

## ***On neither side of the after*** (Self)Deconstruction of the endistic desire

“[T]hose who look into the possibility of philosophy’s [...] dead,  
[...] always act in remembrance of philosophy,  
as part of the correspondence of the question with itself.”<sup>1</sup>

Does thought and writing about the end also imply an end of thought and writing?

Can there, in light of the end, still be question of philosophical thought, or does one then arrive at the place or ground where philosophy ends? – A *post*-philosophical place, where thought encounters its end and where mere *experience* remains? This would then be the point at which thought would meet its limit and precisely therefore – through its contact with a certain limit that supersedes all language and trans-lation – could no longer be thought, but instead an experience of a final judgment, a world shock, a cataclysm, a sublimity. Through the limit all thought would become mute and be assassinated; with the in-conceptualizability inherent to this limit, eventually final thought would be laid to rest.

Or is philosophy as such always a to-die? Is conceptualization not equally a murder? Is it not a denial, or at least a neutralization of ‘the other’ – which is to say, of that which does not fit into the concept, within the image of reality – by the act of delimiting and enclosing, safely framing and painstakingly protecting a certain conviction that one lends preference to? Does philosophy thereby perhaps always function in light of a condemned element? Philosophy as something that gives (itself) death? (A death for which philosophy itself – the tragic and irony are never far away – has to provide meaning.)

The problem of conceptualization and framing is closely related to the problem of the end and ‘post’-thought. The limit of the end that reduces thought to experience, on the one hand, and the conceptualizing that is inherent to metaphysical thought on the other hand, are apparently each other’s opposites. Still they both arrive at the same end result: a standstill. Which also inheres a certain sense of tragedy: thought is impossible – even minimally – without conceptualization. Rendering comprehensible is an appropriation, after all.

In a certain sense philosophy has always been thought ‘at the limit’ – the *marginal*, the para-phrase, the para-citation. In my view it is only alive when it touches that limit. The tactility between philosophy and the limit in fact opens up the dynamic that typifies thought. It is therefore not so much the ‘limit of thought’ but rather the belief in the ‘(place of) the limit of the end’ that should be studied.

### ***The terror of endism***

The assault on thought that takes place in the conveyance – *within* thought – of an endistic desire can allow for thought to be cut off, removed, suffocated, rendered redundant.

Is it then not nonsensical to even want to embark on this text? A text that in the first place wishes to relate to the problem in a philosophical manner? A philosophical text that directs itself to – probably – *unphilosophical* problems and questions? But maybe I am myself influenced by the endistic illusion of a finishing line that would have long been surpassed by thought. Thinking about a post-philosophical place is after all as great a paradox as what I wish

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Violence and metaphysics. An essay on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas*, in *Writing and difference*, translation by Alan Bass, Routledge, 1978, chapter 4, p. 80

to explore here. It is extremely simple to nestle oneself in the typical-metaphysical language which is built up by metaphors that act as grounds for knowledge.

This language should – starting with the roots themselves of what here counts as ‘truth’ – be fought by deconstructing this endistic desire.

If one lends credence to endism, then it cannot be otherwise than that one is continually confronted with its greatest paradox: on the one hand it wishes nothing more than an end and to proclaim the death of something. On the other hand, endism pushes death out of a strong (modernist) belief in progress and it is clear that death would cause a crisis should it genuinely appear. The end then no longer has a ‘goal’. It happens to be so that death (just like ‘the other’) is being scrupulously repressed.

Endism does indeed try to *transcend* this – better still: it reaches out to something transcendental, or, in the worst case, sees itself as the transcendental. Also, with Francis Fukuyama’s idea of the end of history (see his *The end of history and the last man*) this is striking. Market fundamentalism as the new God is what counts there: the indisputable redeemer in which everything that is other eventually has to be fit in – the absolute end of the other. The beginning of identification.

*The beginning of identification is the genealogy of the end.*

To speak of an ‘end’ however remains an absurdity - the text which addresses this subject, can in turn be nothing other than an absurdity (and deconstructing not only the theme, but also itself). Sense and non-sense have however always been interchangeable – they presuppose one another. (In the sense that humanity presupposes terror.)

When one attempts to speak of the end or of death, then it sooner seems to indicate an affirmation of life, of being alive. And this at a very strong level: death is after all the only place of a person’s irreplaceability. Just as the French thinker Jacques Derrida writes in his *Donner la mort (The gift of death)*: “My irreplaceability is [...] given [...] by death.”<sup>2</sup>

I wish to make it clear that it is impossible to speak of something that leaves the ‘foregoing’ completely behind, without preserving traces or elements of that foregoing. Without overlap, mutual influence, iterability or traces.

### *Endism and metaphysics*

Let us begin with the dissection of the notion ‘endism’.

Thinking of the end (and of endism in particular) is typified by metaphysical, dialectic and Christian thought. It is guilty of a metaphysical (oppositional) thought in that sense that it presupposes being able to end something that is not (or no longer) accepted. In this it shows a belief in the unambiguous presence of something that is terminated in order to be followed by something else that is equally protected from any ambiguity because it will be equally unambiguously present. This hegemony of presence ignores absence, delay, (internal) differentiation and shifts, the traces and the *rhizomatic*, which in fact typify every event and also each meaning.

This thinking in oppositional terms is given a Christian interpretation through the belief that an end is being put to Evil and a beginning to the Good. The proclamation of an end is also accompanied by a certain kind of violence. A dialectical impact is attributed to this violence – a negation (*antithesis*) that makes way for a ‘better world’ (*synthesis*). (The difference with Hegelian dialectics is that here it also usually *ends* with the ‘synthesis’.) Further, this thought

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The gift of death*, translation by David Wills, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 41

is typified by its dualistic relationship to the Grand Narratives: on the one hand 'post'-thought does not permit these *grands récits*, but on the other hand it nevertheless returns to a belief in these narratives, because it wishes itself to realize a major ideal image (proclaiming the end has a modernist twitch). Even more typifying for the belief in – and *desire* for – endism, is its relationship to the sacred, the holy.

Endism operates from (within) this elevated apocalyptic train of thought, but it cannot avoid recognizing that the sacred itself indicates a murder itself. On the one hand it all merges with and in that which is typified by an urge for unity, whereby the pluralist and differentiated that are continually active within reality, are ignored. This unity eventually causes a standstill in thought. On the other hand, the sacred causes the loss of responsibility of self for every individual as such. Equally, the sacred will be striving for purity, whereby the other will, here too, be marginalized and rejected. Thought about the Apocalypse is only possible via a neutralizing, metaphysical belief in unity – the unity of the *anthropos* (read: *anthropost*). In this way endism continually ignores the ambiguity, not only operative in man, but in the whole of existence.

*To make a conception of death is to interpret it, shape it, transfigure it,  
to murder it in its otherness – the murder of death.*

This 'terror of sameness' casts its suffocating shadow on the plurality and ambiguity that typify all of being. It makes the illusion self-evident. The illusion, namely, that something can be completely exhausted and subsequently followed up by the (completely) other, that which comes next. The time for it is *past*. It is a finished period. It ushers in a 'post', which closes off a 'pre', both closing it and excluding it. By using clear delimitations and frameworks, of subcategories of 'before' and 'after', between the vanquished and that which follows it, it shows a belief in a linear evolution and progression – a teleological conception of history.

Bringing something forward, however, indicates that a part remains hidden (or, better: is *being* concealed). Just as in Heidegger's *alétheia* (where revelation entails concealment and vice versa), this is one movement. (Derrida calls this a *jeu d'absence et de présence*.) A complete, unambiguous presence is *a priori* impossible. Post-thought however still typifies itself strongly through a modernist position that does indeed lend credence to an unequivocal presence.

A teleological and eschatological image of history does not do justice to the great complexity of the historical event. It ignores its – to use Derrida's term again - *iterable* nature.

One should actually distrust every attempt to categorize into periods. It leads to a standstill, a neutralization of a certain dynamic and eventually to death – of being trapped lifelessly in archives and history books, which, by means of an as accurate as possible chronology, suffocate the events in pedagogical frameworks.

*"This end of History is essentially a Christian eschatology"  
(Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.60, further as SM).*

The end of history, as Fukuyama described, seems just as incapable of escaping from metaphysical (or at least Christian-teleological) thought.

Speaking of 'the end' of history brings about a coincidence of eschatology and teleology – a *teleological eschatology*. One pronounces the end with as *aim* to explode, and suppress, the 'wrong' ideologies (or, better, still: the idea of an ideology as such). This belief in a certain end however clearly shows that one is still thinking from the viewpoint of metaphysical opposition thought and that the desired victory of the one over the other – which however brings about

a hierarchy because the other can never be completely destroyed, whereby opposition thought is reaffirmed – is just as much marked by an ideological standpoint.

A *teleological eschatology* – a goal-oriented end, an end that is typified by a strong belief in the future is probably the greatest paradox that can overcome thought. The end has an aim, apocalyptic in tone. One thus notices that in ‘post’-thought there is still contained a fervently modernist attitude.

Just as the prefix ‘post’ in popular terms such as ‘postmodernism’ and ‘post-philosophy’ is problematic – it after all shows the belief in a certain closure – so too has speaking of the ‘end’ always been typified by mere *preference*. It beats itself a way through the choices, and, through a required dose of violence, marginalizes the other. Moreover, it blindly venerates an own ideological centre, from which a personal utopia by means of terror imposes its architecture on the fundamentals of a rejected civilization.

The end of history can merely limit itself to an end of a certain *concept* of history (SM, 15). The proclamation of an end however immediately reveals the belief in a linear movement of time. In this way one ignores the shift, overlap, and ambiguity that are constantly inherent to an event. (Cf. Heidegger’s *Ereignis*, which has a double meaning: on the one hand it means the appropriation (of the event), but on the other hand it also means dis-owning (by the event). “[T]he event is first of all *that* I do not comprehend.”<sup>2</sup>)

The idea of the end of history is almost evangelical. As a *telos* of advancement, this orientation has the shape of an ideal *finality*. “Everything that appears to contradict it would belong to historical empiricity, however [...] catastrophical and global [...] it might be” (SM, 57).

### *The end reviewed*

The idea of endism, the *phenomenon* ‘endism’, is inexorably linked – or stronger: is by nature inextricably linked with apocalyptic speculation. A looming cataclysm is very important in so-called ‘post-thought’.

One can however view ‘end’ at another level. This other kind of ‘end’ is – which, among others, Foucault described, but had actually already been brought to our attention by the so-called ‘masters of suspicion’ (Marx, Nietzsche and Freud) – the ‘death of the subject’. In my view this is a huge insight. This ‘death’ is saying as much as the statement that modernist humanism, that man saw as the measure of all things, capable of endless improvements, can no longer be conceived as being possible.

With this Fukuyama’s idea of the end of history is once again rendered problematic: man is indeed not just capable of – via a so-called Hegelian dialectic – climbing up, rising up to an eventual victory of a certain case over another. Such a concept of endism is indeed modernist – still imbued with metaphysical, humanist, Christian, Greek-Western thought.

The proclamation of the ‘end of’ (Marxism, the subject, etc.) however harks back a fair way – far before the so-called ‘end of history’. Already from the middle of the twentieth century there is – what Derrida describes as – an “apocalyptic tone in philosophy” (SM, 15).

A whole lot has already been said and written in relation to ‘post’modernism. Many see it as a ‘new’ period that leaves other periods behind and themselves appoint thinkers who fall under this ‘era’. (In this way Derrida – although he repeatedly profiled himself as someone who did not believe in a *postmodernism* – is seen as one of its great trailblazers.) People often try to frame this “postmodernism” in the course of history, whereby this ‘period’ can be attacked

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<sup>2</sup> Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a time of terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, University of Chicago Press, 2003, p.90

by means of incomprehension and hefty criticism (often originating in a great fear of nihilism). Many busy themselves with conceptualizing and thematizing, set to work very prescriptively and hermeneutically and make themselves guilty of what I shall call an *ismology*.

Someone who speaks in a far more nuanced way of the 'postmodern' is Jean-François Lyotard. He continually refers to the postmodern *condition* (see his text by the same name, *La condition postmoderne*). From another text, an interview with Ben Kuiken, Lyotard says:

"[There] are good reasons for criticizing the modern ideas. I call that *postmodern*, but it is clearly a very poor term. It is modernism that is criticizing itself".<sup>3</sup>

It is no doubt better to describe 'postmodernism' as a 'modernist self-criticism' (which we also find at the time of romanticism with its romantic irony) – a self-criticism that signifies the end of *narrativism*. Narrativism, one could say, is a story line, that is constantly imbued with an 'imperative' thought that is directed to general validity.

(1847) < *Gr. aporia* (shyness, doubt)

As became clear above, thought is comprised of rules and mechanisms of exclusion which allow no room for the other, and which not only repress the other, but also marginalize it. Sigmund Freud however showed that no repression is complete, because the traces of the repressed remain active. As well as this, regulatory reason is also marked by that which it has marginalized – the whole of existence of rationality is after all based on the exclusion of intruders; the painstaking exclusion of that which it typifies as the a-rational.

Reason continually attempts to deny the shift and differentiation, but the reality is an interpreted reality. We are constantly in the world via interpretation, and this experience *is* differentiated.

I spoke earlier about the stubbornly persistent belief in a linear evolution and the progressive interpretation of history as teleological conception of that history. The cylindrical-spatial conception of time was in modern times abandoned for a linear-dynamic conception. It is no surprise that this idea of an ascendant, progressive dynamic of time coincides with the growth of capitalism and the emancipation of the subject, namely – as mentioned – the humanistic subject as measure of all things.

A critique of this conception of time coincides with the realization that one cannot know and guide history objectively – man after all is a part of this history. It is impossible to take a position on that history from the outside. Linear thought is indeed detrimental to that iterability, which we shall elaborate on further now.

### *Iterability and aporia*

Only in the use – by *means* – of repetition does meaning transpire. By means of iterability, which implies both repetition and change, we get an – ever active – notion of meaning. Via a break (*force de rupture*), which entails multiplication, meaning crawls out. This meaning is never fixed (there is never question of 'the' meaning) but is on the contrary constantly infected by previous and future meanings. Repetition is also never identical to that which is being repeated: new contexts, which evolve out of the repetition, after all generate new meanings.

Repetition continually leads to aporia. And reversed, aporia is the source of repetition. The reproach to this that often arises is that via such thought only nihilism can occur (one never reaches a goal and is moreover continually the subject of doubt, desperation and, by

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<sup>3</sup> From an interview by Ben Kuiken with Lyotard, in *Filosofie magazine*, 2, no.8 (1993) 8

consequence, fear). But this continual repetition calls for precisely the opposite of nihilism – namely *creativity*.

It is therefore (paradoxically enough) that which makes meaning possible – the repetition and the differentiation – which also allows for the aporia that are characteristic of meaning. Meaning can never be brought home, it has no fixed abode, no location in which it can dwell and find peace. Contrary to rest, it forms connections and traces – it causes shifts that continually shape reality.

Repetition entails ambiguity. It is here, with ambiguity, that Derrida's notion of iterability (*iterabilité*) becomes clear. Iterability is namely derived from the Latin *iteratio*, which means repetition. Moreover, we see *iter*, which is said to come from *itara*, Sanskrit for other or change. In other words, iterability implies repetition and change, repetition and differentiation. In this way we continually arrive at a certain order (repetition), but also at ambiguity (change). This wealth, which occurs through such a view of reality, incessantly causes creativity. The meaning is not fixed, and, in that way, there is a certain indeterminacy. The context will not provide any solace in this either.

For classical as well as modern-scientific thought a context has a limiting impact on meaning. Consequently, it helps to achieve an as pure and objective 'knowing' as possible. For Derrida however, the context occasions an *explosion* of meaning. Many different contexts are involved, which are all changeable as such. An isolated matter that is not being tainted, impacted upon, influenced by other matters is impossible. In this way meaning implies a shift, whereby it will never be able to rest in a fixed, conceptual framework. (It is understandable that many experience the threat of nihilism in this.)

If one knows that a meaning is shaped by – exists by grace of – contexts, then one sees that it cannot be an unambiguous notion; one understands that no single meaning exists and by consequence no single reality. If one however still believes in the possibility of arriving at unity and purity, then this is only possible by means of a denial of the other, by exclusion, by means of violence.

Meaning is repetition and change – legibility (something which is known through its repetition) and illegibility (throughout repetition there still lingers differentiation).

*'I have forgotten my umbrella.'*

*These words were found, isolated in quotation marks, among Nietzsche's unpublished manuscripts.*

*Maybe a citation.*

*[Maybe] a sample picked up somewhere, or overheard here or there.*

*Perhaps it was the note for some phrase to be written here or there.*

*We will never know. At least it is possible that we will never know and that powerlessness (*impouvoir*) must somehow be taken in account. Much as a trace which has been marked in what remains [restance] of this nonfragment, such an account would withdraw it from any assured horizon of a hermeneutic question.<sup>4</sup>*

The other will – if it can escape the violence – dwell in the margin as the singular in the face of the – so-called – commonplace. In this way it continually causes fractures in (metaphysical)

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's styles*, translation by Barbara Harlow, Chicago Press, 1979 p. 123 and 127

systems. The desire for unity will never be able to be completely attained or be enclosed in its own self-satisfaction: it continually invites the other at every attempt at closure, enclosure and conceptualization. In this way thought deconstructs itself – as Derrida kept wishing to make clear.

Metaphysics incessantly cuts its own constructions open. Or more precise: it is betrayed by its own construction-thought and forced to self-deconstruction, and eventually to suicide.

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