication and of generalized communication – this second avenue that seems to be opened up for thinking today by ontological difference. The question is: does Heideggerian being-towards-death necessarily have to be read in a rigorously ontological key, without any relationship to the *ontic* reality of dying or to the natural, biological and animal dimensions of Dasein as a living being? There is a danger that we may get lost in the play of difference/repetition in which the 'philosophy of difference' has got lost. Does not the ungrounding of the context of existence in the direction of an *Ab-grund* have to mean that the continuity of the historical/hermeneutical context of existing must be founded/ungrounded on a naturalness, an animality, or maybe even a silence that is more than the silence between words which makes possible the differential play of the signifier? This is the real *animal silence* which is the pro-venance of human words and to which, in some as yet still-to-be-discovered sense, these words refer. At one and the same time then, we need a development of ontological difference in the direction of a general theory of communication, supported by contributions from psychology, information theory, studies on the pragmatics of communication and systems theory. We also need a reappraisal

of ontological difference in terms of a stress on nature as the natural basis/background/ungrounding of culture. In developing as a theory of generalized communication, hermeneutics has already come into contact with genetics, biology and ethology. If these openings are to be founded from the point of view of difference, they will require a patient rereading of the Heideggerian idea of being-towards-death as it evolves from *Being and Time* to the later works. Only then will we be able to say whether it is meaningful from a Heideggerian viewpoint to take being-towards-death as indicating a biological/natural foundation for culture. Whatever the results of such a reappraisal, this does seem to be the direction in which ontological difference can still constitute a possible adventure for thought.

Notes

1. Now in *Margins of Philosophy*.
2. Cf. *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 27. The Heidegger reference is to 'The Anaximander Fragment' in M. Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. D. F. Krell and F. A. Capuzzi, New York/Evanston/San Francisco /London, 1975, p. 52.
3. *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 27.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
7. For example in studies like the one by S. Kofman, *Nietzsche et le métaphore*; on this, see my 'Nietzsche heute?' in *Philosophische Rundschau*, 1977, pp. 67-91.
8. Cf. *Writing and Difference*, p. 28.
9. G. Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, Paris, 1968, p. 92.
10. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem and H. R. Lane, New York, 1977 and London, 1984.
11. Cf. *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 83.

12. On this topic see G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson, London, 1983; and my introduction to the Italian translation, *Nietzsche e la filosofia*, trans. S. Tassinari, Florence, 1978.
13. Cf. *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, part III, 'The Covenant'.
14. *Truth and Method*, pp. 215ff.
15. This word has been employed to render the Italian term 'senso', which means both 'meaning/sense' and also 'direction'. (Translator's note.)
16. Cf. J. Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 143ff.
17. Cf. F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: the handwritten manuscripts*, ed. H. Kummerle, trans. J. Duke and J. Forstman, Missoula, Montana, 1977, p. 110.
18. A. Wilden, *System and Structure*, London, 1972.