Spirituality and philosophy in post-structuralist theory

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A B S T R A C T

This paper discusses the role of a particular form of philosophical spirituality in the emergence of post-structuralist theory. Initially elaborated in the post-Kantian metaphysics of Husserl and Heidegger, and focused in recondite acts of intellectual self-transformation, this form of spirituality was transposed into a literary hermeneutics that permitted its wider dissemination in the Anglo-American humanities academy. Post-structuralist theory is the result of this historical transformation.

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Christianity, Gregory of Nyssa had insisted, was the 'sublime philosophy'. Its theology and higher moral practices . . . were not for beginners, still less for the uninitiated. It was *paideia* for 'those inside', not shared with those 'outside'. But philosophy had always been seen in this light. Philosophy was a vocation to a higher level of intellectual and moral endeavor. The philosopher was called upon to adopt a distinctive and exacting way of life. . . . Groomed in the accustomed manner, a few serious young notables would rise, through becoming philosophers, to the forbidding heights of a life-style different from that of the majority of their peers.[1]

This paper is a contribution to an intellectual history of what has been called theory in the post-1960s Anglo-American humanities academy.[2] I have earlier suggested that the theory phenomenon can be envisaged as forming a spectrum between two poles.[3] At one pole theory refers to a neo-Kantian style of structuralist analysis. Here it is understood via the model of an a priori language or grammar and is oriented to the formation of theoretical human sciences — 'structural' linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, political economy, psychology — understood as sciences of possible experience.[4] At the other pole, theory embraces a post-Kantian — Husserlian and Heideggerian — style of hermeneutics, organised around the figure of the 'event' or the 'other' that breaks through formal structures in a transfigurative moment. The present paper focuses on the Husserlian and Heideggerian or 'post-structuralist' end of the theory spectrum, mainly as it is manifest in phenomenological and deconstructive forms of hermeneutics and literary criticism.

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[1] Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, 1992), 123.

[3] Ian Hunter, 'The History of Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2006), 78–112. This paper also offers a clarification of the term 'theory' in terms of the self-understanding of those who teach theory in the Anglo-American graduate school, and in terms of those who oppose this teaching.

[4] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1971), 303–87; Gregory B. Moynahan, 'Hermann Cohen's *Das Prinzip der Infinitesimalmethode*, Ernst Cassirer, and the Politics of Science in Wilhelmine Germany', *Perspectives on Science* 11 (2003), 35–75.

In what follows I shall explore the hypothesis that post-structuralist humanities theory can be understood as a certain kind of transposition of acts of self-transformation, initially elaborated within the forms of European university metaphysics and Western philosophical spirituality, into the register of a general hermeneutics of culture and a more specific literary hermeneutics. My interest, then, is an historical one. It is focused on the manner in which, regardless of their truth or falsity, a certain set of metaphysical doctrines and spiritual exercises, originating in post-Kantian German university metaphysics, was transposed into the register of 'continental' (phenomenological) philosophy and hermeneutics, and thence into Anglo-American theory. My central concern here is to show how a variety of discourses enunciating access to 'Being' can be re-described as pedagogical or psychagogical exercises for forming the special subject who is to accede to Being. On this occasion, the institutional context in which this transformative pedagogy takes place — the Anglo-American humanities academy — is discussed only in passing, although one of the aims of the re-description is to open up this context for investigation as a specific pedagogical milieu anchored in an array of cultural–political interests.

Spirituality and philosophy

Traversing an intellectual terrain first opened up by Peter Brown and Pierre Hadot, Michel Foucault begins his lectures on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* with a crucial distinction between the domains of philosophy and spirituality, whose superimposition he regards as a constitutive dimension of the Western philosophical tradition.[5] Philosophy comprises discourses dedicated to the delineation of truth, its separation from falsity or illusion, and the forms of the subject's access to truth: 'We will call "philosophy" the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth'.[6] Spirituality, on the other hand, comprises the discursively mediated acts, practices, and exercises through which certain individuals seek to transform themselves into the kind of subject or self that is capable of acceding to truth:

> . . . I think we could call "spirituality" the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. We will call "spirituality" then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.[7]

The decisive distinguishing feature of Western philosophical or metaphysical spirituality is that it does not regard the truth as something to which the subject has access by right, universally, or simply by virtue of the kind of cognitive being that the human subject is. Rather, it views the truth as something to which the subject may accede only through some act of inner self-transformation: some act of attending to the self with a view to determining its present incapacity, thence to transform it into the kind of self that is spiritually qualified to accede to a truth that is by definition not open to the unqualified subject.

This conversion takes place through definite means or forms, of which Foucault identifies two broad kinds. First, there are the forms of intellectual *ēros* via which the subject is removed from his present condition through ascent to a transfigurative truth, or the descent of this truth to the subject. It is here that we shall be able to locate the phenomenological themes of the 'other' and the 'event', understood precisely as that which calls the subject out of himself into the space of an unscripted transfigurative encounter with Being. Then there are the forms of self-work or *askēsis*, understood as a 'work of the self on the self, an elaboration of the self by the self, a progressive transformation of the self by the self for which one takes responsibility in a long labor of ascesis'.[8] We shall see that a phenomenologically informed literary hermeneutics provides the means and material for transforming literary texts into occasions for just such a work of the self on the self.

Before concluding his framing discussion of spirituality and philosophy, Foucault also observes that it has been possible for Western philosophy to form a hybrid discourse by transferring practices of spiritual transformation into the act of philosophical knowledge itself.[9] This superimposition of esoteric self-transformation and exoteric philosophical ratiocination has resulted in a 'gnostic' style of philosophical discourse in which initiation into 'true' subjecthood is transposed into the register of philosophical demonstration. Such a discourse combines the spiritual grooming of the subject for access to truth with the philosophical demonstration of particular truths; it elides the difference between the willed or instituted cultivation of a particular philosophical persona and the (imaginal) necessity and universality of the philosophical truth to which this persona accedes. If we suggest that the texts of German university metaphysics comprise just such a hybrid spiritual–philosophical discourse, then we will be opening a path of investigation that will permit us to track the forms of spiritual self-transformation that post-structuralist humanities theory has drawn from German idealism via 'French theory'.

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[5] See, for example, Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, 118–58; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), 163–89; Pierre Hadot, 'Neoplatonist Spirituality 1: Plotinus and Porphyry', in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (London, 1986), 230–49; Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision*, trans. M. Chase (Chicago, 1993).

[6] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981–1982*, trans. G. Burchell, ed. F. Gros (New York, 2006), 15.

[7] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 15.

[8] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 16.

[9] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 16–17.

Kantian spirituality

What might be called the tradition of Western philosophical spirituality emerged from the confluence of Greek metaphysics and Christian doctrine in the early church.[10] It was maintained in the Western monastic and university metaphysics and was transmitted into modernity in the metaphysics of Immanuel Kant and German idealism more broadly.[11] Kant's metaphysics of experience is organised around the relation between two intellectual powers. He treats space and time as a priori forms of human sensing or sensibility, which means that spatio-temporal objects must be regarded as 'appearances' internal to the human sensorium. And he treats the concepts or categories required for thinking objects as the product of the understanding's pure a priori intellection. This constitutive thinking is spontaneously carried out by a transcendental subject (of 'apperception') — a pure intellect existing outside space and time — as the timeless forms in which it obtains self-consciousness.[12] This results in a truly remarkable picture of human experience. For Kant, experience is the spatio-temporal form in which an empirical subject (*homo phenomenon*) passively receives as phenomena the timeless objects of pure intellection (*noumena*) spontaneously intelligised by a transcendental subject (*homo noumenon*).[13]

This metaphysical picture or doctrine holds the key to understanding the spirituality that lies at the core of Kantian philosophy. It supplies the architecture for an array of linked spiritual exercises in which the philosopher must learn to treat experience as supplying the 'occasion' for an act of transcendental self-reflection or recollection (anamnesis). Through these exercises the philosopher seeks to transform spatio-temporal phenomena into appearances, thence to 'recollect' the transcendental subject's timeless (a priori) acts of pure intellection from which these appearances have supposedly devolved. In the process, the philosopher transforms his relation to himself in accordance with an imaginal ascent from *homo phenomenon* to *homo noumenon*, in accordance with a broadly neo-Platonic or neo-Plotinian model.[14] Kant of course is usually interpreted as providing a true (or false) philosophy of universal human cognition. Once the 'spiritual' dimension of his discourse is recovered, however, it makes better historical sense to view him as supplying the means of forming a particular kind subject who will accede to truth in the manner envisioned in his picture of cognition.

This way of understanding Kant's philosophy has immediate consequences for the manner in which we understand its relation to post-Kantian metaphysics and the theory that derives from it. In the first place, it makes it quite misleading to characterise German idealism in the Derridean manner as 'logocentric' or as a 'metaphysics of presence';[15] because Kant officially denies that the *noumenon* can be present to human understanding.[16] More importantly, however, even were Kant to have extolled a 'logocentric metaphysics of presence', this would not provide a philosophical reason for superseding his discourse; as this discourse is grounded not in philosophical truth but in the spiritual exercises designed to form a subject who will accede to truth in a particular way. Kant thus seeks to form a philosopher who will treat spatio-temporal experience as an 'analogy' for the inaccessible acts of spontaneous cognitive synthesis performed by the transcendental subject, allowing sensory objects to be treated as hermeneutic 'monograms' or symbols.[17] This 'analogisation' of experience is thus the means of grooming a philosopher who will adopt a fundamentally hermeneutic comportment towards empirical phenomena, as opposed to a descriptive or experimental one.

Kant thus does not teach that the *noumena* or transcendent ideas can be 'present' to a subject to who grasps them in transparent self-consciousness, as *homo phenomenon* is never directly conscious of the noumenal subject that he harbours and aspires to become. The spontaneity of the transcendental subject's acts of intellection do indeed intimate that *homo noumenon* is a pure intelligence lying outside spatio-temporal experience. Kant, though, only 'thinks' (as opposed to 'knows') this recondite figure in order to secure a particular way of acceding to the 'transcendental ideas' or 'ideas of reason' that support this intimation. These ideas — the ideas of a simple immaterial soul, an infinite world of appearances given to this soul, and a supreme being whose intellection gives rise to both the world and the soul — are to be acceded to only in the 'critical' register of the 'as if'.[18] In other words, the 'critical philosopher' may entertain these ideas 'as if' they were true in order to govern the conduct of his intellect in accordance with them. He must simultaneously acknowledge, though, that they lie beyond human understanding, and may thus only be 'thought' as regulative 'ideas of reason'. This comportment might be characterised — for want of a better formula — as the subjunctive assent to theology in and as philosophy. Kantian

[10] See note 5.

[11] For a suggestive account of this transmission, see Heinz Heimsoeth, *Metaphysik der Neuzeit* (Berlin, 1929); and Heinz Heimsoeth, *The Six Great Themes of Western Metaphysics and the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. R. J. Betanzos (Detroit, 1994).

[12] For an overview, see the Preface to the second or 'B' edition (of 1787) of Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. W. S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, 1996), B vii–B xliv. Pagination is given as 'A' (first) or 'B' (second) edition, in accordance with the standard *Akademie* edition of Kant's works: *Kants Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1902–).

[13] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 358–59. Most current Anglophone commentary on this issue is modernising and hence anachronistic. For a reliable account see Heinz Heimsoeth, 'Persönlichkeitsbewußtsein und Ding an sich in der Kantischen Philosophie', in *Studien zur Philosophie Immanuel Kants: Vol 1, Metaphysische Ursprünge und Ontologische Grundlagen*, ed. H. Heimsoeth (Cologne, 1956), 227–57; and, more generally, Heinz Heimsoeth, 'Metaphysical Motives in the Development of Critical Idealism', in *Kant: Disputed Questions*, ed. M. S. Gram (Chicago, 1967), 158–99.

[14] See the rare and indispensable discussions of this in Philip Merlan, *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness: Problems of the Soul in the Neoaristotelian and Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague, 1963); and Heimsoeth, 'Persönlichkeitsbewußtsein und Ding an sich in der Kantischen Philosophie'.

[15] For Derrida's characterisation of Kantian idealism in these terms, see Jacques Derrida, 'Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German', *New Literary History* 22 (1991), 39–95, at 55–61.

[16] See, for example, Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxv–vi.

[17] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 137–47/B 176–87.

[18] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 669–89/B 697–717.

critique is thus not a logocentric metaphysics of presence but a form of philosophical spirituality organised around the analogisation of empirical experience and the subjunctive philosophical assent to theological ideas of reason. It is designed to form a philosophical persona who seeks to keep empirical science and history subordinate to university metaphysics. Critical philosophy does this by treating empirical objects as 'occasions' for the hermeneutic recovery of the a priori acts of intellection whose appearances they supposedly are.

We may suggest, then, that the harmonisation of Greek metaphysics and Christian theology in Kant's philosophy takes place not in the register of demonstrable truth or falsity, but at the level of spiritual exercises designed to form a privileged philosophical persona or way of acceding to truth. This helps to explain what turns out to be a fact crucial for understanding the history of German university metaphysics: namely, that since the middle of the seventeenth century, the metaphysical harmonisation of philosophy and theology had been explicitly targeted for explanation and elimination by a combative empirical historiography of philosophy that was in effect a rival cultural program to university metaphysics.[19] For what this anti-metaphysical historiography reacted against in academic metaphysics was in fact the intellectual comportment that it formed — the philosophical persona claiming insight into pure norms and concepts lying behind ordinary empirical experience — which it regarded as a threat to both civil peace and empirical knowledge. Combining an empirical philology with a Protestant fideist rejection of transcendental thought, this historiography treated university metaphysics as a hybrid resulting from the patristic miscegenation of pagan philosophy and the Christian mysteries. Its exponents included, among others, the Huguenot refugee Pierre Bayle and the Saxon political jurist Christian Thomasius; although during the eighteenth century David Hume and Edward Gibbon would also take up this combative historiography of metaphysics.[20]

In different ways, all of these writers used the historicisation of philosophy to combat what they regarded as the *mésalliance* of theology and philosophy in metaphysics: an illicit union that produced transcendent moralities and politics threatening to civil calm, and speculative concepts corrosive of empirical and historical knowledge. By effecting a radical separation of philosophy and theology, the anti-metaphysical historiography that these writers deployed would form the core of a dual cultural program. This was a program designed to restrict philosophy to the sphere non-transcendental (probabilistic) reasoning about empirical and historical knowledge, and to relegate philosophical theology in favour of a non-doctrinal inner faith, thereby destroying metaphysics ('natural theology') altogether.[21] In defending transcendental knowledge of the phenomenal world and a 'critical' form of philosophical theology, Kantian metaphysics should thus be seen as one of the later rounds in an unfinished combat between rival cultural–political programs.[22] We shall now see that post-Kantian philosophy and post-structuralist theory represent improvisations on the same form of spirituality and cultural combat carried on by Kant.

Post-Kantian philosophical spirituality

Of the many transformations that Kantian philosophical spirituality underwent during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, three are of particular importance for our sketch of a genealogy of post-Kantian 'continental' philosophy and phenomenological or post-structuralist theory. *First*, following the lead of a long line of post-Kantian idealists, the transcendental phenomenologists, Husserl and Heidegger, exercised an option contained within Kant's metaphysics of experience, but only exercised with the greatest circumspection by Kant himself, in the subjunctive register of the 'as if'. This is the option of treating the 'transcendental object' or *noumenon* as itself an object of (a special kind of) experience. This means that the transcendental subject should be treated as capable of experiencing the *noumenon* as a *phenomenon* in time and space — or as a phenomenon that initiates time (and space) — that is, as Being. According to Heidegger, the phenomenon is not appearance, as Kant claims, but is the 'self-showing' of Being.[23] 'Kant', says Heidegger, 'did not see the phenomenon of the world and was consistent enough to keep the "representations" at a distance from the *a priori* content of the "I think". But thus the I again was forced back to an *isolated* subject that accompanies representations in a way that is ontologically quite indefinite'. Apparently, in failing to open itself fully to the transcendental object, Kant's subject suffers a loss of 'authenticity', remaining 'absorbed in everyday multiplicity' as the 'self that … I am *not* authentically', and hence failing to become the 'I' that is the 'being that one is in "being-in-the-world"'.[24]

[19] On the significance of this historiography in early modern Germany, see Ralph Häfner, 'Jacob Thomasius und die Geschichte der Häresien', in *Christian Thomasius (1655–1728): Neue Forschungen im Kontext der Frühaufklärung*, ed. F. Vollhardt (Tübingen, 1997), 141–64; Martin Mulsow, *Moderne aus dem Untergrund: Radikale Frühaufklärung in Deutschland 1680–1720* (Hamburg, 2002), 261–307; Sicco Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte: Philosophiegeschichte zwischen Barok und Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 2004), 21–111, 308–54; and Ian Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State: The Political Thought of Christian Thomasius* (Cambridge, 2007), 61–83.

[20] On these writers in this regard, see Herbert Jaumann, 'Frühe Aufklärung als historische Kritik: Pierre Bayle und Christian Thomasius', in *Frühe Aufklärung*, ed. S. Neumeister (Munich, 1994), 149–70; Stephen Paul Foster, *Melancholy Duty: The Hume-Gibbon Attack on Christianity* (Dordrecht, 1997); and J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge, 1999), ii, 29–71, 163–257.

[21] For a characteristic expression of this program, in the form of an arts curriculum for law students, see Christian Thomasius, *Cautelen zur Erlernung der Rechtsgelehrtheit*, ed. W. Schneiders (Halle, 1713; Hildesheim, 2006). For a discussion, see Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State*, 62–72, 76–82.

[22] For an overview, see Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2001).

[23] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. J. Stambaugh (New York, 1996), 25–8.

[24] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 295–6. See also, Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. R. Taft, 5th ed. (Bloomington, 1997), 112–20.

This is the central point of philosophical departure from Kant who, for the most part, treats the *noumenon* quite differently: as the object of a cognitive power — intellectual intuition — whose unavailability to human beings means that the noumenal 'thing in itself' remains inaccessible to human experience which is thereby restricted to phenomena understood as subjective appearances. In proclaiming that there is such a thing as Being or the 'transcendental phenomenon' — that is, an object of heightened experience appearing to a subject stripped of all the subjective (human) conditions of experience, hence as a disclosure of 'Being in time' — Husserl, like Heidegger, was speaking within the 'grammar' of Kantian spirituality but against its philosophical propositions.[25] Unlike Kant's critical philosopher, the philosophical subject or persona that Husserl and Heidegger seek to form will not accede to truth through the decipherment of a permanently analogical experience. Their subject is supposed to accede to truth through an experience that discloses objects of pure intellection immediately, in the form of the transcendental phenomenon or Being, disclosing itself in the vitalistic supra-formal domain that these philosophers call the 'life-world'. This change is an improvisation on the thematics of German philosophical spirituality — the harmonisation of Greek metaphysics and Christian theology — in relation to which Kantian idealism was itself an improvisation. Husserl does not hesitate to characterise this as a change in the philosopher's intellectual comportment or 'self':

> Now, how can the pregivenness of the life-world become a universal subject of investigation in its own right? Clearly, only through a *total change* of the natural attitude, such that we no longer live, as heretofore, as human beings within natural existence, constantly effecting the validity of the pre-given world; rather, we must constantly deny ourselves this.[26]

As we shall see, it is precisely the self-transformative character of this philosophical spirituality that prevents Being from becoming 'a universal subject of investigation in its own right', restricting it, initially at least, to 'a few serious young notables'.

For the intellectual historian there is nothing to choose between the Kantian and post-Kantian forms of philosophical spirituality: between the recessive *noumenon* and the excessive transcendental phenomenon. As each is an existential means of cultivating a particular kind of subjectivity or way of acceding to the truth, neither variant itself falls within the domain of truth and falsity. In distinguishing between the two styles of spirituality, the historian's task is thus not to rank them according to normative concepts of spiritual authenticity or openness to Being — for that is symptomatic of a philosophical adherence incompatible with historical contextualisation — but only to describe the acts of self-transformation that each requires of its practitioners. In Husserl's case, this means the transcendental reduction or *épochē*. The transcendental reduction fits readily within Foucault's characterisation of spiritual *askēsis* — as a 'work of the self on the self, an elaboration of the self by the self, a progressive transformation of the self by the self'. It is characterised by Husserl as an act of suspension or abstention that the philosopher performs on himself in which he is supposed to cleanse himself of all of the prior forms of knowledge and value that constitute his 'natural knowledge' and 'ordinary self'. The philosopher thus:

> . . . forbids himself — as a philosopher, in the uniqueness of his direction of interest — to continue the whole natural performance of his world-life; that is, he forbids himself to ask questions which rest upon the ground of the world at hand, questions of being, questions of value, practical questions, questions about being or not-being, about being valuable, being useful, being beautiful, being good, etc.[27]

This, however, is only the first stage of the exercise. Once the philosopher has thus cleansed his intellect of all subjective conditions of knowledge and value — the conditions that Kant 'wrongly' regards as necessary for any possible experience — he is in the condition of heightened presuppositionless expectancy in which the 'transcendental phenomenon' can disclose itself. Now the exercise assumes a Platonic-erotic dimension. Here it is envisaged that the transcendental phenomenon self-manifests in an incalculable event. This event is seen as the moment in which pure Being 'comes to' to the subject in a transfigurative disclosure, even as the subject is transfigured by divesting its ordinary self in order to 'meet' this unanticipated phenomenon. Heidegger, who came to reject Husserl's *épochē* but nonetheless continued the exercise of openness to Being, provides this characteristically gnostic formulation of the transfigurative event: 'This is to say that being strikes man and shifts him into transformation, into an initial gaining, into a prolonged loss of what is his ownmost'.[28] Many of the themes of phenomenological criticism and theory are present here *in nuce*: the themes of waiting or deferral (*différance*); of meaning as event; and of the 'other' as that whose occlusion sustains the identity of the ordinary self and whose ruptural appearance transfigures the self that emerges to meet it. Here, though, these themes are present in their primary historical form, as acts of self-transformation elaborated within the spirituality of post-Kantian German university metaphysics.

The *second* way in which post-Kantian philosophical spirituality transformed its immediate predecessor lies in the domain of hermeneutics. Kant had ensured that the approach of German metaphysics to experience would remain fundamentally hermeneutic — oriented to 'recollecting' the hidden a priori conditions of experiential 'occasions' — as

[25] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. D. Carr (Evanston, 1970), 111–21, 148–52.

[26] Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 148.

[27] Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 152.

[28] Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*, trans. P. Emad and K. Maly (Bloomington, 2001), 320.

opposed to descriptive or experimental. Husserl and Heidegger maintained this fundamentally hermeneutic comportment towards experience but changed its form and the inner acts through which it is executed. For Husserl and Heidegger, the objects of experience are not monograms or ciphers in which transcendental intellection can be dimly discerned in the dark glass of the 'as if'. Rather, as projections of the subject's calculating designs on experience, they are regarded as the dead residue of quotidian or 'natural' subjectivity and 'world-life'. They are something that will be transfigured rather than deciphered, with the irruptive appearance of objects stripped of all subjective conditions of knowledge: this permitting the subject to break through its cognitive 'isolation' and unite with other subjects (souls) in pure intersubjective communion.[29] Heidegger thus developed a hermeneutics in which the philosopher or theorist is to practice a silent 'reticence' in relation to the 'ordinary' cognition of experience. This is supposed to result in a state of illuminated lassitude (*Gelassenheit*) in which the transcendental phenomenon will be found to the degree that it is not (cognitively) looked for: 'Reticence in silence is the "logic" of philosophy, insofar as philosophy asks the grounding-question from within the other beginning. Philosophy looks for the truth of the essential swaying of be-ing, and this truth is the hinting-resonating hiddenness (mystery) of enowning [the event IH] (the hesitating refusal)'.[30] This is why in phenomenological hermeneutics and deconstructive criticism, meaning is always found in the unsought detail, at the 'margins' of the text, in the aleatory or distracted interpretation. It is not that meaning actually resides in these recessive locales, but that the hermeneutic exercise of seeking them there is a performance of the hermeneut's spiritual elevation or openness to Being.

This philosophical transformation in the hermeneutic form of Kantian philosophical spirituality was prefigured in the aesthetic or literary transformation that it had undergone during Kant's own lifetime. Here the key figure is the metaphysically trained poet Hölderlin, student of Fichte and thus well versed in Kant, and fellow student of Schelling and Hegel at the Tübingen Stiftung. Like his fellow idealists, Hölderlin exploited the same option made available by Kant's epochal reworking of university metaphysics: namely, the option of treating the intellectual power that Kant had reserved for divine intellection — intellectual intuition, or the mind's power to create what it intelligises — as if it were a special power of the human intellect.[31] Unlike Husserl and the early Heidegger, however, Hölderlin did not exploit this option in the philosophical register but by transposing it into the register of poetic theory and practice. Here the transfigurative intellectual intuition of the *noumenon* could be presented in an elaborate 'musical' metaphorics, via philosophically overdetermined conceptions of rhythm, tonality, and image. The immediacy of the subject's encounter with Being thus came to be played out in the theatre of the reader's encounter with the poem. This literary transposition of post-Kantian metaphysical hermeneutics is given symptomatic expression in Paul de Man's account of why Heidegger turned to Hölderlin:

> One question arises above all: why does Heidegger need to refer to Hölderlin? ... As one reads [Heidegger's] last commentary on Hölderlin ... one understands why Heidegger is in need of a witness, of someone of whom he can say that he has named the immediate presence of Being. ... The experience of Being must be sayable; in fact, it is in language that it is preserved. There must be someone, then, of unquestionable purity, who can say that he has traveled this route and seen the flash of illumination. One such person is enough, but there must be one For then, the truth, which is the presence of the present, has entered the work that is language. Language — Hölderlin's language — is the immediate presence of Being. And the task that we, who, like Heidegger, cannot speak of Being, inherit, is to preserve this language, to preserve Being.[32]

Like Heidegger himself, de Man proclaims that Hölderlin's poetic improvisation on Kantian philosophical spirituality is indeed a precocious aesthetic recovery of the object of intellectual intuition prematurely precluded by Kant: a recovery grounded not in philosophy or philology, but in the 'unquestionable purity' through which Hölderlin has apparently acceded to the 'flash of illumination'.[33] We have seen, though, that Kant's declaration of the unavailability of noumenal objects is only scene-setting for his form of hermeneutic spirituality. It provides him with the means of ensuring that the 'transcendental ideas' of such objects will only be acceded to subjunctively, 'as if' they were thinkable. Similarly, Hölderlin's declaration that such objects are intuitable in the concrete forms of poetry can be regarded as scene-setting for his literary variant of this spirituality. Hölderlin should be understood as improvising a spiritual exercise in which the meditative reading of metaphysically programmed poetry provides the inner theatre for the noumenal object to surface in the non-cognitive immediacies of rhythm, tonality, and musicality, later to be apotheosised as the 'body of language'. In seeking to provide a true (falsifiable) description of these variant forms of metaphysical spirituality, the intellectual historian must of course remain indifferent towards their rival exclusivist claims to truth or authenticity.

The mid-twentieth-century recovery of Hölderlin's literary variant of German philosophical spirituality is in part a pointer to a development in post-Kantian philosophy: namely, its recourse to literary tropes and metaphors as a means of figuralising the extraordinarily recondite thematics of the self-disclosure of the transcendental phenomenon or Being. In one of his later works, we thus find Heidegger making use of the auditory metaphor of the 'echo' as a means of formulating the

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[29] Husserl, *Crisis*, 152–54.

[30] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 54–5.

[31] For a typical expression, see Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Urtheil und Seyn', in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. F. Beißner (Stuttgart, 1961), 216–44.

[32] Paul de Man, 'Heidegger's Exegesis of Hölderlin', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis, 1983), 246–66, at 252–3.

[33] For Heidegger's commentary in the same terms, see Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterung zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (Hamburg, 1951).

manner in which the noumenal object 'calls to' the subject. The metaphor of echo presents the 'call' of the transcendental phenomenon (Being) not directly as an object of knowledge, but at one remove through a 'resonance' which, if heard, transfigures the subject into one capable of annulling his ordinary self by moving towards Being.[34]

Such metaphors may be regarded as effecting the exoteric transposition of esoteric doctrine and inner acts, permitting their uptake by academic audiences not fully initiated into the spiritual–philosophical sources. Some commentators, like the late Richard Rorty, have seen the literary transposition of post-Kantian philosophy and theory as a shift from philosophy to 'writing' or literature.[35] It should now be clear, though, that this transposition is symptomatic of something a good deal more historically significant: not the shift from philosophy to literary criticism, but the augmentation of a philosophical practice of spirituality with a literary variant of the same practice. It is this fact that accounts for the highly tropological or metaphoric character of deconstructive theory and hermeneutics.

The *third* area in which post-Kantian 'continental' philosophy and post-structuralist theory transformed its predecessor is that of the metaphysical subordination of the empirical sciences (*Wissenschaften*). This too displays the same historical pattern of improvisations carried out on and within the forms of Kantian metaphysical spirituality. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the empirical sciences and their natural laws are treated as lower-level operations carried out within the domain of appearances whose a priori categories and schemata are supplied only by transcendental philosophy.[36] This allowed the empirical sciences a limited degree of autonomy, and it provided a pattern for the development of neo-Kantian philosophies of science.[37] It also permitted the emergence of 'human sciences' where the transcendental a priori is lodged within the material finitude of 'man', as Foucault argues in the *Order of Things*. This remains the case even if Kant's central aim was to subordinate the empirical sciences to the transcendental 'unity of reason', and even if his transcendental philosophy denied certain key postulates of the physical sciences: the reality of space and time, the atomic structure of matter, and the existence of self-subsistent material objects.[38]

In post-Kantian philosophy, however, the anti-empiricist spiritual program of German metaphysics — to preserve divine intellection of the 'world' within the otherwise 'soulless' object-domains of the empirical sciences — takes on a more radical form. In Husserl, the 'factual sciences' (*Tatsachwissenschaften*) are themselves identified with the ossified structures of knowledge that forestall the transfigurative appearance of the 'transcendental phenomenon'.[39] For his part, Heidegger characterises the empirical sciences as 'positive' or 'ontic', indicating that they represent only 'regional ontologies', oriented to pre-given 'beings' and hence incapable of grasping the fundamental ontology or Being that 'gives' these beings.[40] This means that the failure of scientists to suspend their own positive or 'calculating' knowledge — in order to encounter transfigurative Being — amounts to a spiritual dereliction rather than an epistemological error. It is indicative of a spiritual or cultural crisis requiring decisive redress: 'But today there is a growing danger that the scientific-technological manner of thinking will spread to all realms of life. And this magnifies the deceptive appearance that makes all thinking and speaking seem objectifying'.[41] It is this spiritual dereliction that 'philosophy' is called on to rectify, which legitimates its domination of the empirical sciences: 'it can be shown that philosophy, as the free questioning of purely self-reliant *Dasein*, does of its essence have the task of directing all other nontheological, positive sciences with respect to their ontological foundation'.[42]

It is in this light that we should view Heidegger's 1930s project to reform the German university through the subordination of the empirical sciences to metaphysics. This was announced in his inaugural rectoral address at the University of Freiburg in 1933 and was accompanied by authoritarian measures intended to compel the reorganisation of faculty structures.[43] Heidegger's reform project was not the result of any intrinsic affinity between his philosophy and Nazi ideology, although it is clear that Heidegger was an enthusiastic and malignant Nazi sympathiser and sometime party member. Rather, the proposal that it should be imperative for science professors to reflect on the ontological foundations of their 'regional' ontologies — forcing them to divest their merely 'natural' selves and unite in a true spiritual community of scholars — arose from the heart of post-Kantian university metaphysics itself. As such it was a development of the intellectual program of Heidegger's Jewish teacher, Husserl, although not of course one that Husserl would have undertaken in such circumstances. In fact Heidegger's reform program was a direct result of the fact that in identifying its doctrine with transfigurative access to Being itself, post-Kantian philosophical spirituality could recognise only one essential way of acceding to truth, and was thus thoroughly sectarian. Through its ideological destablisation of institutional structures, and

[34] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 75–7.

[35] This supposed shift is viewed positively in Richard Rorty, 'Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida', *New Literary History* 10 (1978), 141–45; and negatively in Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA, 1986).

[36] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 113–14, B 163–65, A 215–16/B 262–63, A 654–64/B 682–92.

[37] See, Klaus Christian Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy Between Idealism and Positivism*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, 1993); and Moynahan, 'Hermann Cohen's *Das Prinzip der Infinitesimalmethode*'.

[38] For a different view, stressing the continuity between Kant's philosophy and the physical sciences, see Michael Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (Cambridge, MA, 1992). For a critical discussion of Friedman's view, see Eric Watkins, 'Kant's Justification of the Laws of Mechanics', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 29 (1998), 539–60.

[39] Husserl, *Crisis*, 137.

[40] Martin Heidegger, 'Phenomenology and Theology', in *Pathmarks*, ed. W. McNeill (Cambridge, 1998), 39–62, at 41. See also Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 100–10.

[41] Heidegger, 'Phenomenology and Theology', 60.

[42] Heidegger, 'Phenomenology and Theology', 53.

[43] Martin Heidegger, 'The Self-Assertion of the German University', *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (1985), 470–80.

through the new post of *Führer-Rektor* to which it appointed him in 1933, what the Nazi party offered Heidegger was the opportunity and means to forcibly impose the spiritual supremacy claimed by post-Kantian metaphysics. It offered him a brief moment to live the philosopher's dream, in the form of a regimen of ontological questioning administered by the armed metaphysician.

The early modern anti-metaphysical historians of philosophy would not have been surprised by this uncivil consequence of a 'sectarian philosophy'. Having witnessed the imposition of rival metaphysical doctrines in the religiously divided universities of the early modern confessional states, they were all-too-familiar with the coercive enforcement of metaphysics on the grounds of its transcendental claims.[44] This historical parallel is one that is (literally) lost on those modern commentators who imagine that the civil toxicity of Heidegger's reform program came only from its accidental historical contamination by Nazism, rather than from the spiritual supremacism of the philosophical culture that Nazi illiberalism promised to realise.[45]

Despite the very different kinds of social upheaval represented in the two periods, there is something in Heidegger's identification of the spiritual comportment required to overcome the 'crisis of the sciences' that echoes in parallel diagnoses of cultural crisis in the 1960s: namely his characterisation of this comportment as 'theoretical'. In an address to German university students in the aftermath of Germany's defeat in the First World War, Heidegger thus told them that the 'national crisis' could only be overcome if cognition were renovated by the cultivation of a theoretical comportment: 'The theoretical man necessarily tears himself away from the natural attitude. The theoretical world is not always there, but is accessible only in a constantly renewed divesting of the natural world'. In clarifying this point, Heidegger comments that the 'Theoretical comportment is a process first because it flows through a chain of grounding, but second because it tears itself from the contexture of life with ever novel spontaneity'.[46] Post-1960s theory would also diagnose a crisis of the sciences and issue in demands for an ever novel spontaneity: demands that were also accompanied by proposals for a theory-led reform of the university. In this regard, Marcuse's call to the students of the New Left stands in a discussable relation to Heidegger's address to the students of the old right.

The theoretical comportment

I wish to suggest, then, that the theoretical comportment that emerged in the 1960s Anglo-American humanities academy can be understood as a direct development of the post-Kantian philosophical spirituality that had already been reconfigured into a literary-tropological form. Carried by German intellectual refugees and *émigrés*, by post-war French theorists, and by the cultural supremacism of metaphysical spirituality itself, post-Kantian theory emerged in Anglo-American universities in the form of a particular practice of intellectual self-transformation. This is structured by the philosophico-theological thematics of openness to Being, but is executed in the form of a set of hermeneutic operations performed 'on the self by the self' through the reading and writing of literary texts. Post-structuralist theory thus assumes the form of a literary spiritual hermeneutics.

We have already indicated that the literary-tropological transposition of Western university spirituality is not to be viewed as an inauthentic aestheticisation of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy; as the latter are themselves transpositions of acts of spiritual self-transformation into an anti-empirical philosophical hermeneutics (German idealism). Between a gnostic philosophy and a gnostic literary hermeneutics there is nothing to choose from the perspective of an agnostic intellectual history. The literary-tropological transposition of philosophical spirituality does represent, though, the culmination of an historical development already present in post-Kantian metaphysics. The embodiment of recondite doctrine in pregnant metaphors completes the repositioning of this spirituality on the cusp of the esoteric and the exoteric, allowing it to be both half heard yet fully understood, and thence to be widely disseminated in an academic pedagogy characterised by the transfigurative passage from acolyte to initiate.

The emergence of post-structuralist theory from this literary-tropological transposition of post-Kantian philosophical spirituality can be characterised via three key features. *First*, theory is characterised by the continuous elaboration of tropes and metaphors designed to transmit the basic features of this spirituality in a form that makes it available for a hermeneutic work on the self. Left in the philosophical or metaphysical register, these features are extraordinarily recondite. Even the central doctrine of Kant's metaphysics of experience — that space and time are only subjective forms of human sensing, giving rise to appearances that might well be only 'monograms' for noumenal intellections — is difficult for modern readers to comprehend and assent to. In proclaiming, however, that the noumenal object is directly available to the subject, in the heightened experience of the transcendental phenomenon or Being, the post-Kantian philosophers pushed university metaphysics even farther away from commonsense expectations and the canons of empirical knowledge.

In Kant's case, the spiritual act of recollecting the transcendental subject's acts of noumenal intellection can at least be recapitulated in the philosophical register, as the recovery of the subjective a priori conditions of spatio-temporal

[44] See, Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State*, 34–50, 54–73, 86–93, 145–50.

[45] For the argument that Heidegger's Nazi sympathies represent only the accidental tainting of an otherwise benign, indeed uplifting philosophy, see Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'Martin Heidegger and the University as a Site for the Transformation of Human Existence', *The Review of Politics* 59 (1997), 75–96. In failing to comprehend the spiritual supremacism of post-Kantian metaphysics, the authors are blind to the manner in which the Nazi party's construction of an ideological state allowed Heidegger to envisage the civil enforcement of this supremacism.

[46] Martin Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. T. Sadler (London, 2000), 179.

experience. In Husserl and Heidegger's case, however, the *noumenon* is relocated outside the subject, in the form of an ontological object or Being that initiates the 'primordial temporality' in which the subject experiences itself.[47] This has the vertiginous effect of transforming empirical experience and its 'inauthentic' subject — our quotidian selves — into an obstacle to a self-manifesting Being that breaks in on the subject as something foreign or 'other'. This 'event' is supposed to illuminate and transfigure the subject in accordance with the promise of the protean futurity of repeated 'becomings'. Such intellectual vertigo is a symptom of the fact that despite being no less existentially concrete than Kant's act of transcendental recollection, the act of self-transformation that lies at the heart post-Kantian metaphysics — the transcendental *ēpochē* (Husserl) or 'reticence in silence' (Heidegger) through which the philosopher attunes himself to the incalculable self-disclosure of Being — is impossible to recapitulate in a philosophical register that remains open to the empirical sciences. It is the need to compensate for this esoteric withdrawal from the commonsense of empirical knowledge that drives post-Kantian theory's continuous elaboration of exoteric tropes. These are designed to anchor its spirituality in the commonsense of a non-empirical experience that is partly aesthetic and partly theological.

This is the light in which we should view Heidegger's metaphor of the 'echo'. We recall that Heidegger's echo figuralises the indirect hearing of the 'resonance' of Being that remains concealed. This attunement prepares the philosopher for the 'leap' through which he will break free of quotidian objectified knowledge in a transfigurative movement towards the Being that moves towards him. In this regard, though, Heidegger only stood near the beginning of a concatenating theoretical tropology of unanticipated calls and transfigurative answers; of the exchange of 'looks' between the unseeing subject and the concealed object that looks back; of the structure that determines meaning and the unanticipated 'event' or 'play' of meaning that throws this determination into transfigurative flux; of the symbolic meaning and the semiotic 'chora' that transforms it through the rhythmic pulsions flowing through the 'body' of language; and much more improvised on the same tropological pattern.

In *Specters of Marx*, we thus find Derrida elaborating the more or less disposable metaphor of the 'visor' in the course of a discourse on how Marx should be read now (after 1989) that he has become a 'ghost'.[48] The 'specter' is a metaphor for the theme of the phenomenal embodiment of spirit in the transcendental phenomenon. Its role is to figuralise the 'haunting' of man by the perpetually returning 'question of Being'. This question is posed to a subject locked within the confines of its own empirical specularity, which is apparently the way we are now haunted by Marx.[49] In order to provide a figural accessibility for this esoteric hermeneutic — according to which the texts of Marx will be scanned not for the historical intentions of their dubious past but for their unintended meanings that open us to the future — Derrida makes use of the ghost scene from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and, with it, the trope of the visor. In claiming to identify the ghost of Hamlet's dead father through his open visor, Hamlet's friends, Marcellus and Horatio, misunderstand the function of the visor which, Derrida proclaims, is to permit one to 'see without being seen'.[50] To see without being seen is, of course, that which Being does when it remains concealed from those whom it looks at — with a view to their transfigurative illumination — when they fail to return this invisible look, by presuming that they have already seen it.

In other words, Derrida deploys the visor as a metaphor for a particular way of reading the texts of Marx (and Shakespeare). The metaphor delivers the figuralised instruction that these texts are not to be read for the historical meaning that would tie them and their reader to a spiritually bankrupt past: namely, the whole history of the totalitarian and liberal readings of Marx. Rather, they are to be read for the hidden spirit or meaning whose concealment consists in the transfiguration that the reader must undergo in order to meet its gaze, thereby opening himself to the possible meanings that are 'to come'. The visor metaphor thus transposes the spiritual exercise of the transcendental reduction into an exoteric literary hermeneutics. At the same time, Derrida purports to demonstrate the truth of this hermeneutics by leading the reader through an exercise in reading the texts of Shakespeare and Marx in a manner unintended by their authors; that is, in a manner that is supposed to reveal the spirit of a future philosophy that haunts us through the 'visor' of these texts. This future philosophy is of course neither more nor less than the present philosophical spirituality of post-Kantian theory — or deconstructive criticism — into which the metaphor of the visor is designed to induct Derrida's reader.

The *second* characteristic feature of the theory that emerged from the tropological transposition of post-Kantian philosophical spirituality, is its distinctively ambivalent hermeneutic practice, at once allegorising and oracular. The hermeneutics of theory is an act that one performs on oneself, as the means of attuning oneself to the unanticipated event of meaning. As such, texts subjected to this hermeneutics will be deciphered tropologically or allegorically, as analogies for the transition from the specular concealment of Being to its unanticipated self-disclosure. Derrida thus reads the ghost scene tropologically, as a quasi-allegorical representation of the concealment of Being. This interpretation is anchored in the detail that Horatio is urged to speak to the ghost because he is a 'scholar'; for this is what allows Derrida to project the Heideggerian critique of objectifying knowledge into the ghost scene. Horatio's nomination as a scholar who speaks to ghosts can thus be treated as a trope for the failure of empirical scholarship to discern the face of Being hidden behind the visor from which its transfigurative gaze is not met. The content of Derrida's reading is thus a projection of its hermeneutic form, in which Derrida does meet the gaze of the hidden spirit and thus demonstrates his spiritual superiority over all empirical scholarship and

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[47] See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 65, 297–304.

[48] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. P. Kamuf (New York, 1994), 3–48.

[49] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 4–6.

[50] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 7–8.

scholars: 'As theoreticians or witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals, scholars believe that looking is sufficient. Therefore, they are not always in the most competent position to do what is necessary: speak to the specter'. This is because 'there has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being . . . in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity'.[51]

When it comes to its own tropes, however — such figures as the spectral embodiment of spirit, the echo in which the transfigurative call of Being is heard, the visor through which Being looks out without being seen, and so on — then it is striking that post-Kantian theory refuses to accept that these too might be rhetorical figures for cultivating a certain kind of intellectual comportment. It views them, rather, as the forms in which transfigurative openness to Being is actually executed for and by a universal subject. This means that a privileged group of texts, that are themselves self-consciously composed of these figures, will be read not as allegorical, but as revelatory. Their words will be treated as traces of Being's self-disclosure in time and language, even if what is disclosed is only meanings 'to come' and the need for 'waiting'. It is not just Heidegger's tropes that are treated as revelatory in this way; so too are those of the metaphysical poets, Hölderlin, Rilke, and Trakl, whose claims to reveal Being through the musical 'body' of language, thereby escaping its semantic concealment, are treated as manifestations of 'presence'.

In his meditation on *Geist* or spirit, Derrida seeks to track Heidegger's transition from a 'Christian-Platonic' conception in which spirit falls into time and space as a derogation from Being, to a conception in which spirit initiates time and space and is thus phenomenologically embodied. This is the transition that we have already identified as central to the Husserl's and Heidegger's reworking of the Kantian *noumenon*. Derrida, though, locates this transition inside another one: namely, Heidegger's move from discursive philosophy to hermeneutic poetics. In the course of his commentary on Trakl's *Gedicht*, Heidegger thus asks 'What is spirit?', and answers '*Der Geist ist das Flammende*' and '*Der Geist ist Flamme*'. Derrida's commentary on this answer begins in a kind of stream-of-consciousness immediacy:

> How to translate? Spirit is what inflames? Rather, what inflames *itself*, setting *itself* on fire, setting fire to *itself*? Spirit is flame. A flame which inflames, or which inflames *itself*: both at once, the one and the other, the one the other. *Con*flagration of the two in the very con*flagration*.[52]

Derrida thus presents or performs himself not as interpreting the meaning of an historical trope, but as receiving a truth disclosed by the musical body or Being of language itself: 'Spirit *in-flames*, how is this to be *heard* or *understood* [*entendre*]? Not: what does it mean? But how does it sound and resound? What about the consonance, the singing, the praise, and the hymn in this *Gespräch* with a poet?'[53]

Speaking through Heidegger, Derrida defends this oracular hermeneutics by declaring of 'Spirit *in-flames*' that: 'It is not a figure, not a metaphor. Heidegger, at least, could contest any rhetoricising reading'.[54] This is because there is supposed to be no original or historical meaning from which the figure of the self-inflammatory spirit might have emerged as a metaphorical transposition and in which it can be anchored by philological investigation. Yet it would seem quite clear that there is such an historical meaning lying beneath Heidegger and Derrida's elaboration of this figure. In fact the substance of the metaphor is longstanding and deeply rooted in the teachings of Western university metaphysics: namely, in the teaching that increate spirit or God begets or inflames itself and simultaneously brings forth its creatures in a kind of reciprocal inflaming.[55] Derrida's claim that there is no historical meaning to be philologically recovered from the 'Spirit is flame' metaphor — that he, following Heidegger, is simply disclosing the presence that manifests itself in poetic language — is thus the pure effect of his self-transformative hermeneutics. It is a symptom of the fact that Derrida performs the openness to Being that allows someone who is undergoing an illuminative transfiguration to receive the truth of spirit in the form of an oracular revelation. For such a reading, the text is not an object of philological knowledge, but the occasion for an act of self-transformation.

This is a pointer to the *third* characteristic feature of post-Kantian theory, namely, that the truth of theory is tied to the spiritual qualification of the theoretical persona. Given that Derrida rejects the idea of a historical–philological meaning to be recovered from the text, then the truth (or rather the 'authenticity') of his reading lies in his performance of the reading itself. But this is only because this performance is an act of self-transformation structured by the post-Kantian spirituality of the concealment and disclosure of Being. In other words, the truth of Derrida's interpretation resides in the performance of a

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[51] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11. The ineluctably *ad hominem* character of this performantial reading is shown by the manner in which it can be used to spiritually disqualify those who remain within the bounds of philological scholarship. Peggy Kamuf thus discredits Stephen Greenblatt's reading of the ghost scene — in which he brings to bear contextualising knowledge of Elizabethan theological debate on spirits — by characterising Greenblatt as the scholar who remains trapped in a specular scientific attitude, failing to open himself to the hidden gaze of Being. In other words, Kamuf castigates Greenblatt for failing the psychagogical task set by Derrida, whose school Greenblatt has declined to attend. See Peggy Kamuf, 'The Ghosts of Critique and Deconstruction', in *Deconstruction: A Reader*, ed. M. McQuillan (Edinburgh, 2000), 198–217.

[52] Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Chicago, 1989), 84.

[53] Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 84.

[54] Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 96.

[55] For a typical early modern formulation of this conception of the divine spiritual substance, we can turn to the work of the Lutheran metaphysician Christoph Scheibler, *Opus metaphysicum, duobus libris universum hujus scientiae systema comprehendens* (Giessen, 1617), bk. II, ch. 3, 542–48, 553–59. The notion that humans could only know the divine spiritual substance by perfecting their own spiritual substance or soul was also standard. See, for example, Wilhelm Eswyler, *De idea Dei et mundi* (Utrecht, 1692). For an introductory commentary, see Jean-Luc Marion, 'The Idea of God', in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. D. Garber and M. Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 265–304.

transfigurative reading designed to form a subject deemed capable of acceding to truth in a special way: that is, by hearing the echo of Being in the musicality of language itself. In short, to return to our point of departure, Derrida's reading does not take place within the domain of the true and the false: the domain that is here formed by criticism's own empirical knowledge, philology. It takes place, rather, as a means of forming a particular way of acceding to truth, a particular intellectual comportment. This is the comportment or persona that Heidegger had identified with the 'theoretical man [who] necessarily tears himself away from the natural attitude', and that de Man invests in the 'unquestionable purity' through which Hölderlin accedes to the 'flash of illumination'. In other words, the aim of the heremeneutics of theory is not philological truth but spiritual authenticity and authority.

Given that this hermeneutic is an act of spiritual self-transformation designed to achieve openness to Being, it cannot be invalidated by the accumulation of contrary evidence, as if it were making falsifiable claims about the (philological) meaning of texts. Neither, though, can it be relegated as a modish mystagoguery in favour of the rational clarity of philosophy, Kantian, for example; for we have shown that, as a transposition of Western philosophical spirituality, post-Kantian theory is a filial descendent of Kantian metaphysics. For the same reasons, however, this hermeneutic cannot be validated (and universalised) by simply presenting the 'question of Being', the 'event of meaning', or the 'hearing' of Heidegger's spirit in the musicality of poetic language; as these things can only be presented to those subjects who are themselves engaged in the act of hermeneutic self-transformation that permits access to them. Like the 'visor', the 'exchange of looks', linguistic *différance*, or the 'body of language', these figures are not objects of knowledge available to a neutral audience or universal subject. Rather, access to them depends on the reflex effects of acts of spiritual self-transformation. They are thus present only to a 'few serious young notables [who] would rise, through becoming philosophers, to the forbidding heights of a life-style different from that of the majority of their peers'; although the exoteric transposition and pedagogical dissemination of these acts has indeed swelled the ranks of the serious young notables.

It is significant, then, that it is just at this point — that is at the point of reflecting on the conditions under which the 'question of Being' might be posed, and to whom — that Derrida insists on the impossibility of this reflection. Apparently this is because 'we' are ourselves the product of this question:

> Now who are we? Here, let us not forget, we are first and only determined from the opening to the *question of Being*. Even if Being must be given to us for that to be the case, we are only at this point, and know of 'us' only this: the power or rather the possibility of questioning, the experience of questioning.[56]

A little later, now perhaps speaking again through Heidegger, Derrida draws the conclusion: 'Given that nothing precedes it, spiritual duction remains itself un-conducted ... As *Führer*, it goes or comes on the way, in front, up in front, before all politics, all psychagogy, all pedagogy'.[57] Were this not to be the case — were Heidegger's question of Being itself to have historical conditions in the psychagogical and pedagogical acts of self-transformation that require it to be asked — then, says Derrida, it would not be free of 'camp-following' and discipleship, of the logic of the 'party ... of the School as academic study, technical apprenticeship, or professional training'.[58]

We have provided an historical argument, however, that there are indeed historically contingent conditions for the posing of the question of Being. These are to be found in the transformation of Kantian philosophical spirituality by its post-Kantian rival: the transformation that witnessed the *noumenon* changed from something that the subject recollects from within into something that breaks into 'natural' subjectivity from without. Further, these conditions are to be found in the literary-tropological transposition of this spirituality into a distinctive hermeneutic act of self-transformation, performed using texts as 'occasions'. Derrida's hearing of Heidegger's spirit is simply one such performance, and his insistence that 'we' only exist by hearing the question of Being is neither more nor less than the identification of the members of a particular metaphysical school with humanity. It is just this identification of metaphysical spirituality with humanity, though, that drove Heidegger's program to overcome the 'objectifying' concealment of Being by compelling scientists to open themselves to ontological questioning. As far as I know, Derrida never proposed anything like this. Nonetheless, in treating what is in fact a particular kind of spirituality as if it were the only way of acceding to our authentic selves — in his claim that 'we are first and only determined from the opening to the *question of Being*' — Derrida does identify the theoretical comportment with humanity. In this regard, at least, post-Kantian theory would have filled the early modern historians of philosophy with a bleak sense of *déja vu*, as they had seen this kind of 'sectarian philosophy' before.

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[56] Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 17.
[57] Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 43.
[58] Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 44.