

Derrida, art and truth

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Summary

This article examines the consequences of Derrida's strategy of deconstruction for the notion of 'truth' in art and aesthetics. Its point of departure is R.D. Cumming's 'comparison' of Heidegger and Derrida which shows the latter dismantling Heidegger's conception of the truth of the artwork. Whereas Heidegger wishes to restore to the artwork its autonomy, in this way hoping to return to an original experience of Being (forgotten since the time of the Greeks), Derrida undermines his attempt by exploiting the conflict between the Heideggerian metaphors of 'ground' and 'groundlessness'. In this way Derrida demonstrates that, in view of the metaphorical 'openings' in language, attempts to return to an 'origin' are bound to fail. There are finally only interpretations of interpretations. Derrida's notion of metaphor in philosophical discourse (as well as de Man's related view on the subject) is pursued briefly before concluding with a discussion of his interpretation of van Gogh's peasant shoes painting as exemplification of the similarities and differences between his own and Heidegger's position regarding language, art and truth.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die gevolge van Derrida se strategie van dekonstruksie vir die waarheidsbegrip in kuns en estetika. Die uitgangspunt is R.D. Cumming se 'vergelyking' van Heidegger en Derrida, wat demonstreer hoe laasgenoemde Heidegger se opvatting van die waarheid van 'n kunswerk aftakel. Terwyl Heidegger poog om die outonomie van die kunswerk te herstel, en sodoende terug te keer na 'n oorspronklike ervaring van Syn (vergete sedert die tyd van die Grieke), ondermyn Derrida sy poging deur die konflik tussen die Heideggeriaanse metafore, naamlik 'grond' en 'ongegrontheid' uit te buit. Op hierdie wyse demonstreer Derrida dat pogings om na 'n 'oorsprong' terug te keer, vanweë die metaforiese 'openinge' in taal tot mislukking gedoem is. Daar is uiteindelik slegs interpretasies van interpretasies. Daar word kortliks aandag geskenk aan Derrida se opvatting van metafoor in filosofiese tekste (sowel as aan De Man se verwante siening van die saak) voordat afgesluit word met 'n bespreking van sy interpretasie van Van Gogh se boereskoene-skildery as toonbeeld van die ooreenkomste en verskille tussen sy en Heidegger se onderskeie posisies ten opsigte van taal, kuns en waarheid.

Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, *to make truth laugh*, because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth.

Umberto Eco: *The Name of the Rose*.

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage, seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions; worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses

(die abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind), coins which have their obverse (Bild) effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal.

Nietzsche: 'On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense'

To the question, what Derrida's significance is for art and the philosophy of art in particular, I should answer that it seems to be a specific instance of the relevance that his work has for philosophy and literature, or more broadly speaking, for the (Western) metaphysical tradition in general. In short, Derrida's deconstructive strategy – starting as it does *in medias res* and proceeding through the two stages or double movement of reversal and disorganisation¹ in order to undermine, subvert and dismantle the notion of 'presence' in all its manifestations, (e.g. conceptual finality) – radically questions not only the values entrenched in traditional art and aesthetics, but also some of the most resolute attempts to restore to the latter its credibility and 'truth'.

But where to look for an instructive, if not enlightening instance of such deconstruction? In all likelihood, as someone intent on 'restoring' things resolutely in the face of ubiquitous forgetfulness, Martin Heidegger has no rival in the recent past. And Heidegger's main work on truth in art, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, figures prominently in Derrida's *La Vérité en Peinture*, a translation of which I have unfortunately not been able to trace. What I need to know about Derrida's treatment of Heidegger's *The Origin* in 'Restitutions' (the 'climactic' text in *La Vérité en Peinture*), however, is – although perhaps not fully – nevertheless adequately available in a lengthy article by Robert Denoon Cumming entitled: 'The Odd Couple: Heidegger and Derrida' (1981). What follows is largely, though not exclusively, based on Cumming's article, a confession I make on pain of being accused of relying on 'secondary sources' by academic traditionalists or purists, if it were not for the fact that Derrida himself, who revels in being derivative,² would, I daresay, probably raise no objection to my unavoidable derivativeness.

Can we ever reach a 'true origin', anyway? This happens to be one form of the question which Derrida deals with in 'Restitutions' and from which, with Cumming's mediation, the present paper derives. Of 'Restitutions', Cumming remarks that . . . its 'pre-text' is what Meyer Shapiro has to say in 'Still Life as a Personal Object' about what Heidegger has to say in 'The Origin' about 'the pair of shoes' in van Gogh's painting' (Cumming, 1981:490). I am saying something, in turn, about what Cumming says in 'The Odd Couple' about what Derrida says in 'Restitutions' about Shapiro and Heidegger.

What *does* Cumming say, then, that is informative about Derrida's attitude towards the customary claims by philosophers on behalf of art? As indicated above, in 'Restitutions' Derrida is moved to writing by Shapiro's criticism of Heidegger, specifically of the latter's interpretation of Van Gogh's 'peasant shoes' painting. Ostensibly, Derrida comes to Heidegger's aid, defending him against an art historian's awkward accusations: according to Shapiro, Heidegger attributes the shoes in the van Gogh painting to a peasant woman, whereas he (Shapiro) interprets them as belonging to the painter himself

(Cumming, 1981:492). In so doing, Shapiro reveals his colours as a subjectivist/expressionist in a peculiar manner, for as Cumming remarks (493), the expressionist version concerning the correspondence doctrine (of truth) holds that an artwork is true to the degree that it corresponds with the artist's experience, i.e. with himself – the artwork being an 'expression' of that self, whether in representational form or otherwise. Apparently, Shapiro goes the whole hog with his variation on this theory, in so far as the painted shoes are seen as belonging to van Gogh 'personally': he wishes to 'restore' them to their rightful owner. 'Restoration', which is here (in 'Restitutions') crucial to Derrida, is also central in Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Moreover, I hope to show that the question of the possibility of 'restoring the truth' is where the conflict of interpretations (to borrow a phrase from Ricoeur) between Derrida and Heidegger appears.

In his defence of Heidegger Derrida's apparent objective is, according to Cumming (492-493), to restore³ to Heidegger his own interpretation – disregarded by Shapiro – of the (painted) shoes, of art and of truth. For Heidegger an interpretation of the painting demands its restoration to its original context, viz. the 'world' to which it belongs. This 'world' – which is neither the museum in which it hangs nor the matter/form context of traditional modern aesthetics – is reconstructed by Heidegger from within the painting itself, i.e. he shows that the work belongs '... within the realm that is opened up by itself' (Heidegger, 1975:41): the work-world of the peasant who wears them. In this way, the artwork reveals the truth of the shoes' being. (We may note in passing that Heidegger is here (re-)claiming for art (against subjectivism) an ontological function which it has largely forfeited in our science-dominated era since the 18th century (Harries, 1974).)

As may be expected, however, Derrida's solicitude towards Heidegger is merely preliminary to something more radical – his second strategy – viz. '... to deconstruct the entire philosophical tradition, as a tradition committed to the hermeneutical assumption that an interpretation is authentic when it corresponds to what was originally the author's own interpretation and restores it without transformation' (Cumming, 1981:493-494). In other words, subsequent to his skilful 'restoration' of Heidegger's interpretation of the van Gogh, Derrida proceeds to dismantle the very grounds of this 'restoration' and, by implication, of all other interpretations which rest on the same assumption. But although on this issue he is largely in agreement with Heidegger – whose conception of interpretation is equally irreconcilable with the notion of correspondence – Cumming sets out to demonstrate that what seems at the outset to be a rescue mission by Derrida, turns out to be a more severe attack on Heidegger than Shapiro's. Ultimately, Derrida's target is Heidegger's view of the autonomy of the artwork.

My outline of Cumming's demonstration of Derrida's deviousness must necessarily be brief, in order to get to the point which I would like to pursue at greater length. He shows Derrida selecting from Heidegger's text the reference to the historical 'transition' from the "fundamental Greek experience of the Being of being" to Roman thought, a transition which – according to Heidegger – damaged the original integrity of the *thing* and reduced it to

mere substance.⁴ Moreover, it is from this point that the historical development proceeded (in Heidegger's view) of the subjectivist orientation detectable in modern epistemology as well as aesthetics, oriented as they are by the perceiving subject⁵ (Cumming, 1981:496). Hence, given Heidegger's pronouncement that modernity is characterised by the 'forgottenness of Being' (Heidegger, 1978:21, 262), his effort to return to its (Being's) original experience via the work of art is understandable.

Cumming then asks the pertinent question (496), viz. 'Why should he (Derrida) have picked out this historical 'transition'?' (from fundamental Greek experience to Roman thought). Especially because his subsequent lack of interest in the restoration of the original Greek experience reflects his indifference to the transition which is all-important to Heidegger. To grasp the significance of Derrida's selection, it is advisable to quote Cumming where he quotes Derrida quoting Heidegger: ' "Roman thought took over . . . the Greek words (*Wörter*) without the corresponding co-original experience of what they say . . . The Lack of ground (*Bodenlosigkeit*) of Western thought opens up (*beginnt/s'ouvre*) with this translation" ' (Cumming, 1981:496). The point is that there is more than one translation at stake here. Firstly, there is the Latin translation of Greek words (which interests Heidegger); but, secondly, it is no accident that Derrida translates Heidegger's *beginnt* as *s'ouvre* (which Cumming, in turn, translates straightforwardly as 'opens up').⁶ This is in fact the crucial juncture where the oddness of a comparison between Derrida and Heidegger becomes apparent, in view of the simultaneous presence of similarities and dissimilarities. It is also, nevertheless, the place where Heidegger's 'way' is decisively breached by the zig-zag pattern of Derrida's sidelong interpretative incursion.

Why is a translation so important? It is already clear that Heidegger attributes fundamental importance to language from his conviction that the original experience of Being (by the Greeks) was lost in a (fatal) translation. For Heidegger, language is the 'house of Being' (Heidegger, 1977:193). As such, thought is its guardian; in turn, it holds sway over what *can* be thought. Derrida knows this and, what is more, is at one with Heidegger this point, except that the 'house of Being' is for the nimble Frenchman no impregnable fortress, but a mansion providing multiple access to anyone willing to search for an entrance (even if, say, a window has to be forced a little). In other words – and I realise I may be labouring the metaphor somewhat – the 'house' (language) may be seen to 'open up' at various points. Elsewhere (Derrida, 1978:200) Derrida uses the term *effraction* (French for housebreaking) in a discussion of Freud's attempt to explain memory via the hypothesis of 'breaching' or breaking (of a path). It would be equally apposite in the present context as a metaphor for what Derrida does to Heidegger's text, especially since *metaphor* is what it is all about.

'But', says Derrida in his essay, 'Force and Signification' (Derrida, 1978:17), 'metaphor is never innocent. It orients research and fixes results. When the spatial model is hit upon, when it functions, critical reflection rests within it. In fact, and even if criticism does not admit this to be so.' It is therefore understandable, but at the same time remarkable, that Derrida

interprets Heidegger's location of the beginning of Western thought's groundlessness (at the transition of Greek to Roman thought) as an 'opening up'. For, according to Cumming (497), 'this is what a metaphor is for him. In short, wherever language affords a *passage*, an 'opening', it is meta-phorical – a transition from one point to another.' (In this way Derrida may be seen to apply the etymological meaning – that dimension of words which fascinates Heidegger ceaselessly – of metaphor (viz. a transfer to, beyond, after, behind) as a criterion to locate the metaphorical textures within the fabric of language.)

But let us return to the significance of Derrida's translation, lest the important difference between his and Heidegger's thought be underestimated. It is well known that Heidegger thinks of the original Greek experience of truth as *a-létheia* – uncovering, un-concealing or opening up (Heidegger, 1978:262). Also, that the history of Western metaphysics is the history of the 'covering up' of this (original) experience (Heidegger, 1978:44, 268). In other words, Heidegger perceives an historical 'covering up' of an original, but forgotten, "uncovering" (or 'opening up'). By rendering *beginnt* as 'opening up', Derrida not only makes the 'lack of ground' (*Bodenlosigkeit*) of Heidegger's text more graphic, but also transforms what is for Heidegger a 'covering up' into an 'opening up' (Cumming, 1981:497). This provides the metaphorical basis for his further exploitation of Heidegger's chosen metaphor of 'ground' or 'foundation'. As Cumming points out, the 'lack of ground' of Western thought which occupies Heidegger is "a discontinuity in the 'history' of being and truth," whereas the discontinuity which interests Derrida is 'entailed spatially in a metaphor (as translation, transportation, and transference)' (498). Hence it is not surprising to find him deftly transforming Heidegger's (historical) 'groundlessness' of thought into an 'abyss' – not merely as something which occurred 'historically', but as something ineluctable. In Cumming's words: 'Derrida is sceptical of the prospect of anything reaching its original destination' (497). That this applies particularly to truth and interpretation, and that it ultimately goes back to Derrida's conception of language, should become apparent in the rest of this paper.

Why then, unavoidably, an 'abyss' where interpretation functions? Why not rather, as Gadamer – who may be seen as extending Heidegger's thought in a manner different from Derrida's (Hans, 1980:299) – would say, 'a fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1982:273, 340), i.e. a meeting of different realms of experience in and through the universal medium of understanding and interpretation, viz. language? Here a brief digression is called for. Whereas the 'dialectical hermeneutics' (Palmer, 1969:194) of Gadamer is in agreement with Derrida on the point that all understanding is already interpretation, and moreover, that human understanding is through and through linguistic (Hans, 1980:309), it is incompatible with Derrida's insistence that there is, in the final analysis, only interpretation. For Gadamer, '... interpretation is the explicit form of understanding' (Gadamer 1982:274), and the 'truth' of an experience or of a text resides in what he calls the *application* (of, e.g. the text) to the concrete situation of the person who interprets (Gadamer, 1982:274-275). In

this way experience as a 'hermeneutic event' exhibits the unified tripartite structure of understanding, interpretation and application.

In the light of the preceding it is not difficult to judge which one of the following alternatives, as outlined by Derrida, applies to Gadamer and which one to himself: 'There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism,⁷ the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology – in other words, throughout his entire history – has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play' (Derrida, 1978:292).

It is precisely because for Derrida, unlike for Gadamer, there is nothing outside of the play of signs – 'There is nothing outside of the text' (Derrida, 1980:158) is probably his most often quoted sentence – that interpretation is bound to be confronted, repeatedly, by a 'lack of ground' or an 'abyss'. This is but another way of expressing his familiar insight, that language, whether spoken or written, has the structure of *différance* in the dual sense of 'difference' and 'deferral' (Derrida, 1981: ix). Moreover, it should be remembered that, for Derrida as well as for his American counterparts such as Hartman and de Man, critical or philosophical discourse is by no means exempted from this structural 'contamination'. In fact, in an investigation of the place of metaphor in 'the text of philosophy' titled *White Mythology*, Derrida remarks: '... metaphor seems to bring into play the use of philosophical language in its entirety ... (Derrida, 1974:6). He sets out by examining the 'wear and tear of metaphorical force in philosophical intercourse' (which itself constitutes a metaphor, of course, deriving from the erosion of the image or figure on the obverse of a coin). Focusing on a text of Anatole France on the language of metaphysics – a dialogue which deals with the way in which a sensible figure is 'sheltered' and erased to the point of imperceptibility in every metaphysical concept – Derrida notes that: 'Abstract notions always conceal a sensible figure' (Derrida, 1974:7). The history of the language of metaphysics can therefore be seen as '... commingled with the erasing of what is effective in it, and the wearing out of its effigy' (7). He draws attention to the double meaning of the French word for wear, viz. *usure*: firstly, 'erasure by rubbing', and secondly, 'usury' or an increase of return 'in the form of income', 'a kind of linguistic surplus value' (7). In other words, loss is gain. To the degree that the 'physical' imprint is effaced from the language of metaphysics, it increases in (ontological) value. It is taken to be liberated from spatial and temporal limitations into the realm of universality, like coins which gain exchange value to the extent that the figures on their obverse have been obliterated.

It should be noted that the above comprises largely the implications which Derrida draws from France's text, which also provides the 'catchphrase' for the title of his own: 'They' (the metaphysicians), says Polyphilos in the dialogue, 'produce white mythology' (quoted in Derrida, 1974:11). Derrida

comments as follows: 'What is metaphysics? A white mythology which assembles and reflects Western culture: the white man takes his own mythology (that is, Indo-European mythology), his logos – that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that which it is still his inescapable desire to call Reason.' Again: 'What is white mythology? It is metaphysics which has effaced in itself that fabulous scene which brought it into being, and which yet remains, active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible drawing covered over in the palimpsest' (Derrida, 1974:11). The effacement or erasure is actually twofold: not only does metaphysics erase the sensible or physical origin of its concepts (whose metaphorical character is forgotten), but the erasure erases or conceals *itself* as well.⁸ Far from simply reinforcing the position established by Polyphilos (in France's text), however, Derrida scrutinizes it in order to map out the 'historical terrain' for philosophy's interrogation on 'the metaphorical credentials of its concepts' (13).

The entire scope of this enterprise cannot be dealt with here; suffice it to say that it should be read together with – as Norris helpfully indicates (Norris, 1982:149) – de Man's essay, 'The epistemology of metaphor' (de Man, 1981: 11-28), which similarly dismantles metaphysical-epistemological claims on the part of philosophers. In this case the philosophical discourse of Locke, Condillac and Kant is the object of scrutiny, in so far as it attempts to immunize itself against the 'tropological defiguration' which infects poetry and rhetoric endemically, in this way believing itself to secure privileged access to truth. However, de Man detects in each case an inability to '... maintain a clear line of distinction between rhetoric, abstraction, symbol, and all other forms of language' (de Man, 1981:26). The bid for exemption from the burden of figural language on the part of philosophy ends, in de Man's view, in failure.

We are now in a better position to appreciate the glee with which Derrida slips through the opening which Heidegger allows him in *The Origin*. Especially since Heidegger does not hide the (overtly) metaphorical character of his singular philosophical discourse. Derrida makes this explicit: 'At the juncture where Heidegger denounces the translation into Latin words, he himself makes use of a "metaphor". At least one metaphor, that of foundation or ground. The ground of the Greek experience was lacking to this "translation". What I have just termed a "metaphor" concentrates all the difficulties to come' (quoted in Cumming, 1981:498). In accordance with the strategy of thinkers such as Freud and Bergson, who '... carried out a multiplication of conflicting metaphors (in philosophical discourse) in order to neutralize or control their effect' (Derrida, 1974:12), Derrida proceeds to 'launch' one Heideggerian metaphor against another: the 'lack of ground' is launched against Heidegger's notion of a 'path' of thinking along which he proceeds (Cumming, 1981:500). It is by persistently opposing the one to the other in his interpretation of Heidegger, that Derrida creates the 'abyss' in Heidegger's way.⁹ Commenting on the (fatal) translation which preoccupies Heidegger, he plays a game (of consequence) with words: 'The "same" ... words ... corresponding to the original Greek experience of the thing, the "same" words which are no longer altogether the same, these phantoms which are

doubles of themselves, their light replicas (*simulacres légers*), start walking above the void or in the void, *bodenlos*' (quoted in Cumming, 1981:501). Not only has the subjectivism in art criticism (represented by Shapiro) been undermined by Derrida's initial restoration of Heidegger's aesthetic, but the very Greek soil to which Heidegger hopes to return in his quest for the credentials of truth also collapses (Cumming, 1981:501).¹⁰ Instead, language acquires a 'floating' character, reminiscent of the flying island of Laputa which Gulliver encounters during his travels.

But does an artform like painting not offer us an escape from the rule of metaphor in language? Is Heidegger's rehabilitation of art via – among other works¹¹ – the van Gogh painting not a legitimate valorization of a privileged mode of access to truth, viz. the aesthetic in its etymological sense of the 'sensorily perceivable'? An affirmative answer would, in the first place, overlook the fact – implied by the earlier discussion of the 'white mythology' – that the recognition of the metaphorical nature of language already emphasises the linguistic interplay between the sensory and the abstract: they are locked in a 'supplemental embrace' and as such are inseparable. But, secondly, to valorize 'non-linguistic' art forms in a Heideggerian context would be to ignore Heidegger's insistence that *all* art is essentially poetry in the 'wider sense' of founding truth, and that the poem as 'linguistic work', moreover, has 'a privileged position in the domain of the arts' (Heidegger, 1975:72-73). This is because language, for Heidegger, is a prerequisite for the 'appearance' in the 'Open' – i.e. the presence in a world – of entities, and hence the 'plastic arts' presuppose a linguistically disclosed world (Heidegger, 1975:74). This facilitates a better understanding of the status of the van Gogh painting as an 'illustrative exemplification' (Cumming, 1981:499) of the 'opening up' or deconcealing (in language) of the truth of beings. Which announces the final consideration – which is really a reconsideration – of this paper.

It will be remembered that Derrida's conception of metaphor was earlier likened to an 'opening up' or a 'transfer-point'. Like a true Heideggerian he apparently has no difficulty in finding such an opening for a (profitable) transfer in the van Gogh painting, which is, after all, the visual counterpart of a linguistic text. Here, too, the signs play. Briefly, there are two instances of transference or departure by Derrida from Heidegger's interpretation of the painting which finally demonstrate the tenacious pattern of prying which enables the insubordinate Gaul to prise apart the fabric of restored works, in this way casting suspicion, not only on the workmanship involved, but also on the supposed original integrity and autonomy of the works.

The first of the instructive transfers executed by Derrida is from the shoes in the painting – or perhaps rather from what Heidegger says about shoes – to the shoelace. Cumming (p. 513) draws attention to Heidegger's remark that the appropriate material for shoes is 'firm yet flexible' (Heidegger, 1975:28). These properties are carried over to something suited to Derrida's own purpose – the lace: 'in its twisting, passing and repassing though the eyelet of the thing ... (the lace) assures the thing its gathering together ... Firm and flexible at one and the same time' (quoted in Cumming, 1981:513). Cumming

notes that, in this passage, 'firmness and flexibility are becoming meta-phorically traits of Derrida's own *methos*' (513). But this ostensibly innocuous transfer is another step in the deconstruction of Heidegger's programme of restoration, this time of 'the thingly character' of the thing (Cumming, 1981:514), located by Heidegger in the meaning of an old High German word for thing, viz. *Versammlung* or 'gathering together'.¹² Hence, what constitutes for Heidegger the linguistic assurance of the integrity of the thing – its 'gathering together' – is applied by Derrida to specific things – the (laces of the) shoes in the painting – in such a way that gathering together becomes inseparable from 'opening up'. After all, shoelaces are tied *and* untied; shoes are laced *and* unlaced: there is firmness here, as well as flexibility, integrity *and* openness. Which brings us to the second Derridean transfer.

Heidegger opens his revealing 'reading' of the peasant shoes in a way which makes of them a visual counterpart of his conception of truth as uncovering: From the dark opening¹³ of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth (Heidegger, 1975:33-34). Derrida, in turn, talks about the laces 'passing' through the shoe's *eyelet*, which replaces Heidegger's 'dark opening' of the shoe: 'What opens there its presence veiled – revealing, by letting itself (*en se lassant*) like an eyelet . . . be traversed by the laces? Towards the truth?' (quoted in Cumming, 1981:518). The truth is – as one may gather from the contrast between Heidegger's single (shoe-) opening and Derrida's (pairs of) eyelets – that the opening to which Heidegger attempts to return (truth as *a-létheia*) is itself governed by the binary ('two together') functioning of laces 'passing and re-passing' through eyelets. For, according to Derrida, the laces 'assure the thing its gathering together, underneath tied together with what is above, within drawn together with the outside, by a law of constriction. Firm and flexible at one and the same time' (quoted in Cumming, 1981:516). Moreover, the paired eyelets through which the laces pass, illustrate Derrida's 'metaphorical' procedure admirably: 'translation, transportation, transference to a place from one point to another' (Cumming, 1981:518).¹⁴

It may already be apparent from the above that the laces and the eyelets together comprise a metaphor for Derrida's deconstructive 'method of inter-lacing . . . whether of strategies or texts' (Cumming, 1981:516). What may not be immediately apparent, however, is that it also serves as a metaphor for his conception of the interpretation of language generally, since he depends upon, looks for (or prods until he uncovers) the openings in language which permit the lace-logic (interpretation) to pass through with the purpose(s) of opening or closing, tying or untying, fastening or unfastening. The laces and the eyelets are in a relation of supplementarity (each fills a deficiency in the other), and correspond to interpretation and the ambiguity (or multivocality) of language, respectively.

In conclusion, what are the consequences of these considerations for the 'presence', 'truth' or 'autonomy' of the artwork (as 'restored' by Heidegger)? Here I cannot do better than to quote Cumming: 'This autonomy Derrida denies by surrendering the work, not to the authority of its author (as Shapiro does, when he restores the shoes to van Gogh as his "Personal Object"), but

to the unauthorized interventions of the interpreter, who can take advantage with his own choices of passageways the author never entered, such as the eyelets of the shoes – those “openings” language affords for the “passing and re-passing” of the “laces” of interpretation’ (Cumming, 1981:519).¹⁵

If, as a corollary, it seems evident that Derrida’s mode of proceeding is the aleatory strategy of someone who admits that he does not know where he is going,’ it may be added that he ‘delights in being without defence’ (Derrida, 1983: 50). Besides, he would probably defend even a thesis defence – especially his own, from which the above has been taken – as being in the end indefensible, since thetic presentations rest on the assumptions of propositional logic, which is an either-or logic and which is cunningly undermined by the ‘logic’ of the trace and of un- and interlacing – a logic of ‘either-or/and both’ . . .

Notes

1. Cf. in this regard the article by Veronica Vasterling: ‘De dubbele strategie van de dekonstruktie by Derrida’, 1983.
2. It is well-known that Derrida’s method or strategy, while on the one hand pursuing the philosophical tradition of Kant and Hegel in its reflection on the conditions of philosophical thinking itself, on the other hand departs from this tradition in that it shows itself to be primarily a kind of ‘productive reading-activity’. As such, it deliberately links with the ‘chain of texts’ which constitutes our literary and philosophical heritage. Cf. Vasterling, 1983:90-91; Cumming, 1981:503.
3. I would not presume to do justice, here, to Cumming’s perceptive and nimble-fingered disentanglement of the many strands of meaning in Derrida’s diction. ‘Restore’, for instance, is one of the meanings of the French *rendre*, another meaning of which, viz. ‘return’, may clash with ‘restore’ when the question of painting is considered, since the latter can entail transformation (in ‘rendering’ an object in a painting as well as in the ‘restoration’ of a painting). Hence, the question of *restoration* is linked to those of *correspondence* and *origin*. (Does a *restored* painting correspond with the original?) In this way Cumming traces the way in which Derrida, by playing with the various meanings of his words, keeps on broadening the scope of the questions which he approaches. By uncovering some of Derrida’s detours – and perhaps by adding a few of his own – Cumming highlights the significant multivocality of the Frenchman’s central (but effectively decentring) terms (Cumming, 1981:490-494).
4. This injurious transformation is expressed by the translation of the Greek *hupo-keimenon* (hupostasis) into the Latin *subiectum* (*substantia*), conceived of as the substructure by which the thing remains identical with itself – as opposed to the *accidens* or changing attributes which are supported by the substructure (Heidegger, 1975:23). It should be noted that, as Cumming remarks, Heidegger’s return to the thing – which naturally brings to mind Husserl’s exhortation to ‘return to things themselves’ – is indirect in a twofold manner: it is executed via the work of art (van Gogh’s painting of the shoes which reveals their original integrity) and, secondly, it takes the form of a ‘step backward’ in the philosophical tradition (Cumming, 1981:495). In passing, one may also take note of the extent to which Heidegger as well as hermeneutical thinkers such as H-G. Gadamer (and, with important qualifications, Derrida), among others, have rejected the Husserlian

- epoché as illusory, in so far as it was supposed to enable the mind to behold the essence of things directly. For these later thinkers we can only reach for things indirectly, as our experience of them is unavoidably mediated by tradition (or, as Derrida would say, by interpretation upon interpretation).
5. The entire history of modern epistemology is implied by Cumming's remark, that: 'Although *subjectum* originally referred to the substructure of the thing as object, it became in modern philosophy the "subject" as opposed to the object' (496).
 6. In the Hofstadter translation of Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*, *beginnt* is translated as 'begins'. The sentence reads: '*Roman thought takes over the Greek words without a corresponding, equally authentic experience of what they say, without the Greek word. The rootlessness of Western thought begins with this translation*' (Heidegger, 1975:23).
 7. It is worth noting that Fred Dallmayr, in his study of contemporary post-individualist thought entitled *Twilight of Subjectivity*, gives considerable weight to Derrida, among others, for the way in which his work, with its affirmation of discontinuity, seems to point beyond egocentric humanism to an appreciation of the 'supplemental' relationship between culture and nature.
 8. In his preoccupation with the self-concealment of metaphor in philosophical discourse, Derrida reveals once again an affinity for Heidegger's way of thinking. Heidegger is characteristically intent upon 'uncovering' what is, first and foremost, concealed, not to mention his conception of truth (*a-létheia*) as uncovering or unconcealing, and his insistence that Being simultaneously reveals and conceals itself (Heidegger, 1977:132, 211). Derrida's notion of metaphor as functioning in, even as it absents itself from philosophical discourse, would then seem to parallel Heidegger's notion of Being.
 9. This also happens to be in accord with Hegel's view of metaphor, which Cumming quotes (500): ... metaphor is always an interruption (*Unterbrechung*) in the continuity of representation and a constant dispersal, because it arouses and brings together pictures which do not immediately belong to the thing in question and its meaning, and therefore draw the mind away from it. Whereas Hegel deplores this 'interruptive' effect of metaphor, however, Derrida relishes and exploits it. On occasion he even describes his second strategy as '... changing the terrain in a fashion which is discontinuous and interruptive (*irruptive*)' (quoted in Cumming, 1981:489). In this light, his deconstructive approach may indeed (metaphorically) be termed 'metaphorical'.
 10. It is not only in this instance where Derrida's probing uncovers a chasm – it seems to yawn wherever he looks for the supposed foundations of Western thought. Cumming points out, for example, that in *Dissemination*, Derrida's examination of the 'space' of Plato's *Phaedrus* similarly transforms 'what is at worst a cliff in Plato' into an 'abyss' (Cumming, 1981:502).
 11. Within the limits of the present paper I cannot do justice to the relevance of at least one of the other works discussed by Heidegger in *The Origin*, viz. Meyer's poem, *Roman Fountain* (Heidegger, 1975:37). Cumming deals at length with its importance as the 'place' where the confrontation between Heidegger and Derrida 'never quite takes place' (Cumming, 1981:503-512).
 12. Just how central this interpretation of the 'thing' as 'gathering together' (Heidegger, 1975:174) is to Heidegger's thought as a whole, becomes somewhat clearer when we consider that the Greek terms *logos* and *legein*, which figure prominently in his work, are likewise linked to 'gathering'. Fay (1977) provides a thorough examination of *logos* in Heidegger's philosophy (cf. especially 63, 97).
 13. It is striking that both Heidegger and Derrida oppose a metaphysical tradition

- which identifies truth and reason with 'light' – what may be termed a 'heliocentric' metaphysics. Hence they undertake the 'destruction' and 'deconstruction', respectively, of the tradition. Cf. Cumming, 1981:510.
14. Once again, the odd closeness to each other of the otherwise dissimilar German and Frenchman becomes manifest. As Cumming remarks, "the "veiling-revealing" takes place as the lace successively "shows itself" (*sich zeigt*) and "disappears" (518). This play between revealing and concealing applies equally – as has been indicated in note 8, above – to Heidegger's conception of Being.
 15. What, if anything, is 'restored' by Derrida in this process? If one considers that *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* lists the following as a meaning of 'restitution': 'resumption of original shape or position because of elasticity', one could possibly say that it is the elasticity of language which he wishes to restore – which is hardly a restoration at all.

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