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*Logocentrism and the Gathering Λόγος:  
Heidegger, Derrida, and the Contextual Centers of Meaning<sup>1</sup>*

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**Abstract**

Derrida's deconstructive strategy of reading texts can be understood as a way of highlighting the irreducible plurality of discursive meaning that undermines the traditional Western "logocentric" desire for an absolute point of reference. While his notion of logocentrism was modeled on Heidegger's articulation of the traditional ontotheological framework of Aristotelian metaphysics, Derrida detects a logocentric remnant in Heidegger's own interpretation of gathering (*Versammlung*) as the basic movement of λόγος, discursiveness. However, I suggest that Derrida here touches upon a certain limit of deconstruction. As Derrida himself points out, the "decentering" effect of deconstruction does not simply abolish the unifying and focalizing function of discourse. Insofar as deconstruction involves reading and interpreting, it cannot completely evade narrative focalization. Rather, both Heidegger and Derrida can be understood as addressing the radical contextuality of all discursive centers and focal points, as well as the consequent impossibility of an ultimate and definitive *metanarrative*.

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## Keywords

logocentrism, deconstruction, metaphysics of presence, contextuality, narrativity

Jacques Derrida stands today as one of Heidegger's most prominent philosophical heirs. This is a role that he himself always readily acknowledged, emphasizing, however, that responsible inheriting does not mean a simple reaffirmation of what has been handed down. The intrinsic heterogeneity of every philosophical inheritance, its textual quality in the wide Derridean sense, rather necessitates a critical response, "a filtering, a choice, a strategy"—a selective reading.<sup>2</sup> This strategy makes Derrida, in the words of Elisabeth Roudinesco, a "faithful and unfaithful heir."<sup>3</sup>

Derrida's faithful/unfaithful double aspect is particularly manifest in his readings of the Heideggerian corpus, which in spite of its seminal importance in Derrida's own philosophical formation was not preserved intact from the effects of deconstruction. In 1967 Derrida describes his strategy with regard to Heidegger in the following manner:

. . . despite this debt to Heidegger's thought, or rather because of it, I attempt to locate within Heidegger's text—which, no more than any other, is not homogeneous, continuous, everywhere equal to the greatest force and to all the consequences of its questions—the signs of a belonging to metaphysics, or to what he calls onto-theology.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *De quoi demain: dialogue* (Paris: Fayard/Galilée, 2001), 21; translated by Jeff Fort as *For What Tomorrow...: A Dialogue* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida and Roudinesco, *De quoi demain*, 14; *For What Tomorrow...*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Implications: Entretien avec Henri Ronsse" [1967], in *Positions* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 18–19; translated by Alan Bass as "Implications: Interview with Henri Ronsse," in *Positions*, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 8.

Heidegger's discourse is to be searched for *signs*, for elements that potentially retain it within the limits of what Heidegger himself attempts to delimit as (traditional, Western, Platonic-Aristotelian) "metaphysics," basic aspects of which were identified by the later Heidegger as "ontotheology" and by the earlier Derrida as "logocentrism." Let us take a brief look at these closely related notions.

"Ontotheology" is basically Heidegger's term for the twofold structure of Aristotelian metaphysics as ontology (the study of being<sup>5</sup> *qua* being) and theology (the study of the supreme being). For Aristotle, there is no single determinate sense of "being as such" that would encompass all instances of "to be." A "scientific" ontology in Aristotle's sense is therefore achievable only by way of theology, which completes ontology with an account of the metaphysical God, the supreme entity, as the model of ontological perfection for all other beings. The only feature common to all things that are said to *be* is their situatedness in different hierarchies of being-more-or-less (such as actuality/potentiality, substantiality/predicability, or essentiality/contingency), and the universal point of reference for these hierarchies is the specific being whose being consists in pure actuality, pure substantiality, and pure essentiality. The supreme entity thus provides the only determinate "unity of being."<sup>6</sup> In Heidegger's historical narrative, this ontotheological approach to the question of the general meaning of "to be" in terms of a paradigmatic and ultimate *instance* of "to be" persists in different forms throughout the metaphysical tradition, from Plato to Nietzsche.<sup>7</sup> According to Heidegger's central thesis, the ideal of

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<sup>5</sup> I use "being" to translate Aristotle's τὸ ὄν in the general and abstract sense and Heidegger's infinitival *Sein*; "beings" or "a being" is used to translate τὰ ὄντα and *das Seiende*. Following the practice of the Emad and Maly translation of *Contributions to Philosophy*, I use the hyphenated "be-ing" to render Heidegger's archaic orthography *Seyn*.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, ed. W. D. Ross, vol. 1–2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), Γ.1.1003a21–32, Γ.2.1003a33–b19, E.1.1026a23–32, Λ.7.1072a19–b30, Λ.9.1074b15–1075a10. On the theology of Book Λ as the culmination of the science of being *qua* being, see Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian "Metaphysics": A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), especially pp. 453–54. However, Owens considers even Book Λ to be inadequate in terms of the requirements for first philosophy outlined in the first books of the *Metaphysics*.

<sup>7</sup> For Heidegger's account of ontotheology, see, for example, Martin Heidegger, "Die seinsgeschichtliche Bestimmung des Nihilismus" [1944–46], in *Nietzsche*, vol. 2., 6th ed. (Stuttgart: Neske, 1998), 311–15; translated

being inherent in the tradition is *constant presence* (*beständige* or *ständige Anwesenheit*, for Heidegger, the implicit sense of Aristotle's οὐσία, "substance" or "entity")<sup>8</sup> in the sense of a determinate and self-identical accessibility to intuitive awareness (νοῦς); hence Derrida's idiom "metaphysics of presence." The perfection of the supreme entity can be regarded as consisting precisely in different aspects of an ideally constant presence/accessibility, such as self-sufficiency, completeness, simplicity, and uniqueness.

The term "logocentrism" was originally coined by the philosopher of life Ludwig Klages to designate the Platonic tendency to subordinate the dynamic unity of life or "soul" to "spirit."<sup>9</sup> For Derrida, it denotes the (no less Platonic) tendency to subordinate the full material reality of discourse and language to λόγος in the sense of an ideal "logical" meaning-structure—and, ultimately, to subordinate all discursive structures to a "transcendental signified," to λόγος in the sense of an ultimate central "meaning" that would no longer refer to anything other than itself and would thus provide a self-sufficient and permanently accessible center for discursive chains of references.<sup>10</sup> In his seminal 1966 paper at Johns Hopkins, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida asserts that in Western philosophy and science, "structure—or rather the structurality of structure—although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or of referring it to a point

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by Frank A. Capuzzi as "Nihilism as Determined by the History of Being," in *Nietzsche*, vol. 4: *Nihilism*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 207–10; "Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik" [1956–57], in *Identität und Differenz*, 12th ed. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002), 31–67 [hereafter, *ID*]; translated by Joan Stambaugh as "The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics," in *Identity and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 42–74.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* [1927], 18th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 25–26 [hereafter, *SZ*]; translated by Joan Stambaugh as *Being and Time*, revised by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 24; *Einführung in die Metaphysik* [1935/53], 6th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), 147, 148, 154 [hereafter, *EM*]; translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt as *Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 206, 207, 216.

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Klages, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*, vol. 1: *Leben und Denkvermögen* (Leipzig: Barth, 1929), XXI, 121, 129–30, 144, 217, 232, 374, 472, 511. Cf. Egon Pöhler, "Logozentrisch," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, vol. 5 (Basel: Schwabe & Co., 1980), 502–3.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 71–72; translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 49.

of presence, a fixed origin.”<sup>11</sup> Logocentrism is the desire of discursive thought to transcend discursive structures in order to arrive at a point at which the basic contextualizing movement of discourse—the endless “deferral” (*différance*) in which meanings always turn out to be constituted by references to other meanings, those meanings in turn referring to others—would cease and be consummated in an immediate disclosure of the non-referential and undelayed presence of an absolute meaning.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, “logocentrism” is another name for “ontotheology.”

One of the key insights of Derrida’s earlier work was related to the complicity between logocentrism and “phonocentrism,” a conception of language that privileges the live voice (*φωνή*) over writing, which, in turn, is regarded as a secondary representation of speech. A written text is a texture of material signs, the meaning of which is never discovered “immediately” but rather is generated in a mediate and indefinite process of reading, interpreting, and reinterpreting. In oral discourse, by contrast, the speaker and her intention are supposedly accessible immediately, without delay or distance, making it possible in principle to attain an “authoritative” interpretation of a discourse by asking the speaker to explain what she meant.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, vocalized speech can be regarded as a material representation of an even more original “speech,” the voiceless *λόγος* of thought described in Plato’s *Sophist*, in which the soul communicates ideal meanings to itself immediately, without recourse to a material medium.<sup>14</sup> This “internal *λόγος*” is typically conceived of as being independent of linguistic context; conventionality and context-specificity are introduced into discourse together with the materiality of vocal and written

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, “La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines” [1966], in *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 409; translated by Alan Bass as “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 278.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. David Wood, *Philosophy at the Limit: Problems of Modern European Thought* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 48–49.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 15–31; *Of Grammatology*, 6–18.

<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, in *Platonis Opera*, ed. E. A. Duke et al., vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 263e3–9).

signs.<sup>15</sup> Such phonocentrism is, for Derrida, the basic matrix underlying the distinction between material sign and ideal meaning—the *signifier* and *signified* of Saussurean structural linguistics—which in turn makes a “transcendental” signified, i.e., a final, absolutely universal referent, a plausible ideal. The metaphysics of presence, Derrida asserts, is characterized by a phonocentric “debasement of writing and its repression outside ‘full’ speech.”<sup>16</sup> By contrast, “grammatology,” the new approach proposed by Derrida, is precisely the attempt to make explicit the ways in which writing exposes the radically (con)textual—i.e., irreducibly mediated and referential—way in which *all* discursive meaning is generated.<sup>17</sup> No form of discourse is able to simply extricate itself from textuality. Put in another way, there is no pure signified; all discursive meaning is contaminated with a signifying element, a reference to something else.

“Ontotheology” is primarily a conceptual tool with which Heidegger seeks to delineate and demarcate certain underlying tendencies of the philosophical tradition up to, and including, Nietzsche. In a similar way, “logocentrism” is meant to capture an inherent feature of Western thought about discourse and meaning in the tradition up to, and including, Heidegger. Derrida notes that Heidegger’s project is incapable of simply abandoning the conceptual resources and the specific discursive structures of the tradition it tries to delimit, remaining to some extent conditioned by them, and that this incapacity is not a simple deficiency: there is no simple twisting free of the tradition. “To the extent

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<sup>15</sup> In a classical passage of *De Interpretatione* (in *Categoriae et Liber De Interpretatione*, ed. Lorenzo Minio-Paluello [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949], 1.16a3–8 [hereafter, *De Int.*]), Aristotle maintains that written signs are symbols of vocal signs, which in turn are symbols of mental affects (παθήματα), these in turn being ways in which the soul conforms to real things (πράγματα). Whereas letters and vocal utterances vary in different languages, the mental affects they communicate (as well as, of course, reality itself) are the same for all. Cf. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 21–22; *Of Grammatology*, 10–11.

<sup>16</sup> Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 11–12, 23–24; *Of Grammatology*, 3, 12. In his last seminar, Derrida interestingly maintains that phonocentrism is, to a certain extent, universal, while logocentrism is a particular feature of Western philosophy and the monotheistic religions—implying that logocentrism as a mode of thought is rooted in phonocentrism and not vice versa. (Jacques Derrida, *Séminaire: La bête et le souverain*, vol. 1: 2001–2002, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud [Paris: Galilée, 2008], 461; translated by Geoffrey Bennington as *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009], 347.)

<sup>17</sup> Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 13–14; *Of Grammatology*, 4.

that . . . a logocentrism is not totally absent from Heidegger's thought, perhaps it still holds that thought within the epoch of onto-theology. . . . This would perhaps mean that one does not leave the epoch whose closure one can outline."<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, there is an

. . . ambiguity of the Heideggerian situation with respect to the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism. It [sc., Heidegger's situation] is at once contained within it [sc., the metaphysics of presence] and transgresses it. . . . The very movement of transgression sometimes holds it back short of the limit.<sup>19</sup>

In what follows, I will look at the complex relationship of inheriting, reaffirming, and filtering between Heidegger and Derrida in terms of this notion of logocentrism.

- (1) I begin by arguing that in spite of their heterogeneous, suggestive, and aporetic character, Derrida's readings of Heidegger do have a certain focal point—namely, the question concerning the very possibility of focal points, in other words, the problem of the unity and plurality of discursive meaning.
- (2) This problem is seen to be especially prominent in Derrida's detection of an inherently "logocentric" move in Heidegger's interpretation of the Presocratic concept of λόγος as "gathering" (*Versammlung*) and in the latter's constant reaffirmation of the primacy of gathering, concentration, and unity over dispersal and multiplicity.
- (3) Even though Heidegger does not simply adopt or endorse the Greek concept of λόγος as such but, rather, transforms it in a decidedly non-Greek and postmetaphysical manner, he does indeed retain a certain notion of the unifying and focalizing function of discourse and language. This, I suggest, is the only kind of "logocentrism" that can properly be attributed to Heidegger. However, I

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<sup>18</sup> Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 23–24; *Of Grammatology*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 35; *Of Grammatology*, 22 (translation modified).

maintain that what is at stake here is a transformation, not an uncritical continuation, of the “ontotheological” logocentrism of traditional metaphysics.

- (4) Turning to Derrida’s concession that a certain logocentrism is “philosophically necessary” and unavoidable, I will end by asking to what extent and at what cost the deconstructive abstention from looking for unifying centers of discursive meaning, or the active “dispersion” of such centers, is feasible. In other words, how far can the deconstruction of logocentrism be taken? Are not deconstructive readings, in the end, committed to a certain minimal “logocentrism,” a narrativity that no longer claims the status of *metanarrativity*?

1. *Narrative Unity: Heidegger’s Unthought?*

The feature that most clearly distinguishes Derrida’s deconstructive readings from more traditionally hermeneutical ones is their seeming lack of focus. Derrida refuses to follow the methodological tenet of Heideggerian hermeneutics, according to which “[e]very thinker thinks one only thought. . . . [F]or the thinker the difficulty is to hold fast to this one only thought as the one and only thing that he must think.”<sup>20</sup> For Heidegger, reading texts of the metaphysical tradition involves mapping their “fundamental metaphysical position,” i.e., a specific point or situation within the general framework of the history of metaphysics around which the text or texts of a particular thinker can be grouped.<sup>21</sup> Heidegger’s readings accordingly manifest a tendency to integrate texts into more and more comprehensive wholes, ultimately into what seems to be a kind of “master narrative” comprising the entire history of Western philosophy. However, he does this with a strong hermeneutical awareness that such a narrative is itself narrated from a particular historical

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?* [1951–52], 5th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), 20 [hereafter, *WHD*]; translated by J. Glenn Gray as *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 50.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen” [1937], in *Nietzsche*, vol. 1, 6th ed. (Stuttgart: Neske, 1998), 401–23 [hereafter, *N I*]; translated by David Farrell Krell as “The Eternal Recurrence of the Same,” in *Nietzsche*, vol. 2: *The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 184–208.

situation and therefore relative to a particular context. While crediting Hegel with having produced “the only philosophical history of philosophy heretofore”<sup>22</sup> and having thus challenged philosophy to think historically, Heidegger is careful to distinguish between the Hegelian metanarrative and his own. Hegel’s quest for an *absolute* position with respect to the history of thought is for Heidegger an ultimately self-defeating venture to “jump over one’s own shadow” in which the constitutive finitude of thinking—i.e., the fact that in every thought, something is inevitably left *unthought* in such a way that it is accessible *as* an unthought only from another standpoint—is, in a sense, shrugged off.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to Hegelian absolute teleology, Heidegger suggests that his own attempts, in the later phase of his career, to think being as *Ereignis*, as the “event” or “taking-place” of meaningfulness, imply only a *relative* teleology, the end of a *particular* history. The “end of the history of being” that Heidegger speaks of in his latest texts is simply the end of the progressive unfolding of the different conceptual forms under which the metaphysical tradition has articulated being. This end signifies that it is no longer helpful to articulate *Ereignis* in terms of “being,” since the traditional metaphysical connotations and limitations of this word are, as Heidegger acknowledges in his latest work, indissoluble.<sup>24</sup> While Hegel concentrates on what was effectively *thought* by the

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<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, “Die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen,” in *NI*, 404; “The Eternal Recurrence of the Same,” 186; cf. “Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik,” in *ID*, 33; “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” 44.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Die Frage nach dem Ding: Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendentalen Grundsätzen* [1935–36], 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987), 117–18; translated by W.B. Barton Jr. and Vera Deutsch as *What Is a Thing?* (Chicago: Regnery, 1967), 150–51.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Protokoll zu einem Seminar über den Vortrag ‘Zeit und Sein’” [1962], in *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 44, 53–58 [hereafter, *ZSD*]; translated by Joan Stambaugh as “Summary of a Seminar on the Lecture ‘Time and Being,’ ” in *On Time and Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 41, 50–54. In a later marginal note to “Anaximander’s Saying” (1946), Heidegger notes that the word “being” inevitably designates the “being of beings” and is therefore insufficient for his purposes (“Der Spruch des Anaximander” [1946], in *Holzwege*, 8th ed. [Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2003], 364 n[d] [hereafter, *HW*]; translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes as “Anaximander’s Saying,” in *Off the Beaten Track* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 275 n[a]). In the 1966–67 Heraclitus seminar, Heidegger notes that he no longer likes to use the word “being” (Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, “Heraklit” [1966–67], in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15: *Seminare*, ed. Curd Schwadt, 2nd ed. [Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2005], 20; translated by Charles H. Seibert as *Heraclitus Seminar* [Evanston, IL: Northwestern

thinkers of the tradition in order to dialectically bring their incomplete insights to a definitive fruition, Heidegger's attention centers on what these thinkers—as seen from his particular position—implicitly presupposed but *omitted* to think.<sup>25</sup> The Heideggerian metanarrative is thus more modest than Hegel's: it only incorporates the specific history of a *specific* situation (its own), from the point of view of what, *in* that situation, is emerging as something excluded by the tradition as it shows itself when considered retrospectively *from* that situation. Heidegger's narrative does not place itself above "history as such"; indeed, it denies the possibility of any metahistorical vantage point. It may therefore not be altogether appropriate to call it a *metanarrative*.

In this regard, Derrida is even more modest. During his philosophical career he gradually became more and more cautious of *all* historical metanarratives and of narrative structures in general, noting with reservation the presence of a "hidden teleology" or "narrative order" in Heidegger.<sup>26</sup> Suggesting, perhaps, a general impasse of narrativity rather than a personal incapacity, he ironically asks: "I have never known how to tell a story. . . . Why am I denied narration? Why have I not received this gift?"<sup>27</sup> Derrida is indeed remarkably reluctant to draw general conclusions from his readings or even to summarize them, refusing to incorporate the texts he works with into a comprehensive and systematic account. For the most part, he simply extracts from texts particular components that generally appear to be "marginal" or relatively irrelevant in terms of what is normally

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University Press, 1993], 8.) Cf. Thomas Sheehan, "A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research," *Continental Philosophy Review* 34 (2001): 187–92.

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, "Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik," in *ID*, 37–39; "The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics," 47–49.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 29; translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby as *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 12. Cf. Paola Marrati, *Genesis and Trace: Derrida Reading Husserl and Heidegger* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 106, 223–24.

<sup>27</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), 27; translated by Cecile Lindsay et al. as *Memoires for Paul de Man*, revised ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 3. For an excellent discussion of deconstruction "neither as a simple affirmation nor negation of narrative but rather as a radical *perplexity* in the face of narrative," see James Gilbert-Walsh, "Deconstruction as Narrative Interruption," *Interchange* 38 (2007): 317–33.

taken to be the focal point of these texts, playing with their hidden connotations in order to disclose ways in which they precisely *resist* integration into a single coherent narrative. Derrida's readings of Heidegger, for example, do not amount to a conventional interpretation of Heidegger's work as a unified totality hinging on the author's "fundamental intentions." Their specifically deconstructive function is rather to expose in Heidegger's writings implicit connotations of traditional commitments that Heidegger never explicitly subscribes to and thereby to reveal specific ways in which Heidegger's actual discourse *fails* his integral project. For Derrida, this is not a contingent individual failure but rather a predicament of all discourse—including the philosophical, in spite of its inherent desire to be unequivocal. It is constitutive of the textuality of texts that they can never be harnessed, once and for always, to serve a single purpose. In a reading of Heidegger, a deconstructive operation involves showing how some of the components (phrases, idioms, or metaphors) of his discourse resist integration into the general logic of his thought and can also be construed to serve purposes that potentially conflict with his explicit project of opening up avenues for *postmetaphysical* forms of thinking.

This is Derrida's particular tactic in the *Geschlecht* essays (1983–89), in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (1987), and also in his recently published last seminar on *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2001–3), which extensively studies Heidegger's 1929–30 lecture course on *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.<sup>28</sup> A basic "point" of these commentaries is to exhibit the irreducible plurality of potential meanings present in the Heideggerian corpus. This point is made performatively, precisely by *not* explicitly making it, in order to

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<sup>28</sup> See Jacques Derrida, "Geschlecht: différence sexuelle, différence ontologique" [1983], in *Psychè: inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 395–414; translated by Ruben Berezdivin as "Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference," in *Research in Phenomenology* 13 (1983) : 65–83; reprinted in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 378–402; "La main de Heidegger (Geschlecht II)" [1985], in *Psychè: inventions de l'autre*, 415–51; translated by John P. Leavey, Jr. as "Geschlecht II : Heidegger's Hand," in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Sallis (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1987), 161–96; "L'oreille de Heidegger: philopolémologie (Geschlecht IV)" [1989], in *Politiques de l'amitié suivi de L'oreille de Heidegger* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 341–419; translated by John P. Leavey, Jr. as "Heidegger's Ear: Philopolemology (Geschlecht IV)," in *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*, ed. John Sallis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 163–218.

avoid the impression of an authoritative attempt by Derrida to impute a simple or total meaning to his own texts. In fact, Derrida suggests that the irreducible plurality of textual meaning is perhaps precisely the unthought element in Heidegger, or rather, his “unthoughts.” In a 1987 text titled “Desistance” —the word, retrieved from the work of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, refers to a breakdown or dispersion as a radical form of “resistance” to the logic of any discourse, a refusal to uphold its unequivocal consistency— Derrida mentions the Heideggerian “fundamental axiom according to which the *un-thought* of a thought is always single, always unique,” and goes on to ask:

What if Heidegger’s unthought . . . was not one, but plural? What if his *unthought* was believing in the uniqueness or the unity of the *unthought*? I won’t make a critique out of my uneasiness, because I do not believe that this gesture of gathering is avoidable. It is always productive, and philosophically necessary. But I will continue to wonder whether the very “logic” of desistance, as we will continue to follow it, should not lead to some irreducible dispersion of this “unique central question.”<sup>29</sup>

From this perspective, Heidegger’s main traditionalism would be his methodological conviction that exposing certain inherent limitations of the metaphysical tradition could disclose a *unified* postmetaphysical perspective upon a *single* dimension disregarded by metaphysics. It is in this sense that the movement of transgressing metaphysics allegedly holds Heidegger within the confines of metaphysics. Derrida becomes increasingly sensitive to certain traditional commitments of the Heideggerian notion of the epochal history of metaphysics, in which every phase in the progressive unfolding of being as a certain kind of presence and in the corresponding withholding (Greek: ἐπέχειν) of a

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<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Désistance” [1987], in *Psychè: inventions de l’autre*, 616; translated by Christopher Fynsk as “Introduction: Desistance”, in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 20–21.

certain kind of non-presence is referred to a central “destiny” or “dispatch” (*Geschick, envoi*) of being.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Derrida is suspicious of the very notion of “history” as such, insofar as it implies, in the literal sense of the Greek *ἱστορία*, a teleologically structured narrative in which all elements ultimately come together.<sup>31</sup> Why should the texts of particular thinkers or epochs be read as centralized totalities and subsumed under an even more comprehensive totality, such as the epochal history of being as metaphysics? Why should postmetaphysical thinking continue to be dominated by a unitary central perspective, such as the thinking of *Ereignis*, instead of embracing, with Nietzsche, an endless proliferation of new perspectives with continually shifting centers?

## 2. *Λόγος as Gathering: Heidegger’s “Logocentrism”*

In his earlier writings, Derrida notes a certain ambivalence in Heidegger with regard to logocentrism and phonocentrism. On the one hand, Heidegger’s early formulations of the “ontological difference” between being (*Sein*) and beings (*Seiendes*) suggest vestiges of a Scholastic-Aristotelian view of being as a “transcendental” notion, i.e., one that is implied by all beings, insofar as they are determinate instances of “to be,” but is not itself anything determinate. This impression is seemingly corroborated by Heidegger’s characterization, in *Being and Time*, of being as the “*transcendens* pure and simple.”<sup>32</sup> Heidegger’s idiom is also full of associated auditory and oral metaphors, including references to a “voice of being.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Envoi” [1980], in *Psychè: inventions de l’autre*, 134–35; translated by Peter and Mary Ann Caws as “Envoi,” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 120. On “epochal” history, see Martin Heidegger, “Zeit und Sein” [1962], in *ZSD*, 9; translated by Joan Stambaugh as “Time and Being,” in *On Time and Being*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Violence et métaphysique: essai sur la pensée d’Emmanuel Levinas” [1964], in *L’Écriture et la différence*, 220–21; translated by Alan Bass as “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Writing and Difference*, 186–87; “La structure, le signe et le jeu,” 425; “Structure, Sign and Play,” 367.

<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 38; *Being and Time*, 36.

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger, “Nachwort zu ‘Was ist Metaphysik?’” [1943], in *Wegmarken*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996), 311 [hereafter, *WM*]; translated by William McNeill as “Postscript to ‘What is Metaphysics?’,” in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 237. Derrida says in 1967 (“Implications,” 19–20; “Implications,” 8–9): “[D]oubtless there is a certain Heideggerian phonologism, a

Furthermore, the Heideggerian vocabulary of “originality” and “authenticity/properness” (*Eigentlichkeit*) suggests to Derrida a certain “archo-teleology” in which “derived” and “improper” notions, concepts, or modes of being are supposedly to be referred to “original” or “appropriate” ideals.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, precisely the fact that being is *not a* being implies that the ontological difference cannot be an extrinsic and secondary relation “between” two determinate significations. Precisely in its radical otherness to determinate beings, being can no longer be conceived of as an “origin” in any traditional sense. The “voice of being,” for Heidegger, is not the immediate and living presence of a “meaning” of being but, rather, a mute and concealed, i.e., not directly accessible, “voice.”<sup>35</sup>

In his *Geschlecht* essays of the 1980s, Derrida becomes increasingly sensitive to a recurrent word in Heidegger’s later work: *Versammlung*, “gathering.” Gathering, he notes in his habitual suggestive and aporetic tone, is always privileged by Heidegger over dispersion, diffusion, and apartness.<sup>36</sup> Derrida takes pains not to draw hasty conclusions from this and does not pretend to derive any unequivocal concept of “gathering” from the heterogeneous occurrences of this expression in Heidegger’s text. *Versammlung* is not a magical key to all of Heidegger’s work, not a focal point around which all of his writings could be gathered: “Heidegger’s thinking is *not simply* a thinking of gathering.”<sup>37</sup> What interests Derrida, rather, are the relative positions and functions of *Versammlung* in different Heideggerian contexts with regard to other associated expressions. Themes such as “locality” (*Ort*), “memory” (*Gedächtnis*), the “fourfold” (*Geviert*), and “spirit” (*Geist*) are all characterized by Heidegger in terms of

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noncritical privilege accorded in his works, as in the West in general, to the voice. . . . This privilege, whose consequences are considerable and systematic, can be recognized, for example, in the significant prevalence of so many ‘phonic’ metaphors. . . . Now, the admirable meditation by means of which Heidegger repeats the origin or essence of truth never puts into question the link to *logos* and to *phōnē*” (translation slightly modified).

<sup>34</sup> On the alleged archo-teleology of Hegel’s, Marx’s, and Heidegger’s notions of history, see Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l’état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 125–26; translated by Peggy Kamuf as *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (London: Routledge, 1994), 74.

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 33–39; *Of Grammatology*, 20–24.

<sup>36</sup> “La main de Heidegger,” 439; “*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger’s Hand,” 182. For a thorough discussion of this aspect of Derrida’s reading of Heidegger, see Marrati, *Genesis and Trace*, 87–113.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, 140; *Memoires for Paul de Man*, 146.

gathering and uniting—not simply in the sense of fusing or welding into a seamless homogeneous unity, but rather as the discovery of a shared complicated identity *within* heterogeneity and discord.<sup>38</sup> Derrida thereby initiates a typical deconstructive move. Simply by registering the potential presence of a powerful and traditional hierarchical opposition (unity/plurality) at the heart of Heidegger’s work, he is already implicitly dislodging its self-evident and unequivocal character.

The importance of gathering for Heidegger becomes most manifest in his interpretations of the Greek concept of λόγος, notably of the “archaic” λόγος present in the Heraclitus fragments. Derrida pays special attention to this notion in the fourth and final essay of the *Geschlecht* series, “Heidegger’s Ear: Philopolemology” (1989), which follows the dialectic of friendship (φιλία) and strife (πόλεμος) in Heidegger. The later Heidegger again and again comes back to Heraclitus’ fragment B 50—“Having heard not me but λόγος itself, it is well-advised [σοφόν] to agree [ὁμολογεῖν]: All (is) One [ἐν πάντα]”<sup>39</sup>—concluding that, for Heraclitus, “being [*Sein*] is gathering [*Versammlung*]*—*Λόγος.”<sup>40</sup> Insofar as λόγος, discursiveness, is the gathering articulation of determinate and differentiated beings, it is being itself.

Noting that Heidegger highlights precisely the unifying function of the Heraclitean

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<sup>38</sup> Derrida, *De l’esprit*, 24, 82, 175; *Of Spirit*, 9, 52, 106–7; *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, 97–98, 136, 140; *Memoires for Paul de Man*, 91–92, 141, 146; “L’oreille de Heidegger,” 405; “Heidegger’s Ear,” 205. Cf. Heidegger, *WHD*, 91–95, 157–59; *What Is Called Thinking?*, 138–47; Martin Heidegger, “Die Sprache im Gedicht: eine Erörterung von Georg Trakls Gedicht” [1953], in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 13th ed. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2003), 66–67 [hereafter, *US*]; translated by Peter D. Hertz as “Language in the Poem: A Discussion of Georg Trakl’s Poetic Work,” in *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 185–86; “Zur Seinsfrage” [1955], in *WM*, 411; translated by William McNeill as “On the Question of Being,” in *Pathmarks*, 310–11.

The latter point—that *Versammlung* is, for Heidegger, by no means a homogeneous unity—is emphasized by Will McNeill (“Spirit’s Living Hand,” in *Of Derrida, Heidegger, and Spirit*, ed. David Wood [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993], 113).

<sup>39</sup> Heraclitus, 22 B 50, in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: Griechisch und deutsch*, ed. Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, 6th ed. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1951) [hereafter, *DK*]. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 55: *Heraklit* [1943–44], ed. Manfred S. Frings (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1979), 243–387 [hereafter, *GA* 55]; “Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)” [1951], in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 9th ed. (Stuttgart: Neske, 2000), 199–221 [hereafter, *VA*]; translated by David F. Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi as “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50),” in *Early Greek Thinking* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 59–78.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Was ist das — die Philosophie?* [1955], 11th ed. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2003), 13 [hereafter, *WIP*]; translated by Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback as *What Is Philosophy?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 49 (translation modified).

λόγος, Derrida makes what seems to be an important modification to his notion of logocentrism:

At bottom logocentrism is perhaps not so much the gesture that consists in placing the λόγος at the center as the interpretation of λόγος as *Versammlung*, that is, as the gathering [*rassemblement*] that precisely concentrates what it configures.<sup>41</sup>

Heidegger's interpretation emphasizes the role of λόγος as a differential and referential structure. Λόγος, he tells us in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, is essentially characterized by "strife," πόλεμος, i.e., by the differentiation into binary opposites that generates individual articulate meanings (e.g., "gods" as opposed to "mortals," "free citizens" as opposed to "slaves") and is therefore, in the words of Heraclitus' fragment B 53, the "sovereign" (βασιλεύς) and "father" (πατήρ) of all things.<sup>42</sup> However, in what Derrida regards as the properly "logocentric" move of Heidegger's interpretation, λόγος as πόλεμος is then brought back to a certain kind of "friendship" (φιλία) that gathers opposites into their original unity and belonging together.<sup>43</sup> Rather than designating the centrality of λόγος in the sense of an ideal and central meaning, "logocentrism" now refers to the understanding of λόγος as the gathering of discourse around a center that reconciles difference and antagonism into an inner agreement and unison. Logocentrism in this qualified sense becomes problematic from the point of view of Derrida's particular concerns in the 1989 essay, namely, the "politics of friendship" and a "democracy to come"—notions that would involve, he tells us, a kind of equality compatible with, and even inseparable from, an absolute singularity.<sup>44</sup>

However, it seems that Derrida's problem with this form of logocentrism arises, in part, from his presupposition that the unifying gathering peculiar to λόγος excludes singularity and uniqueness. "The unique—that which is not repeated—has no unity since it is not repeated.

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<sup>41</sup> Derrida, "L'oreille de Heidegger," 378; "Heidegger's Ear," 187 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>42</sup> Heraclitus, DK 22 B 53. Cf. Heidegger, *EM*, 47; *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 65.

<sup>43</sup> Heidegger, *WIP*, 13; *What is Philosophy?*, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Derrida, "L'oreille de Heidegger," 372; "Heidegger's Ear," 183.

Only that which can be repeated in its identity can have unity.”<sup>45</sup> Singularity, says Derrida, “does not collect itself, it ‘consists’ in not collecting itself.”<sup>46</sup> But what is this “consisting” that does not collect itself? I will try to question this particular notion, showing that the gathered unity of λόγος can, in fact, be construed precisely as a *singular* unity, even though this means taking a decisive step beyond Greek thought.

### 3. The Singular Unity of the Postmetaphysical Λόγος

Heidegger initially translates λόγος either as *Rede*<sup>47</sup>, which does not mean simply “speech” but rather “discourse” or “articulation” and is cognate with the English verb “to read,” and later as *Lese*, which as a noun means “gathering” or “picking the harvest,” but also relates to the verb *lesen*, “to read,” and to *Lege*, “lay” or “placement.”<sup>48</sup> Like the Latin *lego/legere*, “to read,” *lesen* and *legen* are cognates of the Greek λέγειν, the most concrete meaning of which is “(selective) gathering,” “picking out,” or “collecting.”<sup>49</sup> What is the connection between λόγος, reading, and gathering? According to Thomas Sheehan, “‘[R]eading’ . . . translates what the early Heidegger (but not Derrida) meant by *logos*.”<sup>50</sup> In the activity of reading, a multiplicity of written symbols, which in alphabetic systems have no intrinsic meaning but simply represent

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<sup>45</sup> Jacques Derrida, “La dissémination” [1969], in *La dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 405; translated by Barbara Johnson as “Dissemination,” in *Dissemination* (London: Continuum, 2004), 399.

<sup>46</sup> Jacques Derrida, “‘Une “folie” doit veiller sur la pensée’ ” [1991], in *Points de suspension: entretiens*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Paris: Galilée, 1992), 365; translated by Peggy Kamuf as “‘A “Madness” Must Watch Over Thinking,’ ” in *Points...: Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 354. Cf. Timothy Clark, *The Poetics of Singularity: The Counter-Culturalist Turn in Heidegger, Derrida, Blanchot and the Later Gadamer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 132.

<sup>47</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 32–34, 160–66; *Being and Time*, 30–32, 155–61.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 33: *Aristoteles, Metaphysik Θ 1–3: Von Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft* [1931], ed. Heinrich Hüni (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1981), 117–48; translated by Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek as *Aristotle’s Metaphysics Θ 1–3: On the Essence and Actuality of Force* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 99–126; *GA* 55, 266–70; “Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50),” in *VA*, 199–221; “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50),” 59–78.

<sup>49</sup> See Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1970), 94–96; Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1999), 625–26.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Sheehan, “Derrida and Heidegger,” in *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and Don Ihde (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), 213. On the interpretation of λόγος as “reading,” see also Wilhelm S. Wurzer, “Heidegger’s Turn to *Germanien*—A Sigetic Venture,” in *Heidegger toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*, ed. James Risser (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 196.

individual phonemes, are selectively collected—not by any active effort but, after one has learned to read, more or less automatically—into more and more comprehensive meaningful units: words, phrases, and sentences. As the formation of meaning through the selective combination of units into unified and articulated wholes, reading *is* gathering.

Heidegger’s early lecture courses devote much attention to Aristotle’s account of the complex structure of λόγος, defined in *De Interpretatione* as a meaningful linguistic utterance composed of inherently meaningful parts. What particularly interests Heidegger is Aristotle’s analysis of the predicative structure, captured with the formula “something as/of something” (τὶ κατὰ τινός), of the declarative assertion (λόγος ἀποφαντικός), i.e., the particular form of discourse capable of being true or false.<sup>51</sup> Heidegger derives the declarative “as”-structure, which he takes to be characteristic of a theoretical statement primarily oriented to presence-at-hand or accessibility (*Vorhandenheit*), from the more primordial, temporally multidimensional “in-order-to”-structure of readiness-to-hand or availability (*Zuhandenheit*). Λόγος as a complex propositional unity is thereby referred back to the complex temporal unity of a practical situation.<sup>52</sup> Heidegger also stresses the fact that Aristotle characterizes discursiveness in terms of a collecting that preserves apartness and articulation: the “something-as-something” structure of λόγος *both* connects (σύνθεσις) its elements *and* holds them apart (διαίρεσις).<sup>53</sup> As

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<sup>51</sup> Aristotle, *De Int.*, 5.17a8–22.

<sup>52</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 20: *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* [1925], ed. Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1979), 210–92; translated by Theodore Kisiel as *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 156–214; *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 21: *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit* [1925–26], ed. Walter Biemel (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), 127–61 [hereafter, *GA* 21]; translated by Thomas Sheehan as *Logic: The Question of Truth* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 107–35; *SZ*, 66–72, 153–60; *Being and Time*, 66–72, 149–55; *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 29/30: *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt–Endlichkeit–Einsamkeit* [1929–30], ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983), 416–532 [hereafter, *GA* 29/30]; translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker as *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 287–366.

<sup>53</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), III.5.430b1–4. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 19: *Platon: Sophistes* [1924–25], ed. Ingeborg Schüssler (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1992), 184–86, 614–15; translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer as *Plato’s Sophist* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 126–28, 425–26; *GA* 21, 135–61; *Logic: The Question of Truth*, 114–35; *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 27: *Einleitung in die Philosophie* [1928–29], ed. Otto Saame and Ina Saame-Speidel (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996), 46–47; *GA* 29/30, 454–55; *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 313–14; *GA* 55, 383–84. See also Sheehan, “Derrida and Heidegger,” 215.

such a differentiated unity, the Aristotelian λόγος points to the wide and rudimentary sense of the word that Heidegger discovers in the Heraclitus fragments:

The Λόγος of which Heraclitus speaks is, as selection [*Lese*] and collection [*Sammlung*], as the One that unifies all, . . . the original gathering [*Versammlung*] that preserves [*verwahrt*] beings as the beings that they are. This Λόγος is being [*Sein*] itself, in which all beings abide [*west*].<sup>54</sup>

The Heraclitean λόγος, Heidegger maintains, is not primarily a human faculty, but rather simply the formation of unified meaning from differentiated elements through a selective and collecting gathering. However, the other central meaning of λόγος and λέγειν, “saying, speaking out, telling,” is neither secondary nor derivative. On the contrary, λόγος is in itself a *discursive* and *linguistic* gathering; even more, it is the very essence of discursiveness and language. In an important and revealing passage, Heidegger tells us that λόγος is also the basic *narrative* structure of discursiveness, i.e., the formation of consistent and “logical” narrative meaning in the form of a “story” or “tale” (*Sage*), which precisely presupposes a selective placing-together or “collocation” (*Lege*) of narrative elements.

Ὁ Λόγος, τὸ Λέγειν, is selective collocation [*lesende Lege*]. But at the same time λέγειν always means for the Greeks to lay before [*vorlegen*], to exhibit [*darlegen*], to narrate [*erzählen*], to tell [*sagen*]. Ὁ Λόγος then would be the Greek name for speaking as telling, for language [*Sprache*]. Not only this. Ὁ Λόγος, thought as selective collocation, would be the essence of the tale [*Sage*] as thought by the Greeks. Language would be the tale. Language would be the gathering letting-lie-before [*versammelnde Vor-liegen-lassen*] of what is present [*Anwesenden*] in its presencing [*Anwesen*]. In fact, the Greeks *dwelt* in this

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<sup>54</sup> Heidegger, *GA* 55, 278.

essence of language. But they never *thought* this essence—Heraclitus included.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, the very beginning of Western “logic” in Heraclitus, i.e., the emergence of the predominant role of discursive rationality as the internally coherent and consistent unity of articulate thought and experience, is inherently oriented by the narrative function of human language. However, the Greek thinkers, Heraclitus included, never explicitly regarded λόγος as language in the modern sense, i.e., as historically and culturally situated, constantly evolving, and context-sensitive discourse. On the contrary, language was conceptualized “logocentrically” as a derivative material and vocal *representation* of λόγος, as its culturally specific *expression*.

[L]anguage came to be represented . . . as vocalization, φωνή, as sound and voice, hence phonetically. . . . Language is φωνή σημαντική, a vocalization which signifies something. This suggests that language attains at the outset that preponderant character which we designate with the name “expression” [*Ausdruck*].<sup>56</sup>

Dislodging this hierarchy between discursiveness and language—which Heidegger himself to a certain extent upholds in *Being and Time* in establishing discourse (*Rede*) as the foundation of language (*Sprache*) and the latter, in turn, as the “utteredness” (*Hinausgesprochenheit*) of discourse<sup>57</sup>—and understanding λόγος as *inherently* linguistic would therefore bring about a profound transformation with regard to the “logocentric” conception of the ideal and universal essence of discursiveness. The Heraclitean λόγος is absolutely universal. However, there is no universal language; there are only particular languages that constitute particular historical communities and the particular ways in which they experience meaningfulness.

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<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, “Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50),” in *VA*, 220; “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50),” 77 (translation modified).

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, “Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50),” in *VA*, 220–21; “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50),” 77.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *SZ*, 160–66; *Being and Time*, 155–61.

“The” language is “our” language; “our language” not only as native language, but also as the language of our history. . . . Our history—not as the course of our destinies and accomplishments, known from historical accounts, but we ourselves in the instant [*Augenblick*] of our relationship to be-ing [*Seyn*].<sup>58</sup>

When discursive meaningfulness is situated within such a linguistic framework, the absolute unity of λόγος turns into the more modest, temporally situated and contextual unity of a particular historical instant. This transformation is an integral part of what the later Heidegger refers to as the postmetaphysical “other beginning” of thinking:

That Greek interpretation of ὄν ἢ ὅν [sc., being *qua* being] as ἓν [one], that heretofore unclear priority which oneness and unity have everywhere in thinking of being . . . . Seen more deeply, that unity is merely the foreground—seen from the vantage point of collecting re-presentation [*sammelnden Vor-stellen*] (λέγειν)—of presencing [*Anwesung*] as such . . . . Presence can be grasped as collection [*Sammlung*] and thus be conceived of as unity—and with the priority of λόγος *must* be so grasped. But unity itself is not of its own accord an originary and essential determination of the being of beings. . . . In terms of the other beginning, that unshaken and never questioned determination of being (unity) can and must nevertheless become questionable; and then unity points back to “time.” . . . But then it also becomes clear that with the priority of presence (the present) wherein unity is grounded, something has been decided, *that in this most self-evident priority, the strangest decision* [*Entscheidung*] *lies concealed*, that this decisive character indeed belongs to the abidance [*Wesung*] of be-ing [*Seyns*] and hints at the uniqueness [*Einzigkeit*], in each instance, and the most originary historicity of be-ing itself.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 65: *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* [1936–38], ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989), 501 [hereafter, GA 65]; translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly as *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 353 (translation modified).

<sup>59</sup> GA 65, 459–60; *Contributions to Philosophy*, 323–24 (translation modified).

For Heidegger, the unity of the Heraclitean λόγος as gathering is based on the ultimate primacy of the pure, absolute, and undifferentiated presence as such that unifies all particular beings. As Heidegger understands it, the Greek “first beginning” of the Western metaphysical mode of thought essentially consisted in the absolutization of pure presence, of the sheer fact of the intelligible accessibility of meaningful reality to (human) awareness, epitomized by Parmenides’ fragment B 3: “For thinking [νοεῖν] and being [εἶναι] are one and the same.”<sup>60</sup> The result of this absolutization is the “purification” of presence of any references beyond itself, to any other-than-presence.<sup>61</sup> However, such purification entails an implicit “de-cision” in the literal sense of a “cutting-off” of presence from the temporal background context in terms of which the present is encountered in concrete singular situations—in other words, an abstraction from the historical uniqueness (*Einzigkeit*) of meaningfulness. While the metaphysical tradition basically looked for the unity of being in the realm of radical transcendental universality, Heideggerian postmetaphysics would look for this unity precisely in the internal unity of every instance of meaningful presence, characterized by radical heterogeneity and irreducible singularity. The “essence” of things is no longer a universal identity shared by particular instances, but rather the singular situatedness of things in a context.

Within the domain of the leading question [sc. the Aristotelian metaphysical question concerning being *qua* being], . . . the essentiality of essence [*Wesens*] lies in its greatest possible generality. . . . When, by contrast, be-ing [*Seyn*] is conceived of as taking-place [*Ereignis*], essentiality is determined from the originality and uniqueness [*Einzigkeit*] of

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<sup>60</sup> Parmenides, DK 28 B 3. Cf. Heidegger, *EM*, 104–06; *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 145–48; *WHD*, 146–49; *What Is Called Thinking?*, 240–43; *ID*, 13–15, 27; *Identity and Difference*, 27–30, 38–39.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, *GA* 65, 188–201; *Contributions to Philosophy*, 132–41; Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 45: *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte “Probleme” der “Logik”* [1937–38], ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1984), 108–90 [hereafter, *GA* 45]; translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer as *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic”* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 95–164; “Der Spruch des Anaximander,” in *HW*, 336–72; “Anaximander’s Saying,” 253–80.

be-ing itself. Essence is not what is general but rather precisely the abidance [*Wesung*] of uniqueness . . . in each instance.<sup>62</sup>

#### 4. *Contextual Centers: Narrativity after Logocentrism*

Derrida's main reservation concerning the notion of gathering as the basic function of discourse—namely, his suspicion that it precludes singularity and heterogeneity—thus begins to seem unwarranted. Heidegger's rethinking of λόγος as *Sage*, "saying" or "tale," as the narrative and textual, collecting, collocating, or "reading" function of language, regards discourse no longer as a gathering in the sense that it would refer all meaning back to an absolute, pure, or ideal presence but, rather, as a "gathering into *Ereignis*,"<sup>63</sup> i.e., into the situational happening of meaningfulness in its singularity in which it always refers to a specific context. This linguistic transformation of λόγος is part of the process that Heidegger calls the transition (*Übergang*) to the other beginning, to the postmetaphysical perspective in which the differential relationship between presence and its context becomes constitutive of presence. The focal point of presence becomes irreducibly embedded in a context of non-presence and thereby relativized.<sup>64</sup> As Sheehan puts it, using one of Derrida's favorite expressions, meaningful presence becomes an irreducible *trace*—a trace of *nothing*, as it were, in the sense of the focus in a nexus of references to meaning-dimensions that always exceed what is presently "there" and can never themselves be made immediately present.

Reading is indeed the referral of *ta onta* [sc. beings] beyond themselves, but it is always a referral to no-presence; hence, always a referral of entities as traces-of-no-presence. . . . [I]n reducing the entity to a trace, reading refers that trace to the differentiating process

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<sup>62</sup> GA 65, 66; *Contributions to Philosophy*, 46 (translation modified).

<sup>63</sup> Heidegger, "Die Sprache" [1950], in *US*, 12; translated by Albert Hofstadter as "Language," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), 189.

<sup>64</sup> On the transition from the first beginning to the other, see Heidegger, GA 65, 171–88; *Contributions to Philosophy*, 120–32; GA 45, 124–27; *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 108–11.

itself, to the . . . movement that is *logos*, the referring that refers to no-presence.<sup>65</sup>

This irreducible referentiality of discursive meaning is what Derrida himself articulates in the 1980 essay “Envoi”: “Everything begins by referring back [*par le renvoi*], that is to say, does not begin. . . . I do not know if this can be said with or without Heidegger, and it does not matter.”<sup>66</sup>

Derrida hesitates (and professes indifference) as to whether the radical kind of referentiality he has in mind remains within or goes beyond Heidegger’s scope. We should here take another look at Heidegger’s notion of ontological difference, especially at the way in which it is developed in *Identity and Difference* (1957), a text that Heidegger himself considered one of the most lucid articulations of his main topics.<sup>67</sup>

For us, . . . the matter [*Sache*] of thinking is difference [*Differenz*] as difference. . . . what does it say, this being [*Sein*] that is mentioned so often? . . . What do you make of difference if being as well as beings [*Seiendes*] appear *from difference*, each in its own way? . . . Insofar as being abides as the being of beings, as difference, as discharge [*Austrag*], being grounds beings and beings, as what *is* most of all, establish being.<sup>68</sup>

The word “being” seems to be used here in two distinct but overlapping senses:

- (1) being as appearing *from* (the ontological) difference; and

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<sup>65</sup> Sheehan, “Derrida and Heidegger,” 214, 215. Cf. Thomas Sheehan, “Getting to the Topic: The New Edition of *Wegmarken*,” in *Radical Phenomenology: Essays in Honor of Martin Heidegger*, ed. John Sallis (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978), 299–316; “Heidegger’s Topic: Excess, Recess, Access,” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 41 (1979): 615–35; “Heidegger’s Philosophy of Mind,” in *Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey*, vol. 4: *Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Guttorm Fløistad (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1983), 287–318; “Time and Being, 1925–7,” in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, vol. 1: *Philosophy*, ed. Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1992), 29–67; “How (Not) to Read Heidegger,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (1995): 275–94; “A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research,” 183–202.

<sup>66</sup> Derrida, “Envoi,” 141–42; “Envoi,” 127–28.

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger, “Protokoll zu einem Seminar über den Vortrag ‘Zeit und Sein,’” in *ZSD*, 39; “Summary of a Seminar on the Lecture ‘Time and Being,’” 36.

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, “Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik,” in *ID*, 37, 55, 61–62; “The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics,” 47, 63–64, 69 (translation modified).

(2) being *as* this difference *itself*.

In the more narrow sense (1), being is the framework or context of a being but not a being in its own right, in other words, the frame of reference in which any particular presence is implicated but which is itself present only implicitly, never immediately as such. In this sense, both beings and being—i.e., the foreground of presence and its respective background context—appear “from” their reciprocal differentiation. In the more comprehensive formulation (2), however, being *is* this very differentiation, not as a relation between two pre-given relata but as a reciprocal “discharge” (*Austrag*)—identified by Sheehan as another name for λόγος<sup>69</sup>—in which a determinate, context-specific being is “carried out” by its background context and thereby “discharged” or “delivered” into presence.<sup>70</sup> *Austrag*, in this reading, *is* the contextual, differential, and referential happening of presence, the contextualization in which the focal point of presence is differentiated from, and at the same time inextricably intertwined with, a background that is present only in the references and traces that constitute the focus. *Austrag* is what Derrida designates as *différance*—a word that does not convey a difference “between” any pre-given identities but rather stands for a process of indefinite contextualization, referral, and deferral in which relative meaningful identities are constituted through a chain of references to further references that never lead to any ultimate reference point.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Sheehan, “Derrida and Heidegger,” 215.

<sup>70</sup> Heidegger, “Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik,” in *ID*, 56–65; “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” 65–72. This is corroborated by Heidegger’s later marginal note to “On the Essence of Ground” (1929) in which he indicates the necessity of “overcoming the ‘distinction’ [*Unterschied*; sc. the distinction between being and beings] from out of the essence of the truth of be-ing [*Seyns*], or of first thinking the ‘distinction’ as be-ing itself” (“Vom Wesen des Grundes” [1929], in *WM*, 134 n[c]; translated by William McNeill as “On the Essence of Ground,” in *Pathmarks*, 105 n[c]; translation modified.) On the twofold account of being *as* the ontological difference *as well as an aspect* of the difference, cf. Max Müller, *Existenzphilosophie im geistigen Leben der Gegenwart*, 3rd ed. (Heidelberg: Kerle, 1964), 43; John Sallis, *Echoes: After Heidegger* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 150–51; Julien Pieron, “Heidegger, du tournant à l’*Ereignis*,” *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 105 (2007): 385–97.

<sup>71</sup> Derrida, “La *différance*” [1968], in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 13; translated by Alan Bass as “*Différance*,” in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 13: “It is because of *différance* [*différance*] that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself” (translation modified). However, Derrida also insists (“*Implications*,” 19; “*Implications*,” 8) that, as opposed to *différance*, the Heideggerian ontological difference is “in a strange way . . . in the grasp of metaphysics. Perhaps then, . . . we would have to become open to a *différance* that is no longer determined, in the language of the West, as

As *différance*, as indefinite contextualization, being/*Austrag*/λόγος also unifies beings—not as some absolute reference point or “transcendental signified,” but rather in the way in which a *text* as a system of references interweaves its individual elements into an articulated texture. As *Rede, Lese, and lesende Lege*, Heidegger’s linguistic, post- or trans-Greek λόγος stands for the *readability, textuality, and contextuality* of meaningfulness—for the gathering of meaningfulness around a central focus which, however, is meaningful only *as* the focal point of a specific context.<sup>72</sup> To read and to interpret is to gather a text around *a* focal point, *some* center or another; the very notion of “context” presupposes a center. Nonetheless, no reading can even in principle be definitive and no interpretation exhaustive. Texts always remain open to shifts of focus, reinterpretations, and recenterings.

Derrida’s famous and much-abused 1967 dictum, *Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*, “There is no outside-the-text,”<sup>73</sup> which he much later translated to say, “There is no outside-context,”<sup>74</sup> would thus be quite in concordance with the Heideggerian “logocentric” notion of the contextual gathering of meaning. As Jonathan Culler and David Wood put it, two central principles of Derridean deconstruction are the contextuality of meaning and the indeterminacy of every context.<sup>75</sup> All meaning is inscribed in a configuration of background dimensions which, because of its heterogeneity and singularity, cannot be specified and identified. Or, in the formulation of Rodolphe Gasché, “inscription [i.e., becoming-textual, insertion into a text] . . . contextualizes that which claims uniqueness and oneness. Deconstruction reinscribes the

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the difference between being [*l’être*] and beings [*l’étant*]. . . . *Différance* . . . therefore would name provisionally this unfolding of difference, in particular, but not only, or first of all, of the ontico-ontological difference” (translation modified). For an excellent discussion that locates *différance* at the heart of Heidegger’s enterprise, see Tilman Küchler, *Postmodern Gaming: Heidegger, Duchamp, Derrida* (New York: Lang, 1994), 23–53, 127–60.

<sup>72</sup> On the aptness of the word *focus* (Latin for “hearth”) for designating, in a Heideggerian framework, this kind of context-sensitive center, see Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 196–99.

<sup>73</sup> Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 227; *Of Grammatology*, 158. Spivak offers two alternative translations: “There is nothing outside of the text” and “There is no outside-text,” of which the latter is more literal.

<sup>74</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* [1988] (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 251; translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman as *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 136. In the original French: *il n’y a pas de hors contexte*. Weber and Mehlman translate: “There is nothing outside context.”

<sup>75</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 128; Wood, *Philosophy at the Limit*, 96.

origin into the context or text of its infrastructural possibilities.”<sup>76</sup> There is no absolute origin, no reference point of meaningfulness that would rest beyond the endless meaning-generating play of references. There are only different possible focal points and context-specific centers. It is true that in his early texts, Derrida speaks of a post-logocentric “decentering” as a *disappearance* or *loss* of center.<sup>77</sup> What is at stake, however, is not a loss of the notion of center as such, but rather its transformation, which entails abandoning the traditional aspiration to an *absolute* and *permanent* center:

[I]t was necessary to begin thinking . . . that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play.<sup>78</sup>

Derrida makes this especially clear in the 1966 discussion at Johns Hopkins related to the original presentation of “Structure, Sign and Play,” reacting to Jean Hyppolite’s assertion that one cannot think of a structure without a center, whether in the sense of general rules that allow us to understand the interplay of the elements of the structure or in the sense of certain elements which enjoy a particular privilege within the structure:<sup>79</sup>

Structure should be centered. But this center can be either thought, as it was classically, like a creator or being or a fixed and natural place; or also as a deficiency, let’s say; or something which makes possible “free play” . . . and which receives—and this is what we call history—a series of determinations, of signifiers, which have no signifieds. . . .

I didn’t say that there was no center, that we could get along without the center. I

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<sup>76</sup> Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 159–60.

<sup>77</sup> Derrida, “La structure, le signe et le jeu,” 411; “Structure, Sign and Play,” 280.

<sup>78</sup> Derrida, “La structure, le signe et le jeu,” 411; “Structure, Sign and Play,” 280.

<sup>79</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences: Discussion” [1966], in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 266.

believe that the center is a function, not a being—a reality, but a function. And this function is absolutely indispensable.<sup>80</sup>

The center of discursively articulated meaningfulness is not a fixed and substantial point of reference but rather a function of discursiveness.<sup>81</sup> Discursive thought and experience function by gathering their different elements around a focal point. This is also what we understand by the narrative function of discourse: “relating,” in the sense of narrating, literally means establishing a link between diverse past events and the present of narration, gathering them around the present. Moreover, just as Derrida emphasizes the “philosophical necessity” of the gesture of gathering, he is now emphasizing the “indispensability” of the narrative function. This means, perhaps, that there always already are narratives. The discursive nature of meaningfulness entails that meaning is always “told” meaning, i.e., integrated into a framework with a “point” or center that binds together the multiple references to a context. David Wood suggests: “[P]erhaps what we think of as the privilege of the same, of unity, of presence, is not the privilege of some autonomous value, but the privilege of a certain minimal framing.”<sup>82</sup>

The effect of deconstruction is therefore not the simple abolition of narrativity or narrative structures. Deconstruction is, rather, the process through which narratives are constantly undone and replaced by others—the movement, intrinsic to discursiveness itself,

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<sup>80</sup> Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences: Discussion,” 268, 271.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Clark, *The Poetics of Singularity*, 132: “For Heidegger . . . , there is a *Versammlung*, i.e., a force of unifying gathering whose rhythm pervades and determines the rest. For Derrida, however, there can clearly be no ‘centre’ in the sense of a uniquely decisive word or phrase . . . , but only verbal thickenings of a ‘secret’ syntax. . . . No interpretation can gather the secret or singularity of text under some summary heading without leaving some remainder.” However, I try to show that the Heideggerian “gathering” is just such a discursive “thickening,” an interpretive gathering that always leaves a remainder. See also Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 152: “The infrastructure is what knots together all the threads of correspondence among certain heterogeneous *points of presence* within a discourse or text. . . . As the medium of differentiation in general, it precedes undifferentiated unity and the subsequent bipolar division. It is a unity of combat.”

<sup>82</sup> David Wood, *Thinking after Heidegger* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 105. Wood is replying here to a suggestion by Christopher Fynsk, made in the context of a discussion in which Derrida himself participated, that there is a “kind of structural tendency in Heidegger towards reconstruction of the *same*. It is still one thing, in itself, still a certain oneness, or a certain privileged unity which is reaffirmed from beginning to end.” (David Wood, “Heidegger after Derrida,” *Research in Phenomenology* 17 [1987]: 115.)

that makes an ultimate or final master narrative impossible, since every narrative framework can, in principle, be re-narrated from a new vantage point. This readiness for new narratives and for retelling, Derrida notes, is precisely what coming to terms with the irreducible referentiality of meaning and meaningful presence demands of us.

As soon as there are references [*renvois*], and they are always already there, something like representation no longer waits and one must perhaps make do with that so as to tell oneself this story [*histoire*] otherwise, from references to references of references, in a destiny that is never guaranteed to gather itself, identify itself, or determine itself. . . . This is the only chance—but it is only a chance—for there to be history, meaning, presence, truth, language, theme, thesis, and colloquium.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Derrida, "Envoi," 142; "Envoi," 128 (translation modified).