SPECTRAL MEDIATIONS:

RHETORIC, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE THINKING OF ORIGINARY TECHNICS

by

KENNETH RUFO

(Under the Direction of Kevin Michael Deluca)

ABSTRACT

Rather than talk about what mediation is and what it does or does not entail, this dissertation is concerned with the strategies by which mediation has been theorized and what those strategies mean politically and philosophically. This dissertation takes for granted that experience, reality, thought, communication and whatever else have been mediated from the beginning, and argues that we must begin to interrogate how the different responses to this mediation have manifested, how mediation has historically rejected and denounced, as well as celebrated and glorified. And we must begin to think how these different theoretical strategies for dealing with mediation continue in the discussions of media today. Finally, and most importantly, we must begin to ask about the very serious costs of maintaining these different ways of thinking the technics of mediation, something this project attempts by looking at texts from Plato and Lacan, the writings of Derrida and Heidegger, as well as the fiction of Kipling and the virtual reality of *The Matrix*.

INDEX WORDS: Rhetoric, Philosophy, Originary Technics, Media Ecology, Mediation

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This project progressed via a pretty tortured route. What began as an explication of certain tropes in contemporary discourses about cyberspace morphed into a work about philosophy, or more precisely how different philosophical positions respond to the problem posed by mediation. The project ended moderately well, even if it carries with it some substantial failures. More could have been done, in pretty much every capacity – preparation, research, thinking, writing, and so on. Still, as difficult and time-consuming as a dissertation may be, it is still just a dissertation, and as such, I will accept the failures while trying to remain more than a bit pleased with the successes contained therein. Those successes are due in very large part to a number of people, and I want to take this space to thank them.

First and foremost, I am indebted to Kevin DeLuca, who has been my adviser since the beginning of my doctoral program, and was immensely helpful in providing assistance and direction for this project. He is an exceptional reader, a characteristic that is invaluable in this line of work. My committee—Michelle Ballif, Celeste Condit, Bonnie Dow, Tom Lessl, and Richard Menke—provided a diverse and impressive array of insights and inspiration. This dissertation would have amounted to little without their support and guidance.

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A Preface of Sorts:

Technics, History, and a Preambulatory Case Study

Jacques Derrida, writing in the foreword to *Dissemination*, notes the strange conditions of a preface. Anticipating his own reading of Hegel's "Preface" to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Derrida takes objection to the strange structure that governs what is called the "preface:"

> A *preface* would retrace and presage here a *general* theory and practice of construction, that strategy without which the possibility of a critique exists in fragmentary, empiricist surges that amount in effect to a non-equivocal confirmation of metaphysics. The preface would announce in the future tense ("this is what you are going to read") the conceptual content of significance... of what will *already* have been *written*. And thus sufficiently *read* to be gathered up in its semantic tenor and proposed in advance. From the viewpoint of the fore-word, which creates an intention-to-say after the fact, the text exists as something written—a past—which, under the false appearance of a present, a hidden omnipotent author is presenting to the reader as his future. Here is what I wrote, then read, and what I am writing that you are going to read.[1]

Thus the conventions of a preface: to forecast what has already come before, and to transform the past act of writing into the present (and future present) act of reading. This is why Derrida finds the recouping of metaphysics proper in the operations of the preface; the preface repeats and confirms the structure of presence and the myth of transparency that drive the ontotheological belief in knowledge.

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As conventions, these conditions are not strictly necessary, but they are functionally indispensable. Conventions are both derivative from and constitutive of—in other words, a "preface" would not be knowable as a preface if not for the conventions associated with it. It is as much identified by its techniques as it is by its title; indeed, should semantic push come to titular shove, one suspects that the labeling of a preface matters much less than the fore-wording of what is to come. This fore-wording, governed as it is by convention, becomes sedimented, stable, and predictable. But this is not the end of the story. At some point, conventions had to be convened, and each rearticulation of those conventions, each repeated convening, also carries the seed of the conventions' undoing. As conventions become regular, and consequently regulated, they simultaneously become all the more apparent. And once these norms rise visibly to the surface, they are open to examination, reformation, and play. Derrida's discussion of the preface to a work through the preface of his own work calls attention to the textuality that makes possible a preface and thereby unbinds the *act* of writing his foreword from the *norms* of writing a preface, opening both act and norms to critique. The result: one begins to think about the conventions of the preface, to be sure, but one also begins to consider the more original, more anterior conventions of writing and of reading in general, the normative patterns of metaphysics, and the connection that those metaphysical formations have to the seemingly disconnected conventions of inscription. In a book like *Dissemination*, given over to nothing but the discussion of this connection, Derrida's preface approaches the productive aporia of unhinging the preface while doing exactly what every preface must: performing the what-is-to-come of the text.

This brief discussion does not resolve the obvious questions that animate it. How can a preface—this preface—take place, when it serves to forecast what has already occurred? What

are the strategies by which it navigates this tension? Can such a negotiation take place without duplicating and recouping a metaphysics that operates in a direction opposed to that of this project? Pithy answers may not be forthcoming, but the pursuit of the questions remains valuable. In many ways, this brief excerpt from Derrida's own preface already raises and engages the issue that animates this study; the questions that he raises about the structure, function, and genre of the preface—the questions I raise here—are questions that confront directly the problem of technics. In so doing, he provides the perfect foreword to this one.

Technics and the Death of Mediation

This dissertation explores the rhetoric of technics—how it is that different ways of thinking about technics manifest themselves in words and in images, in theory and in popular culture. I argue that these different ways of dealing with technics have political and philosophical consequences, influencing different ways of thinking the "political" and impacting, for good or for ill, portions of theory or philosophy seemingly unrelated to the question of technics. These different experiences of thinking technics emerge from particular historical and material conditions, since by necessity, the conceptualization of technics employed in these discourses refers to the technologies and media ecologies in which different thinkers find themselves.

That means that from the beginning, I confront a conceptual difficulty. One cannot write a dissertation about the rhetoric of technics without paying very careful attention to those ecologies that make such a project possible. Here I confront a reflexive hiccup: if I am to argue that shifts in technics – or the thinking of technics – produce different ways of thinking and different tropes to govern that thought, I cannot excuse myself from such an assessment. Hence

the importance of what may appear to be merely a "semantic" decision: the use of the term "technics" offers a relatively new way of engaging and complicating the discussion of mediation, a topic that has become pronouncedly common of late. A shift in terminology hardly resolves the hiccup at issue, but it does create some distance between the object of this study and the thing called mediation. The scope and value of this distance will be pursued more in chapter one.

For now, we should note that the issue of mediation—and not coincidentally, the use of that term—announces itself seemingly everywhere with increasing obviousness. But we should understand just what this entails, because the study of mediation is not the same thing as the study of media. Scholars and thinkers have long been concerned with media content and media effects. As a means of disseminating content, television and film have a broader and more pervasive reach in the contemporary West than does print. As such, scholars have had a vested interest in analyzing these artifacts for ideological constructs, portrayals of race and gender, all many other sorts of political determinations, often in the guise of the rhetoric of popular culture or cultural studies. This study of media, or more accurately, this study of its content, follows a conventional schema of representation, one that assigns a certain discreteness between the object and its reference, and focuses more on the meaning of said representation and less on the imbrication that meaning has with its particular means of representing. Scholars involved in mass communication research have also focused on these media by measuring their effects—how persuasive are their ideological constructs, how memorable are their various messages, and how agenda-setting are the issues they highlight. These two ways of approaching media have supplied important insights into the effects that new media have (or might have) on social formations, but they are increasingly being supplemented and/or supplanted by a concern over a more subtle relationship between media and those who interface with it.

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We can log three exhibits.

First, academic departments focusing on media and mediation, rather than simply mass communication or film, are increasingly common, especially in the so-called academic West, with prominent examples throughout North America, Europe, and Australia. In addition, traditional communication departments have also been reorganized to pursue this interdisciplinary focus on media, with Indiana University and Georgia Tech providing cogent examples closer to home. These transformations not only revamp and reorient traditional communication studies, they also combine more narrowly construed "film" or "television" studies into the broader rubric of media studies.

Second, scholarship on mediation is proliferating at a rapid pace. The study of media ecologies, quickened by the recent formation of the Media Ecology Association and its new journal, *Explorations in Media Ecology*, offers one of the more promising avenues for thinking media today. Thinkers such as Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis, among others, have provided inspiration for a new generation of media ecologists such as Jay Bolter, Lev Manovich, Paul Levinson, Douglas Rushkoff, and Neil Postman. These thinkers evidence different politics and divergent priorities, but they are united by their concern with the social and psychic effects of mediation. In addition to the discussion of media ecologies, a sociologically determined emphasis on mediation understood by way of simulacra can be seen in the work of Jean Baudrillard, Rex Butler and Arthur and Marilouise Kroker. Then there is the so-called "non-modern" approach, inspired by Michel Serres, and most identifiable in the work of Bruno Latour. Finally, there has been something of a poststructural turn in the thinking of mediation, evidenced most ardently in the writing of Friedrich Kittler, Samuel Weber, Bernard Stiegler, and, of course,

Jacques Derrida. Suffice it to say that a lot of heavy hitters have turned their attention to questions concerning mediation.

Third, even the field of rhetorical studies provides increasing evidence of a sensitivity to mediation. I will offer just a handful of examples. John Durham Peters, in an extremely powerful contribution to the field, places the question of mediation at the heart of the study of rhetoric, arguing that as a consequence the emphasis on communication can and should be replaced by a focus on dissemination.[2] Kevin DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples have recently attempted to retheorize how the public gets constituted by televisual image-events in their award winning essay on the "public screen."[3] Robert Hariman and John Lucaites have published a series of essays focusing on what they call "iconic photography" in an effort to produce a critical appreciation for images that gives the visual its due while integrating that due into a fairly conventional liberal humanism.[4] Sarah Stein has dealt explicitly with how the disjunct between the visual and the verbal impacts television journalism in *60 Minutes*.[5] Robert Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus have spent time trying to appreciate how DVDs uniquely impact the consumption of home videos, even if their appreciation remains horribly limited.[6] Christine Harold, in her forthcoming piece "Pranking Rhetoric," pays careful attention to the viral mechanics of contemporary mediation and the means by which it escapes the more conventional dialectics of representation by inviting participation in the spread of brand memes.[7] Thomas Frentz and Janice Hocker-Rushing, in their recent piece on *The Matrix*, spend a great deal of time talking out their own mediation vis-a-vis the film's over-the-top special effects.[8] And so on and so forth. These are limited but recent examples, and they are just the tip of a mediation iceberg no longer submerged beneath the study of public address and historical oratory. Sure, these rhetorical approaches to media often remain tied to more conventional notions of media studies,

and many of them remain wedded to classical theories of representation,[9] but nevertheless these studies show a discipline concerned with mapping the terrain of mediation.

A certain question imposes itself at this point. If suddenly people like myself, and all the supporters this dissertation cites, are paying attention to mediation proper, and not just to the content or the effects of particular representations in media, we have to ask: *why now?* What has catapulted the question of mediation to the foreground? What makes mediation today so important, so meaningful?

Part of the answer, paradoxically, may be that mediation no longer *means* anything. Thinkers like Maurice Blanchot and Jean Baudrillard argue that concepts appear clearest and most open for discussion at precisely the moment when the concepts themselves lose their historical value, and concomitantly, their semantic coherence.[10] This semantic "death" happens for a couple of reasons: first, the concept loses its value in light of changes in thinking or shifts in the culture, and second, the concept reaches a point of ubiquity that renders it utterly obvious. A strident example comes from the work of Michel Foucault. As Baudrillard explains, Foucault becomes obsessed with the disciplinary history and microphysics of "power" just as modern media changes the social landscape entirely, replacing the classic concepts of influence and power with simulations of those concepts. This blind spot towards the constitutive effect of modern media helps clarify why Foucault so rarely continues his genealogies of power past the spread of television, or why he never isolates how radio or newspapers encouraged particular arrangements of power. The problem, for Baudrillard, as it is for many who wrestle with Foucault's insights,[11] is that power manifests itself in particular historical modes even as the concept of power remains itself transhistorical. If power is always already everywhere, then how and why do we continue to identify it as a discrete conceptual entity? Power has died, at least

metaphorically—its historical importance has declined at the same moment it finds itself diffused in every social nook and cranny. This does not mean we should ignore its death rattles, translated as they are into academic prose, but it does undermine any attempt to think the instantiation of power outside of very particular historical contingencies.

I will suggest that the current fervor regarding mediation, of which this dissertation is a part, comes out of a similar movement. Mediation implies an active going between, an insertion somewhere in the middle of two objects, entities or events. But with the ubiquity of modern media, this possibility of going between begs the question, most pertinently, between what? As media have become more ubiquitous, the line that marked the terrain of this between—between human and machine, information and knowledge, transmission and translation—has been continuously whittled down and become rather indistinct. Even the distinction between human and animal continues to dissipate, an erasure due in large part to the contributions of the technologies of genomics and the biological reduction of the human body to its component technologies.[12] Cyborg bodies, brain implants, the science of genetics, the quantum physics of thinking, the pursuit of direct, transparent interfacing with advanced technology, artificial intelligence and artificial life—this space between has gotten tenuous at best. And as a consequence, thanks to popular work by thinkers like Donna Haraway and Arthur Kroker, writers like R. U. Sirius and William Gibson, and movies like *The Matrix* and *Ghost in the Shell*, it has become remarkably difficult to defend the existence of a real or idealized space between these paired terms. Which is not to say that people do not try to defend such a space, and defend it staunchly, to the death, as if everything depended upon it. I will be turning to some of the strategies of that defense soon enough, but for now it is simply worth noting the difficulties attending the maintenance of any clean division given recent technological advances.

With the rise of digital media and the global rewiring associated with the Internet, even the difference between various media has become increasingly unclear. Every analog inscription and transmission can be and is being recoded for digital playback and manipulation. Old records, rare manuscripts, television feeds, and so on—these older media are increasingly being rendered and made available as a product of binary 1s and 0s of computer-speak. Newer content never sees analog form, existing only in the digital ether of compact discs and DVDs, or somewhere in the implacable surface of a hard drive as mpeg and mp3 files. Digital processes have collapsed the functional distinction between what were once distinct forms of media. And as a consequence, mediation has given up the ghost, so to speak, relinquishing its historical value even as it appears to be everywhere at once, constituted by the omnipresence of binary code in digital technologies. Everyone wants to talk about it because no one is really sure if it means anything anymore.

This shift in the social and subjective relation to media is perhaps most evident in the recent terminological and technological expansion of "cyberspace," a term that signifies a wide range of relationships to new media technology. Cyberspace is at once a naming of the imaginary realm of computer networks and the visual space of the web, and a label for the connection between telephones, electronic networks, and computer monitors. It is the signifier of a non-space, or at least a space experienced only through the interactions it makes possible. No one experiences the flow of electrons across the telephone wires or the transfer of packets that make possible internet communication, but they do experience those interactions, those attempts at connection, as evidence of the ever present and alternate modality of cyberspace.

This modality, which is now accepted as a casual fact of life, a technological fait accompli, is a surprisingly recent phenomenon. "Cyberspace" the concept emerges at the dawn

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of the 1980s with the publication of Vernor Vinge's *True Names*, a novella that "presaged everything from Internet interactive games to *Neuromancer*."[13] Four years later, with the Internet celebrating just one year in existence,[14] William Gibson's wildly successful *Neuromancer* catapulted "cyberspace" into common usage. Derived from the Greek *kubernetes*, from whence also comes the word "governor," the *cyber* of cyberspace "connotes automation, artificial control, and computerization."[15] Space, construed as a perceptual expanse, is juxtaposed and imbricated with the manipulated artifice of computers. Gibson's *Neuromancer* envisioned cyberspace as the collation of global data and information into a virtual architecture that could be navigated by a disembodied consciousness as facilitated by a direct neural-computer plug-in. He writes:

> Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children behind taught mathematical concepts… A graphic representation abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding.[16]

Gibson's vision does not exist today; his description stems from fictional musings on the future of global information.[17] Instead, the widespread use of *cyberspace* as a label for today's network infrastructure can be credited to John Perry Barlow, former cattle rancher, lyricist for the Grateful Dead, and cyberspace pioneer, who recognized a nascent version of Gibsonian cyberspace in the Internet and beyond. Bruce Sterling describes the Barlovian conception of cyberspace as:

> the 'place' where a telephone conversation appears to occur. Not inside your actual phone… Not inside the other person's phone… The place between the phones. The indefinite place out there, where the two of you, two human beings, actually meet and

communicate… Although it is not exactly 'real', 'cyberspace' is a genuine place. Things

happen there that have very genuine consequences.[18]

More than just the simple non-space of telephone conversations, cyberspace can be seen today in

the glow of computer monitors and the growing production of data-gloves.   For the purposes of

this dissertation, I will construe cyberspace rather broadly, incorporating technologies as diverse

as virtual reality, telematics, and computer-mediated communication under its semantic auspices.

Of course, the best example remains the one with which most are familiar, the one identified as

cyberspace by Barlow. Constructed by computer code and experienced in such diverse

technologies as the World Wide Web, Usenet, Instant Messenger, Multi-User Domains, VRML

avatars and Massive Multiplayer Online environments, the Internet offers, at present, the best

known experience of cyberspace.

More and more objects of popular culture evince this intuitive belief in the non-space of

cyberspace. The enormously successful Matrix movies, more independent films about mediation

like *eXistenZ* and *The Thirteenth Floor*, cutting edge crossover anime like *.//HackSign* and *Serial*

Experiment Lain, television shows like the *X-Files* and *VR-5*, an entire sub-genre of print science

fiction, with authors like William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Melissa Scott, Neil Stephenson,

Douglas Rushkoff, and Charles de Lint, and various miscellany: the mental space of Haruki

Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, cyberspace cameos in films like

Swordfish, *Hackers*, and *The Net*—the list could go on.

The novelty of cyberspace is not the construction or emplacement of fictitious worlds.

Those worlds have always existed/been posited, but they have, for the most part, been the

province of the supernatural, the magical, or the whimsical. The novelty of cyberspace is how

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explicitly and pervasively those worlds have tied their existence to interaction with media technologies.

I want to spend the rest of this preface attempting to demonstrate the importance of this new "media ecology." If the history of its development, as either a technology or a concept, show anything, it is that cyberspace connects with the cultural imaginary in a powerful way. In doing so it puts certain concepts, once hegemonic, into crisis. But I want to be cautious here. History is not some simple, linear narrative, with rising action and a series of climaxes that point to progress or evolution or advancement; histories are not, in other words, overdetermined by their futures. These new technologies of cyberspace may put older concepts into crisis, but they are in turn put into a different sort of crisis by those histories they inherit. To demonstrate this I will offer a brief reading of J. Hillis Miller's *On Literature* to show how the idea of literature has come under conceptual assault from changes in media even as it has returned fire in a rather stealthy fashion. Finally, I will end this preface exactly as Derrida has portended, with hints of what is still to come.

Miller's Virtual Reality (The Crisis of Literature)

If I recognize my own status as a product of cyberspace—which is to say a subject socialized by a certain level of media technology, raised with and familiar with the Internet and other new media—it turns out that I am not alone. Like it or not, choose it or not, everyone and everything has become a product of cyberspace. As with cyberspace, so with every conceptual and cultural development; the allegedly new manifests in a rethinking of the old, especially when it comes to mediation. This basic truism was one of the primary concerns directing Heidegger's thinking in his "Age of the World Picture" and it is the logic that Baudrillard sees governing the

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"precession" of simulacra in the contemporary media environment. The unavoidable ubiquity of new media and their particular mediations has had a pervasive effect on thought, reshaping ideas that came before it and dressing them in new vocabularies.

"Literature" provides one of the best examples, something that can be seen by examining J. Hillis Miller's 2002 text on the subject. The book is itself explicitly a response to the crisis of literature, and accordingly Miller begins with a strangely twisted farewell to the subject that will consume the length of his book: "The end of literature is at hand. Literature's time is almost up. It is about time. It is about, that is, the different epochs of different media. Literature, in spite of its approaching end, is nevertheless perennial and universal. It will survive all historical and technological changes."[19] This paradox, that literature is at once both dead and immortal, governs all of *On Literature*, and it reveals some significant "realities" about the relationship between cyberspace and those fields, like literature, that come before it.

That literature must be dying for it to have come under discussion repeats the argument regarding the conceptual status of mediation given above. Miller ties this imminent (if paradoxically survivable) death to the overwhelming hegemony afforded to new media, a hegemony that comes from the devaluation of the printed word. He writes: "Western literature belongs to the age of the printed book and of other print forms like newspapers, magazines, and periodicals generally."[20] That age has come and gone, and its passing is lethal: "In addition, technological changes and the concomitant development of new media are bringing about the gradual death of literature in the modern sense of the word. We all know what those new media are: radio, cinema, television, video, and the Internet, soon universal wireless video."[21] Miller spends the entirety of the first chapter parsing this demise, linking it to shifts in the organization of nation-states and predictions of academic reorganizations that eventually demote the standing

and funding of English departments under the guise of economic necessity. If literature is dying, it may well be taking the "discipline" of English with it.

But this bonding of literature to its printed binding need not be the only way to conceptualize literature. Miller makes this clear, noting that in a second sense, the sense that will not be killed by new media, "literature is a universal aptitude for words or other signs to be taken as literature."[22] Words or other signs? Not only does this conceptualization free literature from the ecology of print, it also frees it from the technics of alphabetic inscription. This freeing continues with an interesting aside two pages later: "Literature exploits a certain potentiality in human beings as sign-using animals. A sign, *for example a word*, functions in the absence of the thing named to designate that thing, 'to refer to it,' as linguists say."[23] Literature thus remains immortal as a concept, which is to say, as a relationship to and between signs. The printed word functions as the dominant example of that relationship, but Miller wants to make clear that it is just one example, even though Miller never actually offers examples of literature that do not begin with the word, either here or throughout the text. Still, as much as literature (in the historical sense of printed material) may be dying, Miller remains eminently hopeful regarding literature (in the conceptual sense) carrying on despite that crisis.

We can contrast this take with someone like Sven Birkerts, who carries the concern with the death of literature through to a much more apocalyptic conclusion.   Birkerts agrees that cyberspace changes the nature of literature and transforms the experience of reading, but he views this transformation as a dire event, one that should be laden with caution signs. Unabashedly humanist in his orientation, Birkerts wants no part in thinking literature in terms of more recent technologies. He writes: "My core fear is that we are, as a culture, as a species, becoming shallower; that we have turned form depth... and our adapting ourselves to the ersatz

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security of a vast lateral connectedness. That we are giving up on wisdom, the struggle for which has for millennia has been central to the very idea of culture, and that we are pledging instead to a faith in the web."[24] Birkerts makes it clear from the beginning of his elegy that, for him, a great chasm exists between the new media technology and the gift of language: "I speak as an unregenerate reader, one who still believes that language and not technology is the true evolutionary miracle."[25]

Miller would seem to disagree, both in terms of the valence and the clean separation of language and technology. For my purposes, the most important portion of Miller's book comes with his conflation of literature and virtual reality, a trope that occurs throughout the book and even situates itself in the title of two of the six chapters. Literature comes to be understood as cyberspace, or perhaps an originary cyberspace, but for it to be so understood, one must already cede a certain conceptual privilege to cyberspace and virtual reality as terms. And one must do this, especially, because Miller refuses to contribute to any sense of what virtual reality or cyberspace might entail.

At least a dozen comparisons are made between literature and virtual reality, and in no instance does Miller ever offer any discussion of what "virtual reality" entails. He leaves the term bereft of exposition, floating in the text repeatedly to emphasize the inventive potential of literature to create fictional worlds. One might be tempted to think that fictional worlds are thus synonymous with virtual realities, but this temptation would be shortsighted. Miller is a linguistic technician; he has authored dozens of books—tomes that touch upon the giants of literature and the complexities of postmodernity with equal grace. One can find his work unpersuasive, or his interests insignificant, but one would be hard pressed to casually cast aside such a deliberate semantic choice. So instead we should ask: what is it in Miller's metaphor that

prompts a hundred and fifty pages defining the tenor (literature) and nary a sentence describing the vehicle (virtual reality)?

A few examples will help decipher this mystery. The first treats virtual reality as if it exists already, somewhere out there in the cultural or technological imaginary, and simply needs to be accessed: "This other world I reached through reading... seemed to me, did not depend for its existence on the words of the book, even though those words were my only window on that virtual reality."[26] Quickly, the comparison becomes inflected with some literary faerie dust, and the act of transporting the reader into those worlds becomes magical: "I have used, and will go on using, the word 'magic' to name the power that words on the page have to open up a virtual reality when they are read as literature."[27] A page later, lest we think Miller's emphasis on the "words on the page" lends any singularity to conventional, printed literature, he explicitly assigns the magical force to new media technologies: "Cinema, television, CDs, VCRs, MP3 gadgets, computers, and the Internet have become our dominant far-seeing and far-hearing conjurers, sorcerers, prestidigitators, animators of talking heads. These devices are, in short, our chief purveyors of magic shows. They have incalculable power to determine ideological belief."[28] Literature becomes thought as virtual reality, even in the terms of virtual reality, as a way of explaining what is immortal in literature. If its print avatar is dying a slow death, its immortal essence returns in a more technologically recognized form: cyberspace and virtual reality.[29] Whether this new incarnation is simply a new manifestation, a new corporeal avatar, or instead what is properly immortal and critical in literature remains a bit vague, even if the importance of thinking literature through the technologies of today and tomorrow is resoundingly clear. To wit, Miller thinks of "virtual reality" as a need that transcends most modern media, all of which provide access to whatever virtual reality entails: "The need to enter some virtual reality will be

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satisfied in one way or another – if not by literary works, then by computer games, or by films, or by popular songs in video format."[30] Think of it as literal high definition.

But what is Miller talking about here? In *On Literature*, virtual reality is deployed consistently as a term that compares to and helps understand literature, and Miller deploys it in a manner distinct from the related ideas of imagination, fiction, and even alternative worlds. If Miller had believed or decided that the one term could be substituted for any of the others, that virtual and fictive could be reduced to each other, there would have been no reason why Miller would describe the technology of literature in terms of the technology of cyberspace. But Miller does so, whether by conscious choice or not, and despite incurring a particularly severe risk—he has to describe the singularity of literature by thinking it through a technology that only makes sense to his contemporary readers. In other words, he has to discern the uniqueness of literature through (and against) the increasingly common belief in the strange, technological non-places of virtual reality and cyberspace. Why take this risk?

To attempt an answer requires careful attention to the manner in which virtual reality is deployed, to the fact that it is done so, every time, without a hint of further explanation. It is the new kid on the block, the golden child of the classroom, and apparently it needs no introduction. Whereas literature faces a lethal combination of changes in media, everyone can talk as if virtual reality is known, for granted, i.e. not in crises. And yet it engenders crisis; literature is remade in its tropological image. Sometimes quiet and subtle – as in Miller – sometimes loud and maddeningly blunt – as in Birkerts – the influence wielded by virtual reality operates pathologically to overwhelm and redefine every concept that runs up against it, the consequence of presumably different epochs in mediation. The times of mediation change and thinking changes with them, an arrangement that Sylviane Agacinski describes as the "war that [the

passage of] time wages against the concept, like the concept's moment of crisis confronted with the sudden appearance of the new."[31]

And so it would seem. With Miller especially. That is, though, until one realizes that he *is* secretly talking about virtual reality. He is putting it into its own crisis. Literature may be understood by means of virtual reality – though never through any sustained argument to clarify the relationship between the two – but it is an understanding engendered by the logic of the supplement. By abstracting a core to what constitutes literature and by aligning that core to the abstracting of virtual reality (rather than particularly identified media, all of which are magical but are not in and of themselves magic), the two abstractions interanimate each other. And so literature, thanks to a somewhat secret operation, begins to outline the contours of what qualifies as virtual reality: every quality assigned to literature applies equally to the budding concept and practice of virtual reality—it opens, it is imaginary, it keeps its secrets. This is why Miller takes the risk that he does regarding virtual reality and literature: because the power of literature is the power to define virtual reality, the power to adapt to its successors and in so doing effect, if only slightly, the nature of that succession. In effect (though perhaps unintentionally), Miller's investigation into literature, and his linking of literature to virtual reality, connects and applies his literary investigation to the thinking of virtual reality. And by never describing virtual reality other than by its implicit and sustained connection to literature, the operation remains just below the surface.

Miller's success can be judged by its careful appreciation for the technics of writing, and the use of those technics to respond to the crisis (or death) of literature.[32] His argument is performative but unavoidable, since his paradoxical farewell to literature can only be understood by believing that literature is reborn by and in the thing that kills it. Miller's endeavor may be

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localized to dealing with the fate of literature, but his lesson applies equally well to the other humanities. After all, literature is not alone. It is joined by rhetoric, sociology, political science, and so on – the overwhelming academic trend shows that the humanities have discovered media, or at least it shows that media has forced the humanities to reinvent themselves, a la literature, as a response to increasing mediation. But that rearticulation carries with it a feedback loop that scholars can use to their advantage, like Miller, by availing themselves of the chance to play with the loop itself. In other words, new advances in media may have forced a reworking of old concepts like literature, society, politics, etc.—but media do not, in and of themselves, entirely control or determine the final semantic harvest. The time of mediation may have ended with its viral diffusion, and there may no longer be an identifiable middle ground from which to think the possibility of mediation. But the time to analyze the effects of this diffusion, and the closure of mediation it entails, as well as the time to gauge the response to this closure, is just beginning.

A Final Foreword

If mediation has suffered a semantic death, this dissertation avoids ceding its entire purpose and value by taking that death as its starting point. Rather than talk about what mediation is and what it does or does not entail—which is, if I am right, a less than productive enterprise—I am instead concerned with the actual strategies by which mediation has been theorized and what those strategies mean for us, today, politically and philosophically. I take for granted that experience, reality, thought, communication and whatever else have been mediated from the beginning, and I argue that the increasing obviousness of this fact demands more than mere resignation to the escalating blurring of what were once bedrock distinctions between humanity and technology, or between knowledge and information. Instead, we must begin to

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interrogate how the collapse of these distinctions has been historically rejected and denounced, as well as celebrated and glorified. And we must begin to think how these different theoretical strategies for dealing with mediation continue in the discussions of media today. Finally, and most importantly, we must begin to ask about the very serious costs of maintaining these different ways of thinking the technics of mediation. This dissertation is an attempt to do just that.

Chapter one will explore the concept of originary technics, a way of thinking the aftermath of mediation that denies the original separation of human from machine, or medium from message. To argue for a conception of "originary technics" is to argue that subjectivity is constituted by technics, and as such, technics cannot be assigned to ontologically discrete phenomena, anymore than technics can be said to be secondary and instrumental. The chapter offers a sustained treatment of this thinking of technics, drawing heavily from the work of Jacques Derrida and his friend and former student, Bernard Stiegler. I argue that originary technicity provides a backdrop against which we might consider other responses to the question of technics. In order to enrich the heuristic potential of this backdrop, the chapter focuses on three themes: the spectral (how media produce the phantasm of presence), the messianic (the question of time and timing), and the problem of mimesis (the mechanics by which different media produce different possibilities of representing reality). These three themes will in turn help to illuminate the critiques in the case studies follow chapter one.

The next three chapters present three different case studies. Although each takes the thought of a particular philosopher as one of their objects—Plato, Heidegger, and Lacan respectively—a few initial clarifications about this practice are in order. *First* and foremost, this is not a work of philosophy. I care not for the search for truth, the call of Being, or the proper

demarcation of reality, other than as rhetorical constructs. When philosophers "do philosophy,"

they are doing what every individual does during any debate or discussion—they argue. Sure,

they dress it up in the austere language of "philosophizing," but it remains composed of

particular rhetorical strategies. As such, I view these case studies as rhetorical criticisms of

philosophy, in much the sense that Derrida approaches philosophy (an approach that has earned

him no small amount of grief from more traditional philosophers). I am interested first in how

the rhetorical treatment of media and mediation, or technics in general, serves to bolster,

suppress, or warp seemingly unrelated rhetorical strategies at work elsewhere in their

philosophies and second the political consequences that follow from the treatment of mediation.

If this reads as philosophy, so be it, but understand "philosophy" is not my project here—indeed,

one of the lessons of the first case study is that this division between philosophy and rhetoric, as

to what counts as such and how that counting awards privilege, already cedes far too much

credibility and precedence to philosophical discourse.

Second, one might object to a supposed systematicity at work in these case studies. When

one engages in a critique of Plato, for example, how can one be justified treating the dialogues

that bear the stamp of Plato's name as "the Platonic dialogues?" Does this titular unity treat those

dialogues as effects of an author already undermined by the research of Roland Barthes and

Michel Foucault? Not necessarily. The dialogues share certain traits and certain motifs in

common; I might even say that they share a certain technics that makes their commonality

recognizable. There are differences, to be sure, but those differences do not overwhelm the

commonalities, and "Plato," assuming any vestigial author-function, serves more as an index of

those commonalities than any original source. In other words, Plato, Heidegger, Lacan—these

proper names signify, mark, and index not only the subject to which work is most often attributed, but also the object produced by the encounter with that work.

Third, the reasons for pursuing these particular case studies need to be clarified. Each case study focuses on someone who contributes significantly to the thinking of mediation or technics, or rather, each case study focuses on someone who is seen as making a significant contribution. At the same time, each case study highlights a different way of responding to and negotiating the three themes outlined above (spectrality, time, and mimesis). For the most part, each strategy is defined by its response to the first theme, the question of spectrality, with the other themes impacting and impacted by this *mediation of the spectral*. With that setup, here are the details regarding the three case studies.

Chapter two focuses on Plato's *Phaedrus*. The *Phaedrus* sits at the start of two disciplinary endeavors: rhetoric's separation from and sublimation to philosophy, and the critical assessment of two different media ecologies (the oral vs. the written). This chapter argues that Plato's "grotesque" use of myth is integral to determining the Platonic delineations between rhetoric and philosophy, as well as the separation of knowing (*episteme*) from the means of knowing (*tekhne*). To this end, I identify the work done by the "*psyche*" when Plato negotiates the distinction between good and bad writing, the relationship between writing and rhetoric, and the (often implicit) technics of memory within Platonic thought (where memory is often thought as its externalization). This rhetorical strategy, which I dub "souljacking," helps complete a separation between the subject and the subject's technologies, and sets the stage for a number of conventional binaries: subject/object, reality/appearance, user/instrument and so on. Souljacking signifies a strategy of *appropriation*, by which Plato claims the spectral on behalf of the subject and that subject alone, and than uses that appropriation to distance the subject from its technics.

The binaries this underwrites, and their deficits, are well worn, but approaching their Platonic instantiation from the question of technics offers two compelling reasons to revisit them. First, this approach inserts the question and politics of technics into a conversation that has largely kept technics/mediation at the theoretical margins. Second, this approach conceptualizes the development of Plato's philosophical "system" from within a particular media ecology, and as such indicates how and why certain Platonic concepts might break down as media ecologies shift in directions radically different from those over two millennia old. Finally, this chapter also interrogates the figure of Socrates, mimetically distinct from Plato, in terms of his impact on the understanding of media and representation.

Chapter three juxtaposes two discourses: Rudyard Kipling's short story "Wireless," published in 1902, about the dawn of what we know today as radio, and Martin Heidegger's work regarding technics and mediation. The critique focuses on the question of the spiritual in-between at work in both discourses. Kipling's story makes explicit the spiritual component of media communication, while Heidegger makes explicit the spiritual component of orality, and banishes the possibility of any similar spiritualist encounter with more contemporary media ecologies. This strategy of *expropriation*, which exorcises the spectral from the contemporary scene only to award it, via a sort of technological nostalgia, to an earlier medium (like oral exchange), negotiates the spectral in an interesting and novel way, since it does not require the overt metaphysics and humanism found in Plato's appropriation. The chapter concludes by noting the contemporary application of this strategy in thinkers like Neil Postman.

This chapter offers the only sustained treatment of the rhetoric of Martin Heidegger, but his ghost haunts the entirety of this dissertation. Derrida has a pivotal and inspirational role, to be sure, but Derrida breaks his own trail towards deconstruction in large part as a response to

Heidegger's earlier efforts at *Destruktion*. Heidegger does not always get a lot of screen time in contemporary rhetorical theory, though there are some very notable exceptions.[33] For Samuel Weber, this seemingly slight gap in scholarship marks a rather pronounced caesura in the thinking of representation. He writes:

> Since there can be no doubt as to the role played by Heidegger in problematizing representational thought, the lack of attention so far devoted to his work by critical theorists is symptomatic of a resistance, one which is not very difficult to explain, but which can nevertheless prove quite instructive to analyze. To engage the work of Heidegger necessitates an approach to the problem of representation quite different from that to which we have become accustomed. To put it succinctly: to read Heidegger seriously is to cease treating representation as though it were simply one 'theme' among others or even as an exclusively 'theoretical' issue. Rather, the problem of representational thought imposes itself in an intensely practical way, calling into question conventional styles of academic writing, scholarly or critical.[34]

It is Heidegger who performs the movement of his critique of metaphysics as representation by careful attention to the mechanics of representation at work in language, painting, technology, etc. His critique falls short in some respects – especially when it comes to the in-between of media, rather than more obvious technologies – something I will explore more in the third chapter, but it nevertheless initiates a sea-change in the thinking of technics. As such, his powerful and wide-ranging critique will surface here and there throughout the dissertation, since it remains all but impossible to take mediation and technics seriously without simultaneously taking Heidegger seriously in turn.

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Chapter four offers the final case study, this time focusing on the connections between Jacques Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage," introduced first in the 30s and then again, with some modification, in the 40s, and the treatment of mirrored reflection in the blockbuster cyber-thriller, *The Matrix*, released in 1999. Jacques Lacan may seem like an odd and less obvious focus of the dissertation, as he speaks to technics less directly than do either Plato or Heidegger. But this indirect approach offers its own important variations in that technics becomes a means by which we understand the subject or analysand of psychoanalysis. When it comes to the distinctions to be drawn between different mediations (like cinema, word processing, phonography, etc.), Kittler reminds us that: "Lacan's 'methodological distinction' among the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic is the theory of that differentiation. The symbolic now encompasses linguistic signs in their materiality and technicity... For that reason, Lacan designates 'the world of the symbolic [as] the world of the machine.'"[35] As such, investigating how the technics of the mirror – as well as its peculiar mimetic faculty – offers a way of approaching the current fantasy of controlling the symbolic world. This fantasy plays itself out in *The Matrix*, with the obviously Messianic Neo learning to control the world of the computers and transcend them. By focusing on the film's ninth chapter, in which Neo encounters a mirror and is consumed by it, and in so doing is released from the Matrix, I hope to demonstrate that this fantasy of control can be understood as a strategy of *sublimation*, in which the spectral components of mimesis are internalized and ultimately controlled by the interaction between the subject and its machine.

The final section of the dissertation, the afterword, expands upon the political implications of the three case studies, and the way in which they respond to the death of mediation. Appropriation lends itself to certain humanist impulses, to be sure, but it is not as

simple as aligning the two. And expropriation is not easily reduced to nostalgia, even if a certain

style of nostalgia can be seen at work in what drives Heidegger's particular exorcism. In this

final offering, I suggest that the politics of spectrality and the the politics of time are intrinsically

linked, and offer further suggestions for case studies in line with this dissertation that might make

these consequences and imbrications all the more apparent.

Chapter 2

An Exergue:

Reflections in/on Print

"The written word: in it we no longer live."[36]

Cyberspace may very well galvanize a shift in our public and academic imaginaries, and in so doing prompt new discussions and ways of thinking technics. But I am arguing for the importance of such a technological shift by way of a technology over five centuries old – the printed word. The means of its production have changed, obviously; the words are formed and manipulated somewhere in that cyberspace I was just speaking of, but the means of its dissemination remain, by and large, the paper and print that originated with Gutenberg. How then does one call attention to a medium with such hegemonic ubiquity? And how does one do so while still taking seriously the question of mediation?

Let us begin with the posing of these questions, here in this exergue and specifically regarding this exergue. By definition an exergue is that space on a coin not taken up by the design of the currency, a space that contains information regarding its own production—for example, the date and place at which the particular coin was minted. In a more literal sense, an exergue is a space outside of a work (from *ex-* and *ergon*). This is of course an impossibility, albeit an instructive one. We can probe this a number of different ways, with a number of different emphases.

First, this exergue cannot structurally be outside of the *work*. I have written it; it is a

work of mine. My name is attached to the pages you have before you, which means, given the

conventions of print culture, that something like authorship or ownership of these words is

assigned to me. At the very least, and despite any desire for the death of the author, you will be

forced to hold me responsible for them, if only by the requirements of reading and the conferring

of a degree. Further, the exergue is a product of the work inherent in composition and it comes

to be understood through the work of reading. Without either type of work, there could be no

exergue, here or anywhere. So how can an exergue be, when literally it cannot? This paradox

reflects the same tension that Derrida identifies in any preface, in his "Outwork" to

Dissemination, which I have discussed previously.

Second, this exergue cannot structurally be *outside* of the work. What would one possibly

mean or possibly hope to maintain by the division between the inside and the outside when it

comes to the work of theory, of writing, or of technics? Whatever the metaphysical benefit to

strenuously pursuing such a bifurcation, the pursuit becomes all the more complicated here.

Even should we reconsider the definition of work, and think of a work as a product with a

definite end and beginning, with at least the possibility of an inside and an outside, this exergue

is framed physically by other sections of the dissertation and bound together to those sections. It

cannot be removed without consequently changing the work itself, which means even if one

wanted to transform it into some distal outside, the act of removal would obviate the possibility

of being outside of this work, producing instead two different works previously bound together.

Third, this exergue cannot *structurally* be outside of the work. As a second preface, and a

further stalling of the dissertation proper, it necessarily provides a certain structure. It delays the

reader's arrival at chapter one, but it does not do so by necessity. No lethal coercion was used to

direct the eyes here rather than further along. No overt instructions were given that directed one

to move, in some Pavlovian fashion, from the preface to this exergue. Unlike some media, like

hypertext narratives or flash animations, the entire text sits before you, physically unchanging.

Certain norms direct you to read in a linear fashion, from the first page to the last, but those

norms impose a structure long before you picked up this text, an originary grammar that dictates

how must read and encounter the printed word. In other words, you have access to the text in its

entirety, but that access is always already structured by convention. In the same way, the process

of writing such a secondary preface suffers from its own conventions, its own structurality, and

its own paradoxes.

Sometime before August, assuming some moderate success at my defense, this

dissertation will eventually be turned over to the library and bound, in hardback or electronic

form, and be filed away somewhere in the bowels of the library. This process of turning over and

binding is, like all publishing, well regulated. It is governed by a set of rules set forth by the

graduate school and refined in response to different exigencies. As with the vast majority of

what passes as a book in western culture, a hard copy of this document will read from left to

right, bound in a manner not too unlike the codex developed a hundred years before Christ went

around resetting the calendar. The text, and whatever else "supplements" that text (pictures,

graphs, tables), will follow established norms for appearance. These norms produce their own

type of mediation and their own juridical thrust.

Indeed, the standard style guide for theses and dissertations at the University of Georgia

outlines the accepted conventions extremely clearly.[37] Fonts are to be size 11 or 12 and the

typeface should be "one normally associated with a standard word processing program."

Variations from this, it explains, are prohibited because "non-standard fonts may not survive the

conversion into PDF format." For similar reasons, the "entire thesis or dissertation, including figure and table captions, and all page numbers, must be typed in the same typeface and size." There are some exceptions outlined to this requirement, though none are particularly unexpected: footnotes, body of tables, body of figures, reproduced materials, and "portions of the main text where the content absolutely requires a different font (e.g. computer code, different voices in a dialogue, etc.)."

While these sorts of style restrictions announce with some degree of obviousness their imbrication with the contemporary technologies of printing and archiving, they announce that imbrication in a manner that forecloses many of the strategies for playing with it—that is, at least, if one plans on graduating. Which, incidentally, I do.

So what then does this exergue do?

On the one hand, it might make explicit the materiality of the text itself, just as the space on a coin offers information about the coin's production. This is a difficult postulate to maintain in terms of the uniqueness of this exergue however, no matter how self-reflexive, since every appearance of a word or grapheme on any page of this or any other project tells us something of the materiality of a text. Every word informs us about diction, about words not chosen and grammars not deployed in the so-called "prison house" of language. Every typographic decision regarding margins and white space or font and font size is consequently an exergue by definition. These formatting decisions frame any work and delimit it, thus making possible even the thinking of something like an "exergue."

On the other hand, the explicit articulation of an exergue interrupts the structural conventions of a dissertation. It stalls, it fills space, it delays, if only because of its obsessive and obvious self-reflection, like a nonfiction homage to Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a*

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Traveler.[38] Once a decision is made to call attention to the technics of writing a dissertation, the call itself has to be negotiated; it has to navigate between the constraints of the publishing technologies employed by the graduate school and the desire to expose the arbitrary and ideological ramifications of those technologies. But therein lies an academically-determined, political difficulty. Given the constraints imposed upon me by the graduate school, I can choose to interrogate the materiality of the text but I cannot do so in a manner that performs that interrogation by playing with the font or format of the text itself. Other approaches, in other venues, have been much more radical, and I want to turn to those before moving on to the first chapter.

I want to highlight two approaches that experiment with print in the context of scholarship on language.[39] The first experiment comes courtesy of Berkeley professor Avital Ronell with the 1989 publication of *The Telephone Book*.[40] Focusing chiefly on the figure of Martin Heidegger, this ambitious text attempts to think Western philosophy's relation to technology in general and the telephone in particular. Throughout the book, Ronell plays with the conventions of print, at times transforming her academic writing into a visual analog of an actual telephone book, with yellow pages and all. At other times, margins appear in the center, weaving through the text and breaking up the flow of the sentence. Questions begin to be asked: why is the break there, rather than here? How does it construct the meaning as well as the flow of what is written? Below are two examples (figures 1 and 2) of the sort of textual play in which Ronell engages.
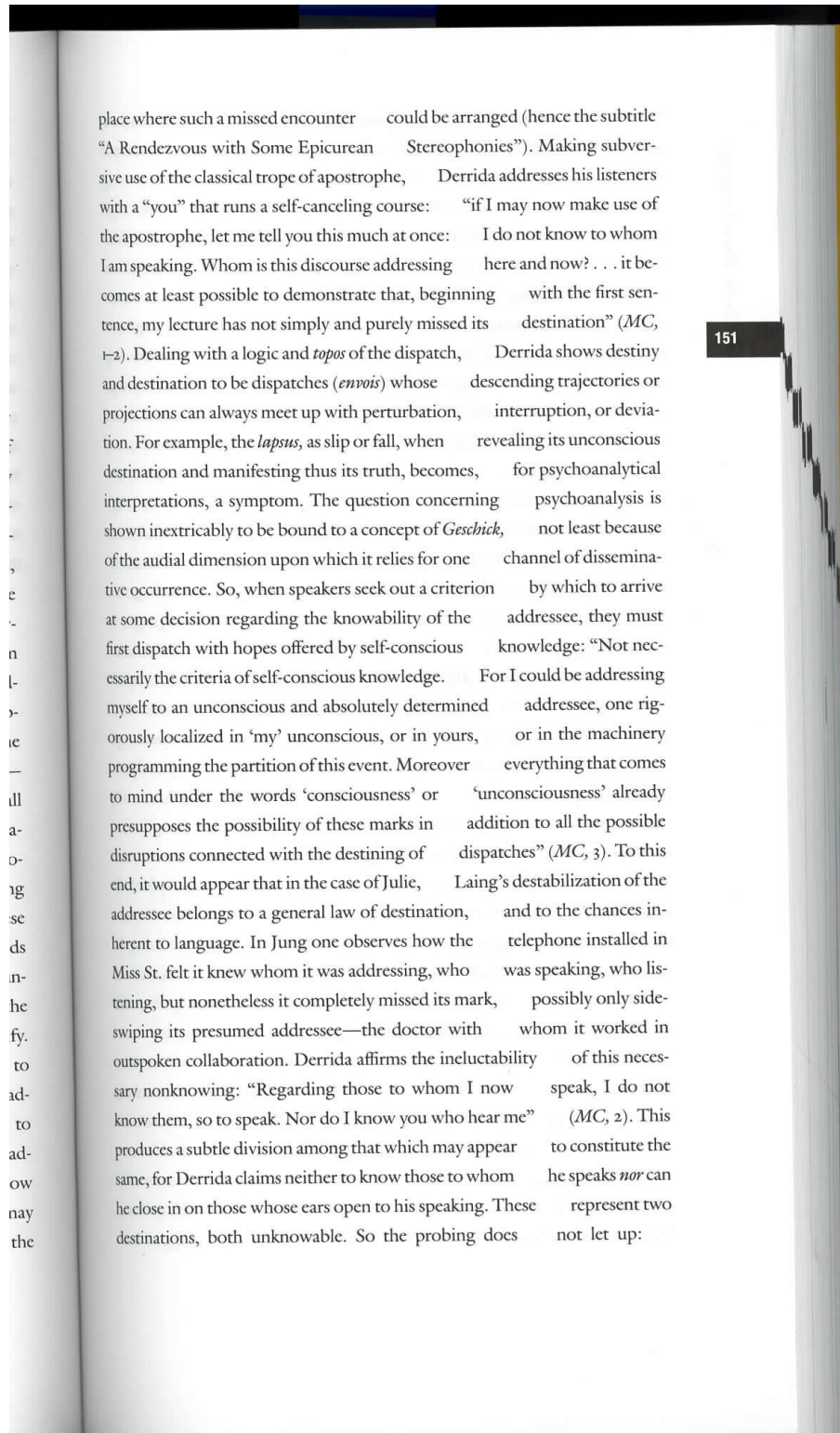
place where such a missed encounter could be arranged (hence the subtitle "A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies"). Making subversive use of the classical trope of apostrophe, Derrida addresses his listeners with a "you" that runs a self-canceling course: "if I may now make use of the apostrophe, let me tell you this much at once: I do not know to whom I am speaking. Whom is this discourse addressing here and now? . . . it becomes at least possible to demonstrate that, beginning with the first sentence, my lecture has not simply and purely missed its destination" (*MC,* 1–2). Dealing with a logic and *topos* of the dispatch, Derrida shows destiny and destination to be dispatches (*envois*) whose descending trajectories or projections can always meet up with perturbation, interruption, or deviation. For example, the *lapsus,* as slip or fall, when revealing its unconscious destination and manifesting thus its truth, becomes, for psychoanalytical interpretations, a symptom. The question concerning psychoanalysis is shown inextricably to be bound to a concept of *Geschick,* not least because of the audial dimension upon which it relies for one channel of disseminative occurrence. So, when speakers seek out a criterion by which to arrive at some decision regarding the knowability of the addressee, they must first dispatch with hopes offered by self-conscious knowledge: "Not necessarily the criteria of self-conscious knowledge. For I could be addressing myself to an unconscious and absolutely determined addressee, one rigorously localized in 'my' unconscious, or in yours, or in the machinery programming the partition of this event. Moreover everything that comes to mind under the words 'consciousness' or 'unconsciousness' already presupposes the possibility of these marks in addition to all the possible disruptions connected with the destining of dispatches" (*MC,* 3). To this end, it would appear that in the case of Julie, Laing's destabilization of the addressee belongs to a general law of destination, and to the chances inherent to language. In Jung one observes how the telephone installed in Miss St. felt it knew whom it was addressing, who was speaking, who listening, but nonetheless it completely missed its mark, possibly only sideswiping its presumed addressee—the doctor with whom it worked in outspoken collaboration. Derrida affirms the ineluctability of this necessary nonknowing: "Regarding those to whom I now speak, I do not know them, so to speak. Nor do I know you who hear me" (*MC,* 2). This produces a subtle division among that which may appear to constitute the same, for Derrida claims neither to know those to whom he speaks *nor* can he close in on those whose ears open to his speaking. These represent two destinations, both unknowable. So the probing does not let up:

Figure 1: Sample from Avital Ronell's *The Telephone Book.*

from the genealogy of a technological desire, a desire that celebrated *techné* and participated in a rhetoric pumping the artificial self. Already heterogeneous, the self that speaks into the phone or receives the call splits off from its worldly complexity, relocating partial selves to transmitting voices in the fundamental call for help. The call for help is what Kafka imagines in his diaries: Alone. He would be in pain. The telephone rings. The voice tells him, "don't worry, we're coming to help you."[136] In Kafka's diary of pain the phone responds to your aphonic call for help.

The Survival Guide Is the Autobiography of Telephony.

The emergency temporality in which it discloses itself might be called the new journal of the plague: "**It is an alarming sight. . . . Do not attempt to force anything into the victim's mouth**" (*A*, 54). While the material gathered in these pages was provided by medical and emergency services in cooperation with the state, there will be no contractual guarantee, no responsibility, and no liability for any deluded empirical action taken as if this guide were a referential,

pragmatically inflected call to mimetic response. Thus "**any person relying upon the Survival Guide does so at his or her own risk**" (*A*, 49). Desiring the Survival Guide in itself implies a risk.

The New York Telephone Company (1986) published a similar text, titled more in the Heideggerian vein, Emergency Care Guide. **However, the notice shows that NYT relied on Pacific Bell at its own risk:** "Information in this Emergency Care Guide is copied in whole or part with the permission of the copyright owner 'Survival Guide.' The Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Company, 1978." "Any person relying upon such information does so at his or her risk." **The telephone puts you at risk, or it figures the language of risk. It produces a safeguard against disaster—** Survival Guide—**which, however, puts you in touch with your own risk. What is your ownmost risk? Or even, *where* is your own risk (at your own risk)?**

As for the Survival Guide, it cables you into a double bind: You must but do not rely upon The Telephone Book.

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Figure 2: Another Sample from *The Telephone Book*.

they signal the embedded state of *every* text: *all texts—pulp and electric— are always already hypertextual.* There is no text that's not hypertext. This is what the goals of clarity and linear progression hope to contain. This is the excess that the prosthetic composition course is designed to hush.[24]

But it's time to cut the shit: A wired classroom full of netheads who are happily addicted to technology is not at all comparable to a traditional classroom of technophobes who don't yet know that they are cyborgs. The "world" is ssShiftinggg. The drug we are beginning to push in the composition classroom will no doubt effect a fundamental change in our field, a gestalt turn roughly equivalent to a Copernican revolution. And this ride is not equipped with an emergency brake.

Hold on . . .

hesitate • • •

this road has not been paved

To those who still think they can *use* technology in the writing classroom to *empower* students, Cynthia Haynes issues a polite wake-up call: "[V]irtual spaces," she reminds us, "disrupt power relations, technify pathos, and morph identity" ("prosthetic_rhetorics" 84). The alliance between computers and composition ffffforces the posthumanist paradox into the writing classroom. The argument for empowerment, Haynes notes, tactfully, seems at best "misguided." Here's Haynes:

Using computers in composition pedagogy feels like a prosthesis that either compensates for a lack of control or frustrates when we can't control it. What we experience, then, is a psychological phantom pain associated with a threat to the self. ("Loss" 5)

A *phantom* pain. A *laceration*, not of the *Self* but of the "fabric of identity" that the rhetorics/myths of the Self have woven for more than a century. And/but, still .

.

. YOUCH! .

.

. Buckle up for a wild ride. Because, as

Figure 3: Sample from *Breaking Up [at] Totality*.

In a book about the interrupting call of the telephone, a call that gives the telephone specific value even as it robs it of ontological concreteness (in that a telephone is useless in and of itself; its value relies upon some other phone, somewhere else to which it might one day "connect"), the playing with print conventions serves to interrupt the flow of reading, and highlight the eerie

similarities between the technics that structure the call of the telephone and the technics that structure the capacity for shared language.

Diane Davis, in *Breaking Up [at] Totality*, offers a second experiment (figure 3), playing mostly with typographic conventions – varying font choice, size and shape in order to call attention to the conventions of reading.[41] As the example below indicates, she experiments with the text in order that the old norms of reading might "sssslip" away. Unfortunately, the novelty of her typeface machinations remains novel and engaging for only so long before the practice of reading adjusts to accommodate it. This should not be "viewed" as a failure on Davis' part – indeed, it shows that the routines of reading are as normative as they are flexible, or perhaps more accurately, that the norms of reading are normative precisely because they remain so flexible. Readers have always been able to linger over a word or a phrase here and there, or skim and skip to details later in the text. This may be the real discovery made possible by her experiment: given enough exposure, any practice of reading can become commonplace.[42]

These experiments highlight something so obvious that it is all too often taken for granted and missed: form and content are inextricable. The success of Davis and Ronell is not in forcing a shift away from the standards of the printed codex, or away from the conventions of reading that govern our interaction with the text; rather their success is to force a rethinking of that content is always already formed. By altering the norms of print "form," Ronell and Davis force us to reexamine the more common conventions of the printed word. We come to realize that typographic choices are as integral to the creation of professional, accepted content as are the word choices themselves. We come to realize that the text is an active agent in the production of content, rather than a passive medium through which content is transmitted. Literally: *form*

matters content. This is the subtle rule of representation—namely, that the particular incarnation, the "re-" that makes possible re-presentation, is never simply neutral.

Take as a brief example the font known as "Times New Roman." It is one of the most common fonts available in word processor programs, and it is used so often that it almost seems normative (Celeste and a few other outliers notwithstanding). Indeed, this entire dissertation has been composed in Times New Roman, which means, like it or not, that you are reading and consuming the norms of that font right now. For those of you committee members running the current speech-communication dissertation gauntlet, I would be immensely surprised if any of the dissertations you read deviate from this de-fault font choice. But let us imagine being surprised. If one of the dissertations did deviate, you could conduct your own experimental comparison. You would be able to compare the experience of reading it, the rhythm at which your eyes consume a line of text before jumping back to the left margin in order to consume anew, the speed with which words are read when presented in different fonts, how errors might be easier to notice in one font over the other, etc. In addition, you would be able to compare how differences impact your your aesthetic perceptions of the work, its professionalism, its bearing, its efficient use of space and paper and tree. One would be forced to contend with a textual materiality that is all too often taken for granted.[43]

To extract a lesson from these meanderings: no matter how thoroughly this dissertation interrogates the question of technics and no matter how much thought it encourages regarding the theoretical practice of representation, it cannot escape repeating the conventions of representation – iterability, white space, grammar, spacing and typography – because it relies upon those conventions to be understandable. Even as this exergue identifies the limitations of its particular printing, it nevertheless does so by founding itself upon print convention, just as Derrida founds

his discussion of the preface on the norms that make a preface thinkable. One can only hope –

and it is only a hope, and a particularly big one at that – that by making these norms explicit, one

can fashion a way of writing (or printing) that is capable of challenging the conventions of

representation without repeating, blindly, the very norms of writing that mute any challenge the

moment ink splashes it down upon the page.

Chapter 3

Originary Technicity:

Responding to the Death of Mediation

Living in the so-called information age, it is easy to see, as Marshall McLuhan did, that media matters. And if the medium is not entirely the message, it nevertheless plays a substantial role in translating the conditions by which any message emerges. The difficulty comes in trying to divine those conditions, since a nearly infinite recursion takes effect: the act of divining the conditions of one message necessarily takes place in and disseminates itself through the conditions of particular media networks. Friedrich Kittler explains the paradox this way: "Understanding media—despite McLuhan's title—remains an impossibility precisely because the dominant information technologies of the day control all understanding and its illusions."[44] For rhetoricians trying to grapple with the complexities attending to the ubiquity of mediation, this paradox can be daunting.

Things were not always so difficult. Back in the olden days, when rhetoric could still have been subtitled the "cultural logic of late orality," rhetoric was something much more readily defined and practiced. Sophists taught and refined it, philosophers defined and reviled it, and treatises on rhetoric spread the good word about, well, words. Taking rhetoric seriously in those days meant taking oral discourse seriously. Indeed, when Aristotle defined rhetoric in the second chapter of his own treatise on the subject as an "ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion," he made it extremely clear that this faculty relates exclusively to *oral* argument.[45] He did this even though he was writing about rhetoric, and he did so despite, as

George Kennedy notes,[46] the fact that the written publication of speeches was quite common during Aristotle's time.[47]

Nevertheless, Aristotle treated rhetoric as if it was entirely and exclusively an oral issue, and for the longest time rhetorical theory and criticism followed suit. The early decades of our field, dominated by figures like Herbert Wichelns,[48] Ernest Wrage,[49] and Edwin Black,[50] found their academic grounding in the study of oral discourse, often associating it (as Aristotle had) with an ambiguous idea of "public argument." Then the modern media revolution arrived, full of television and internet and computers – oh my! – and mediation quietly entered the conversation. Rhetoricians were called upon to respond.

Of course, this did not necessarily mean that the field of rhetoric needed to change its ways, just the extent of its reach. For the longest time, rhetoricians continued to write and teach about everything as if these new media were primarily and actively oral. Even today many rhetoricians continue to treat non-oratorical artifacts as if they are oratorical analogs, deploying the same critical methods that served rhetorical study well when critiquing the canonical speeches of Churchill and King, speakers whose words carried through the air via radio and microphone. Institutional inertia being what it is, this methodological holdover makes sense, even if it may seem, in retrospect, to be regrettable. Still, as the preface intimates, enough scholars are beginning to take media seriously that we can stop beating the orality-myopia dead horse. We can take issue with particular ways in which scholars respond to media and mediation, much as I am doing here, and much as I have done elsewhere,[51] but it is time to move on from simply castigating the field for *not studying* mediation and instead start castigating them for *how they study* it.

To begin, rhetoricians might wish to return to, follow, and rethink Aristotle.[52] When Aristotle writes of particular cases (*peri hekaston*), he alludes to particular individuals and their actions: the "particulars" include actions out in the world, complete with material and discursive contingencies, which is to say that the "particulars" necessarily include interactions with one's environment. More importantly, "to see" translates *theorēsai*, a phrase we might expeditiously render as "to theorize." Following this slight reframing, rhetoric becomes defined by the ability to theorize, through interactions with one's environment, the available means of persuasion. From here, it is just a question of thinking rhetorically. What if theorizing persuasion in this particular situation, today, with the death of mediation around us, requires a much more radical response than a series of guidelines outlining the practices (*tekhnē*) of rhetoric? What if taking Aristotle seriously means theorizing something other than what we classically think of as persuasion?

My response to these questions is governed by an overarching concern with exploring the rhetoric of technics. In order to theorize anything through the interactions with one's environment, one has to take seriously how that environment already structures the possibilities of theorizing, just as one has to begin to appreciate how theory helps to shape the perception of the environment, an environment that today more than ever is dominated by the scene of media and the production of simulation in all its guises. To advance the possibility of any theorizing, this chapter offers a broad introduction to the questions of technics and mediation that I am hoping to address. As such it claims two main objectives: first, to describe and develop an appreciation for the concept of *originary technics*; and second, to thematize how this concept might play out in the rhetorical nitty-gritty of responding to the question of technics—namely through an emphasis on the spectral, the messianic, and the mimetic.

Let us begin.

Originary Technicity

This dissertation's principle concern is *technics* – the how, the what, and possibly the who by which interaction is possible. Technics may seem a strange and awkward term, especially when compared with the more familiar idea of "mediation." Construed broadly, technics can include anything from particular technologies and the interaction with those technologies to the more esoteric idea of an "essence" of technology, and it can include very particular and stylized techniques or more abstract and undefined notions of artistry. Construed abstractly, technics defines and is defined by exteriority. One can call this exteriority the distal, the material, the real or what have you (a choice already indebted to certain ways of schematizing technics), but regardless, "technics" describes how one negotiates interaction with that "out there," whatever that "out" and that "there" entail. This process is continuous since, as Heidegger noted as early as *Being and Time*, one is thrown out into an already extant world, structured by history, language, and possibility. This negotiation with the world in turn produces what we think of as the "human." Technics, as Australian philosopher Simon Critchley explains, "is that process of exteriorization, the use of means, of media and mediation whereby the human takes shape. Hominization is technicization."[53] In other words, no matter how common the instrumental conception of technology as something out there available and waiting for our use, the exteriority that technics make possible goes hand in hand with the morphogenesis of the human. Or, to strategically deploy a rather problematic binary, we might say that the subject is always already defined by its objects; rather than the subject as the privileged half of the standard metaphysical

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binary, technics means that the subject only comes to mean anything because of the pretense and deployment of the binary itself.

Technics includes mediation but is not reducible to it. As I noted in the preface, mediation implies a going-between, a between that may no longer make much sense given the pervasiveness of today's media ecology. By contrast, technics describes even the possibility of the going, since it describes the means by which mediation is thinkable. As such, technics includes a number of disparate technologies and discursive strategies (examples: language and video recording, telephones and master tropes, bifocals and digital photography), and different ways of thematizing technics will consequently produce different ways of thematizing what is meant by the human, the subject, the world, and other related concepts.[54] Technics, in other words, is as rhetorical as it is material – assuming that this split can be maintained – in that it conditions the possibility of thought and simultaneously influences, terministically, how one perceives those conditions of possibility.

The advent of what McLuhan calls the Gutenberg Galaxy provides a case-in-point: the change in the dominant media, from script to print, led inexorably to a focus on fixed repetition, a passion for exact measurement, and a purification of grammar and language. In addition, as Jurgen Habermas notes,[55] the mass production of particular texts took individual readers, who could now be united by shared reading material, and transformed them into a public. The changes charted by McLuhan and Habermas were material and cultural consequences of print technology, but their particular formations were governed in large part by how print was put to use in the thinking of that new medium. Benedict Anderson, for example, has written a complex history of how this "public" was transformed into a "nation" through the printed work of particular populist movements.[56] The nationalism at work in these movements came about by

theorizing (and writing) that the "public" was not so much a generic product of the mechanics of printing, but rather the specific consequence of the mechanics of the *particular language* that printing helped to purify. It is a technical decision, and if not strictly a question of intent or influence, it is also not strictly a question of technological determinism. The point: appreciating technics requires careful attention both to particular technological apparatuses and to particular rhetorical strategies. Appreciating technics means taking seriously both the conditions of emergence and the conditions of possibility of any particular discourse.

Such an endeavor remains problematic. If technics define the exteriority that constitutes human thought, then even the specific thinking of technics is already determined, at least in part, by those technics coterminous with that thought's exteriority. The paradox that Kittler identifies in trying to understand media applies equally well here in trying to understand technics. As a result, any effort to "really and truly" understand technics confronts a certain methodological and teleological impossibility. One could, and many have, confront this impossibility anew, again, and strive to divine the truth of technics. This strategy has not been particularly successful; two millennia of philosophy and countless decades of thought have been poured into this problem, and no definitive account of technics has yet been written. Nor does it look like any account will be written any time soon. I have no desire to beat this dissertation's head against this difficult and bloodied philosophical wall.

Instead, let us begin with the impossibility of understanding technics and not with actually understanding technics themselves. Paradoxes are often productive resources for thinking, and the feedback problem that Kittler identifies is no exception. What if, rather than attempting to understand technics *per se,* we attempted to understand the various ways that thought has confronted the question of technics? And what if we did so by doing our best to

account for the media ecology in which we undergo such an attempt, even while always acknowledging the necessary failure to do so adequately? If mediation has today been put to death, we might ask how this death forces us to read the thinking of technics and mediation that came before.

These questions radically reconfigure the issue. Rather than search for a way of revealing the truth of technics, and rather than seeking to depict the hidden essence of technics, as Heidegger would like to do, these questions transform previous treatments of technics into rhetorical artifacts rather than ontological and epistemological truth-machines. Supposedly "philosophical" responses to the impossible thinking of technics can thus be read as *symptomatic* of the technics that made those responses possible, even as they reflect the political machinations by which particular strategies tried to respond to their particular conditions of emergence. As such, the task for rhetorical criticism becomes the taking to task of the thinking of technics. In other words, the task is not to theorize technics but rather to engage in critiques of how previous attempts at theorizing have taken place.

This is the goal of the project before you. In pursuit of this goal, I will offer three case studies in which I will contrast different glosses on technics with the idea of *originary technics*. This idea offers a way of thinking about technicity that comes from thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Avital Ronell, Sam Weber, Bernard Stiegler, and Friedrich Kittler – a group of scholars that comprise what might be called the "poststructural turn" in media studies. This project borrows liberally both in form and in content from Derrida and Stiegler, and no doubt those familiar with these two thinkers' approaches to the questions of media and technics will recognize the debt owed. For those less familiar, this chapter will hopefully provide some useful theoretical articulations.

Defining originary technicity is difficult. The problem – one that supposedly plagues

most of what we in the states refer to as postmodern or poststructural thought – is that the idea of

originary technics is more of a calling into question or putting into crisis than it is its own

erstwhile definition of the relationship between technics and its ostensible others. Much like

Derrida's différance or general writing (which is more obviously and explicitly a type of

technics), much like Lacan's symbolic or Kristeva's abject, originary technics finds problematic

any clean bifurcation between itself and its purported others. Instead, as its name would suggest,

originary technics posits that technicity is what make possible these original bifurcations from

the get-go; technics are there at the origin, and subsequently technics constitute everything, even

the possibility of constitution, which means they can never be cleanly parsed as a discrete object

(or objects) of analysis. In a way, originary technicity is what calls the Owl of Minerva away,

long before philosophy shows up to play. Or more popularly, it is the Waldo of "Where's

Waldo?" infamy – technics are at work whether you find them at work or not.

As already indicated, the act of actually "finding" them is rhetorical; the act of defining

technics produces (or more accurately reduces) our understanding of them, and so for obvious

reasons, I will not attempt to delimit originary technicity *per se*; at least I will not delimit it

beyond this very rough and ambivalent formulation. This undecidability will not please

everyone, but it is the necessary consequence of the systematicity of technics, which is to say that

one cannot simply step outside of the technical apparatuses that allow for the possibility of

definition – speaking and writing, teletechnologies, tropes and figures, ocularcentrism and

perspective, and everything else that Burke will, without irony, refer to as "equipment for living"

– and emerge with some objective pretense of a taxonomy. The belief to the contrary, the belief

that one can actually step outside of a subject like technics in order to know it, is, I would

suggest, part of a larger problem in our thinking of technics and our theoretical attitudes toward mediation. As Stiegler argues, the thinking of originary technics means rethinking the philosophical purification and separation of the *epistēme* (knowing) from its *tekhnē* (the techniques of/for knowing) and the subsequent devaluation of the technical object.[57] (Parenthetically, the rethinking of this purification provides the driving force for the dissertation in general, especially the lengthy reading of the *Phaedrus* in chapter two.)

I should be clear. I am not positing originary technics as the truth of technics, as if such a claim would even be possible. If it approaches anything like a truth, it does so because of very particular historical and material conditions. Originary technicity, far from being one way of reading technics among others, is the only thinking of technics consistent with the recent death of mediation. When "the middle" seems less and less feasible, the idea of a thinking of mediation that skips the requirement of any middle becomes necessary. In other words, as what was once thought under the name of mediation becomes more and more pervasive and taken-for-granted, one naturally begins to analyze the structure of this pervasion, and subsequently identifies that structure as something other than mediation. In an analogous fashion, this is why Derrida, in the first chapter of 1967's *Of Grammatology*, a chapter entitled "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing," goes out of his way to highlight that recent scholarship had recast *language* as *writing*, which is to say that a shift in thinking had taken place that reframes thought in terms of its particular mediations.[58] A similar shift is underway – or perhaps the same shift in media technologies continues – in the contemporary thinking of technics as originary rather than merely mediating.[59]

Indeed, a thinking of originary technicity may be needed, if only to move beyond the dialectic binaries so common in responses to technology. There are two basic pole-positions:

first, that technology will save humanity, help us to evolve as a species, and solve the growing

ecological problems that confront us, and second, that technology will doom us, that it guts the

potential of subjectivity, overdetermines our future, and contributes to the increasing degradation

of our environment and society. French thinker Sylviane Agacinski points out that both

"conceptions of modern man [sic], optimistic and pessimistic, define him outside technology and

independent of it—that is how they are in collusion. They diverge in the idea that technology can

either serve man or ruin him."[60] In other words, the two positions share the fundamental

assumption that technology exists independently from humanity, that it is a disconnected

exterior, a "master psychosis" as Kenneth Burke calls it,[61] that influences from outside but does

not in and of itself constitute human, world, or whatever else might be of *real* value. Taking

originary technics seriously requires a much more complicated assessment of this relationship.

So what is at stake here? Why should we care? In large measure, the answer depends

upon how seriously we take the dangers posed by the idea of a sanctified *epistēme*, a knowledge

purged of its technical impurities. Given the particularities of different strategies by which such a

purification takes place, some of the political consequences of such a belief must wait upon the

case studies that follow. The means by which the purity of thought and the purity of experience

are manifest will carry with them different political formations and be laden with different

ideological baggage. As I will demonstrate, these strategies are often paired with explicit and

implicit discourses about the spirit, as a way of responding to the inherent spectrality at work in

technics and manifested in media. But if we must wait upon the particulars of the case study to

see the stakes in more nuanced detail, we can at least note that, in general, strategies that operate

in the "spirit" of a sanctified reason do not have a good record upon which to stand. Rhetoric

and composition scholar Diane Davis makes the case rather forcefully, arguing:

[T]he 'reason' on which we base our innocence, that thinking-style that masquerades as thinking itself, that sends us scrambling to categorize, to separate the Self from the Other, the Same from the not-Same, the poison from the cure… can no longer be counted on to save us from disaster because it's *implicated* in too many disasters. Don't miss the significance of this: The Nazi Nightmare may not have been the result of "mis-takes" in thinking—it may rather have been the result of a thinking that was too logical, logical to the extreme. After all, the 'project of making [One] sense' seems to have been hanging out at the scene of every massive crime against 'humanity' recorded in our long and indecent histories—it presided over the holy wars, the Salem witch trials, and the Nazi massacres; it justified the storm of Desert Storm and the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia; in fact, it has been at the bottom of every hate crime buttressed by presumed distinctions in race, sex, class, religion, sexual orientation, etc.[62]

If this overstates the case a bit, it does not overstate the stakes. The dream of a pure (which is to say imminent and *unmediated*) anything has never ended particularly well, and the dream of a knowledge free of the imperfections of technics and not beholden to the determinations of technology is no exception, especially given the long history of that thought in Western philosophy from Plato through Heidegger and beyond. A lot of barbarism has taken place under the guise of Reason, and if philosophy and the exiling of technics are not entirely responsible for it – and they certainly are not – they are nevertheless not entirely free from responsibility either. This is where the thinking of originary technicity may prove most beneficial. Accepting the impurity of thought forces a rethinking of technics, one that does not begin with its devaluation. As Stiegler notes, "if technics is not a means, it can no longer be a question of having simply a 'debate' on technics—through a 'liberated' form of communication... Much more radically, the

preceding implies the need, today, to forge another relationship to technics, one that rethinks the bond originarily formed by, and between humanity, technics, and language."[63]

The contrast between originary technicity and the ways of thinking technics taking place in each of the three case studies offers three things: first, an inroad into thinking the technical conditions of emergence that made the various ways of thinking possible – this is the symptomatic tissue in each set of artifacts; second, a means of assessing the political consequences of negotiating technics in the manners offered by the artifacts in question – these consequences will be expanded upon in the final section of this dissertation; and third, given the fact that my reading takes place from within its own particular ecology – the one that offers up originary technics as a way of thinking, the one governed by increasingly pervasive media – the case studies also offer a way of assessing the political stakes of the current moment and the current environment. What does originary technics do for us, to us, whether we think it actively or not? This third offering cannot, by necessity, be fully appreciated within the scope of the present project, but it does give us something to consider as we make our way through the following case studies.

If we are to maximize the possibilities of critique, a better framework must be established by which to understand the responses given to the impossibility of thinking technics. To do this, the next few sections will detail certain heuristic components, or themes, at work in the *rhetorical* question/ing of technics: *spectrality, time,* and *mimesis*. These three themes are just that: tropes that recur in the material and discursive articulation of technics. They are not the media's "truth" or "reality," two words with baggage I wish to avoid, but rather critical devices that can benefit us when engaging mediation through the practice of rhetorical criticism.

I will start with spectrality.

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The Ghosts that Haunt Us

We might begin by imagining a scene like this:

The theater lights dim and a solitary spotlight throws its light upon the stage. A narrator walks slowly into the light, turns and faces the audience. He begins to read aloud, albeit in a poor imitation of a German accent. The words sound almost familiar:

"A specter is haunting rhetoric—the specter of mediation. All the powers of old rhetoric have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: Platonism and its soul, Phenomenology and its coming-to-presence, Psychoanalysis and its quasi-humanist spies.

Where is the thinking of technics that has not been decried as esoteric by its opponents in the academy? Where is that thinking that has not hurled back the branding reproach of politics and practicality against the more nuanced thinking of technics as well as against its theoretically conservative adversaries?

Two things result from this fact:

One: Mediation is already implicitly acknowledged by those who take rhetoric seriously to be itself crucial to their endeavor.

Two: It is high time that those interested in technics and mediation should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the specter of mediation with a manifesto dealing with mediation itself.

To this end..."

The voice fades to silence and the lights dim further to black as the narrator exits, predictably, to stage-left.

This reenactment of Marx, whatever its theatrical value, encapsulates many of the issues that confront the thinking of rhetoric and media today. Marx spoke of the specter of communism haunting the political formations of Europe. Today we can rightly speak of the specter of mediation haunting the ideological and critical formations of rhetoric. This is in part because mediation undoes the canonical tools of criticism. The oratorical emphasis that continues to linger in our field, especially in the form of public address, has to exorcise itself of the thinking of mediation, as it would be next to impossible to discern the import of a speech by looking at the text of the speech itself once sound-bites and the viral pattern of new media are taken into account. In the same way, the emphasis on particular speakers as exemplars runs afoul a similar problem, since the structural ADD enabled by the deluge of images cuts short the ability for a particular speaker to author and maintain control over a particular meaning.[64] Even when media artifacts are taken into account as rhetorical, one cannot approach those artifacts with the same set of expectations and the same critical grammar; instead, one must learn to "read" an image or a camera movement, which means learning the language of that respective medium.

That mediation matters in the construction of public imaginaries and the dissemination of meanings seems easily *apparent*, but it is just as easily an *apparition*. As I indicated in the preface, mediation is most likely dead, and today the "task of thinking" is to deal with its remains. But this articulation requires qualification. Mediation, it turns out, has always been dead, or at least it has always been about the reproduction of the dead, often through dead mediums like paper and papyrus. These early technologies of inscription, which underwent their own metamorphoses over the centuries, eventually ushered in early recording media like the camera. These new media captured the experience of "reality" without the additional encoding-decoding cycle of writing; they took something "that was," snatched it from the flow of time and existence, and recorded it as proof of its own existence. The phonograph and the film made possible even the capture and reproduction of the flow of experiential time itself, recording the movement of the real and opening it up to manipulation.[65] We take these technologies for granted today, despite their relatively recent appearance. Whereas the Greek alphabet birthed the first wave of phonetic literacy over two and a half millennia ago, these newer recording media fall well shy of even two measly centuries, and yet already we find them commonplace, banal.

Perhaps we have been forced to grow accustomed to them. Perhaps, by comparison to the rapid change and innovation occurring in today's media technologies, the simple act of recording sound or imprinting a flash of light seems quaint, even primitive. Certainly, a glimpse back to the histories of those early media reveals a decidedly primitive, almost pre-modern sensitivity to the spirits conjured by mediation. The telegraph led to reports of increased contact with poltergeists and other spirits, the likes of which suddenly began communicating telegraphically, using a series of repeated knocks and scrapes to communicate their intent. The photograph captured flights of fancy, from faeries to auras, promising to catch a supernatural *noeme* that no

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unaided eye could grasp. Radio broadcast the mysteries of the ether, a wireless spirituality that connected life, the universe and everything in a manner not unlike the power of the Force. With something akin to Jedi training and the right technology, one could access this mysterious essence—a way of divining the divine. Television channeled the spirits of electricity and ran them through a little box, the afterglow from its cathode ray tubes all too Frankenstein-like in their ghostly appearance.[66]

Today, these spiritual reminisces seem outmoded and antediluvian. Today, in a media network dominated by the Internet, cellular phones, and high-definition digital television, these past media and their ghostly qualities seem so outmoded that we are forced to deploy the term "new media" to describe our more recent media technologies. Everyone knows the hype: the world has become wired, and increasingly wireless, families are better connected, and digital television brings us closer to reality than actually being-there. There is a catch, though. If today's media continue to surprise us with their power to connect, they do so with a scientific bathos that represses the spiritualism so commonly associated with earlier media. We are no longer intrigued with the mysticism of connecting or the spiritual essence of the power to do so, and we rarely, if ever, think of the static streaming out of our mobile phones as the phantasmatic voice of some dead soul. This fascination was once much more intuitive, something that will be shown by my reading of Rudyard Kipling's "Wireless" in chapter three.

Then again, maybe we retain some of these "primitive" insights. The repressed spectrality of media returns today in cinema and in literature, as well as in more subtle aspects of academic writing. Movies like *The Ring* and *fear.com* speak to us of possessed media that labor with the suffering of unsaved souls and transmit that suffering to those who consume it. The monumentally successful *Matrix* trilogy offers the promise of transcendence and a technological

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Messiah, and ghosts populate the pages of cyberpunk thrillers like *Mona Lisa Overdrive* under the guise of artificial intelligence or uploaded human essence. Souls go jumping between bodies in films like *The Thirteenth Floor*, and other souls, referred to as "ghosts," appear as emergent properties of internet-born artificial life in Masamune Shirow's manga *Ghost in the Shell*. Indeed, cyberspace is a particularly fertile terrain for spiritualist fantasies. In the Stephen King inspired film *The Lawnmower Man*, Job downloads himself into the computer, freeing himself from death and decay of the flesh. Such is the exact vision described by futurist Hans Moravec in his 1990 work, *Mind Children*, a text that Katherine Hayles describes as being "driven by a fear of death so intense that it mystifies the power of the very technologies that are supposed to solve the problem."[67] Online game players die and reincarnate, often to return ever more powerful, just as *The Matrix's* Neo dies and is born again—a virtual apotheosis: "Information conceived as pattern and divorced from a material medium is information free to travel across time and space… The great dream and promise of information is that…if we become the information we have constructed, we, too, can soar free, immortal like the gods."[68] Artificial intelligence theorist Marvin Minsky works to redefine understanding of the human brain as a series of algorithmic functions (mini-minds) and intelligence as the amalgam of these collective processes,[69] while William Gibson writes ecstatically of an escape from the "meat" of the body.[70] John Perry Barlow dismisses the weary, atomistic world of "flesh and steal," echoing Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's vision of humanity's spiritual convergence and mental evolution in the "noosphere."[71] Michael Heim contends that the "fascination with computers is… deeply spiritual,"[72] and Nicole Stenger, a virtual reality programmer, suggests that cyberspace "will be seen as a Fountain of Youth, where you will bathe and refresh yourself into a sparkling juvenile."[73] As science popularizer Margaret Wertheim notes, "Immortality, transcendence,

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omniscience—these are the dreams beginning to awaken in the cyber-religious imagination."[74] In the realm of cyberspace it seems that death shall be no more. Not surprisingly, the wiring of the world offers a new way of wiring the Word, convincing rabbis like Joshua Hammerman to go "searching for God online."[75] What do these examples demonstrate? Science historian David Noble highlights the obvious answer when he writes that "modern technology and modern faith are neither complements nor opposites, nor do they represent succeeding stages of development. They are merged, and always have been..."[76] Erik Davis, a theorist of cyberculture, agrees, noting: "From hieroglyphs to the printed book, from radio to computer networks, the spirit has found itself inside a variety of new bottles, and each new medium has become, in a variety of contradictory ways, part of the message."[77] In a number of very different contexts, an increasingly impressive array of people are recognizing that modern media carry with them spiritual components.

No reason to keep hammering away. I trust that I have at least gotten the point across: mediation is *spectral*, which is to say that it transmits and translates all manner of specters: ghosts, souls, phantasms, essences, and other spirits. Kittler agrees, noting that "Media always already provide the appearances of specters."[78] That mediation has suffered a semantic death impacts this not at all, if anything it just adds another ghost. The specter of mediation functions as a medium in the more mystic sense of the term, a seer of and speaker for the supernatural. It does this out of necessity. By recording the past, media technologies like photography capture the present as a past and re-present it as a *this* (picture that is) *was* (whatever is pictured). As such, these recording media literally produce the dustbin of history, transforming history into a series of artifacts that de-pict the past rather than de-scribe it. Transmission media take that same past and send it over distances of space and time, transforming past events and contexts into the

reception of live experience. The dead speak to the living and the absent are made present.

Science can explain the mechanics that make recording and transmission possible, but they can

never banish entirely the funereal comportment of these events. Invariably, the repressed returns.

Even writing has its ghosts. The mystique attached to old texts, seen recently as the

source of satanic power and mysticism in Roman Polanski's *The Ninth Gate*, is just as active in

the growing piles of undeliverable mail known collectively as "dead letters." Even if they do so

in an utterly banal fashion, words speak to us from the dead, if only from the passed past of their

inscription. Even the near-instantaneous exchange of e-mail is phantasmatic, with writing done

here suddenly manifesting *there*, saved in the inbox until (or after) being read, waiting for the

next click of the mouse to initiate an electronic séance. Books written by the departed and read

by the living—does this count as haunting? The entire enterprise of writing is dedicated to the

proposition that the author no longer needs to be there for the message to be received; the

possibility of communicating beyond one's death is inscribed in every act of writing. Writing

always entails the possibility of writing a dead letter.

No thinker has been more obsessed with this relationship, between writing and death in

particular, or between spectrality and media in general, than Jacques Derrida. Enough

rhetoricians have summarized the impact of Derrida's thought on rhetorical studies that I do not

need to cover that well-trod ground again here.[79] But rhetoricians have yet to take into account

more recent work by Derrida, work that focuses increasingly and more explicitly on mediation,

religion, and politics. This recent work is not so much a departure from earlier work as it is a

reorientation and evolution of previous scholarship. Indeed, if there is anything like a *Kehre* in

Derrida,[80] it does not turn around the issue of politics like some believe,[81] but instead around the

accentuation of technics and its relationship to time, a relationship that governs his thinking of

religion (in the form of the Messianic) and politics (in the "hesitation" of the decision). Following this trajectory, Derrida has keyed heavily on the thinking of spectrality. In the aptly titled *Specters of Marx*, Derrida reads the ghosts in and of Karl Marx, some of which haunt Europe in the guise of communism and others of which are banished in favor of Marx's materialist ontology.[82] For Derrida, this difficult negotiation, in which ghosts appear in one place only to be banished from another, reflects some of the difficulty of inheriting Marxism, just as it reflects some of the difficulty of positing Marxism as something realizable. In a relationship that will be explored more towards the middle of chapter three, haunting makes possible Marxism's materialism, even as it undermines it (use value haunts exchange value, Shakespeare haunts Marx, the future haunts its own historical unfolding, etc.).

Rather than something to be banished, exorcised, or controlled, the phantasm represents for Derrida the very undoing of representation. In an interview discussing his fascination with the logic of haunting, Derrida offers the following explanation:

> What has, I dare say, constantly haunted me in this logic of the specter is that it regularly exceeds all the oppositions between visible and invisible, sensible and insensible. A specter is both visible and invisible, both phenomenal and nonphenomenal: a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance. The spectral logic is *de facto* a deconstructive logic. It is in the element of haunting that deconstruction finds the place most hospitable to it, at the heart of the living present, in the quickest heartbeat of the philosophical.[83]

In other words, the acknowledgment of spectrality, something to both fear and embrace, is also the acknowledgment that the standard binaries of metaphysics and fundamental ontology have slammed into their internal heuristic limits. The ghost is both there and not-there, it is a

manifestation of the present moment and some distant past, it both repels and attracts, it exists

and yet one can never be entirely satisfied with believing in its existence. One might, with *The

X-Files'* Fox Mulder, want to believe, but that belief must necessarily be tinged and constituted

by the possibility of being wrong. Spectrality casts the usual metaphysical suspects into doubt.

Not surprisingly given my discussion up to this point, Derrida ties spectrality to

contemporary media and the question of technics, as well as to the potency of hegemonic

articulations. He writes that "As it has never done before, either to such a degree or in these

forms, the politico-economic hegemony... passes by way of techno-mediatic power... this

differentiated set of powers cannot be analyzed or potentially combatted, supported here,

attacked there, without taking into account so many *spectral* effects..."[84] In other words, one

cannot take media into philosophical account without appreciating how it upsets the traditional

schemas by which philosophy (in the form of metaphysics or ontology) appropriates the world.

Further, one cannot take the power of media into account without understanding how the

upsetting of these schemas impacts the dissemination of content. For something like the Internet,

where Holocaust deniers mix interminably with self-professed alien abductees in the Google

cache, the phantasms are readily apparent. The same spectral logic is work in the televisual

dissemination of the Nike swoosh, as commercial after commercial work to transform that

swoosh into a podiatric crystal ball, capable of conjuring the ghost of Michael Jordan. Some

commercials even evince the logic of possession, where the right gear lets you channel the

athletic prowess of various athletic heroes, be they alive or dead. John D. Caputo affirms this

relationship, especially in relation to thinking about cyberspace: "Spectral space is the space of

'virtual reality' and 'virtual events': the odd being, time, and space of instant presence, worldwide

dissemination, on-the-spot reporting; of a sea of images and simulacra, of sound bites and

electronic messages sailing through cyberspace..."[85] It is through the cyberspace of the screen, be

it the computer monitor or the television, that we can see an event like the first or second Gulf

War and still conclude, in all seriousness, that the event did not take place.

We need not continue this too much further. The point is that mediation operates through

a logic of haunting, which is to say through the conjuring of specters. To repeat: *mediation is*

spectral. Media are full of ghosts, and mediation is governed by spiritualism. John Durham

Peters realizes exactly this in his brilliant *Speaking Into the Air*: every medium has, at some point

or another, reflected a drive for spiritual connection, a communication that is synonymous with

communion.[86] Peters also realizes that this drive is incapable of being fulfilled, and that the

dream of communication will never be transformed into waking reality. This is because

communication never conjoins spirits. Instead, it disseminates specters that continue to haunt

long after the message has been sent. This spiritual and spectral paradox, that the dream of the

one is always contaminated by the other, rises and falls with technics. The first possibility:

recent technologies seem poised, more than ever, to offer the chance of real communion, in real

time, with live video presentations with voice, face, body, etc. Simultaneous telecommunication

seems to come close to effectuating communion. Of course, the technics that make possible this

illusion of simultaneity also distance the user ("user" is the common and debased form of

"author," "rhetor," or "person") from the means of their production. Bernard Stiegler explains

that:

> one can't be a reader of books without in one way or another being potentially a writer. It
>
> is hardly conceivable that the addressee of a book could successfully read it without in
>
> some sense knowing how to write... On the other hand, for reasons having primarily to
>
> do with technics, film, television, and computers have made it so that an addressee may

have no technical competence with respect to the genesis or production of what he

receives.[87]

One *reads* literature – an active process that mirrors the writing (production) of literature – but

one *consumes* new media – a passive response to interfaces that vitiate contact with the

technologies that make those interfaces possible. Communication offers the illusion of real time

communion, but through the devil's bargain of increasing distance from the means of producing

that communion. The feed breaks down, the buffer is overrun, the video quits streaming, and the

communicator lacks the capacity to respond. Or, in rare instances, emails are sent but never

arrive, their ghostly entrails scattered across any number of routing machines.

The second possibility: let us say the system of exchanges worked, that the addressee

receives and returns the messages, and that the routing system functions perfectly and in real

time. Even should this happen, what is it that gets sent? What is it that gets received? Are these

two things really the same? What does one *really* see when one encounters the video and voice

of the distant other? Even if the medium functions absolutely perfectly, it still manifests an

apparition. The encounter remains plagued by the same fragility of belief that marks the

phenomenological formations of presence and absence in an age of pervasive mediation. One

can never be sure one is encountering the "real" person, not that one can ever be sure they are

encountering the *real* person whatever and wherever the means of exchange, and as a

consequence the same constitutive doubt enters and disturbs the encounter like a communicative

poltergeist. No, the dream of real communication will never be fulfilled; it cannot be fulfilled,

because the structure of all exchanges remains mediated, and as such, haunted. Derrida suggests

that we keep this basic spectral structure of mediation in mind when we attempt to understand

what is unique about today's media ecology. The issue is one not decided by the uniqueness of

the degree of mediation but rather by the particular manner in which that mediation is packaged as the real time of speech. The technology that makes possible the dream of communication from the earliest – the technology of a shared language – is the originary prosthesis that mediates the supposed "naturalness" of natural speech. He writes that

> this specificity, whatever it may be, does not all of a sudden substitute the prosthesis, teletechnology, etc., for immediate or natural speech. These machines have always been there, they are always there, even when we wrote by hand, even during so-called live conversation. And yet, the greatest compatibility, the greatest coordination, the most vivid of possible affinities seems to be asserting itself, *today*, between what appears to be most alive, most *live*, and the différance or delay, the time it takes to exploit, broadcast or distribute it.[88]

If the machines have always been there, making possible the dream of communication even as they preclude the realization of communion, Derrida nevertheless cautions us to remember that the entire possibility of exchange remains predicated on very particular technical apparatuses, a lesson he draws as early as 1980's *The Post Card*.[89] The lesson of his more recent work is that these technical apparatuses are also already spectral apparatuses, and that this spectrality haunts much more than the channels of communication. Finally, we should note the both-and structure at work here. Spectrality is both necessary for mediation and at the same time the moment of failure in mediation. Like the ghost of Hamlet's father that takes up so much of the beginning of Derrida's *Specters,* the ghosts of mediation are both repulsive abominations (an example: the attempt to purge new media of "noise") and essential fascinations (same example: without the constitutive outside of noise there would be no way to define the signal).

Let me turn away from this attempt at summarizing spectrality and return to the reasons for the study at hand. If spectrality is a constitutive component of mediation, even as it threatens to undo the possibility of successfully mediating, then spectrality poses a sort of threat. There is, in other words, an excess of spectrality that must be taken into account. This dissertation engages in rhetorical criticisms of different ways of thinking technics/mediation, and the logic of spectrality identified here helps focus those critiques. The issue that centers each of the case studies will be how particular responses to technics respond to this *excess of spectrality*. I will be arguing that different ways of thinking technics function rhetorically by situating different ways of responding to the threat of spectrality.

These responses will in turn determine and be determined by two other themes: time and mimesis.

Time, Politics, and Ghosts to Come

When Marshall McLuhan describes media as extending the central nervous system, he inadvertently reveals the importance of the relationship between media and time. Not only do media literally expand the space across which human senses and other faculties can operate, but they also reconfigure that space and the experience of time. The idea of "extension" is crucial to appreciating this. Extension comes, through a long etymological derivation, from the Indo-European root "*ten-*,"[90] which means to stretch, though the root is modified in the Greek as *teinein*. Extension thus entails stretching out or stretching outside of, a meaning consistent with what one will find in most dictionaries. We tend to think of extension in primarily spatial terms, but the root "*ten-*" is also, albeit in an alternately modified Latin form, the etymological origin of *tempus*, a stretching out of the moment or of experience as *time*. From here one could link a

whole *web of word associations* to the question of technics with instructive consequences:
tendency (the patterns at work in media), tempo (the rhythm of media), temper (the strengthening
of various infrastructures and ideographs, like nation and celebrity, as effects of media),
temporize (the call to slow down in order to deal with the deluge of information media make
available), temporary (the fleeting reporting of events within the 24 hour news cycle), temptation
(the seduction of media technologies, the downfall of real knowledge, humanism, etc.), and so on
and so forth.

    These linkages reveal that the question of mediation is tied inextricably to a certain
experience of time.

    And of timing.

    Certainly this dissertation is not immune to this tether. A project such as this one,
concerned with rhetoric and technics, finds itself constantly butting up against the flows of time
and forced into an impossible negotiation between them. The time of research, the flow of
writing, the experience of reading: each of these moves at a different rhythm. To a certain extent
then, the question of time plagues any research, in any venue, for exactly these reasons—every
project must negotiate the different rhythms of its production and be open to the uncontrolled
rhythms of its reception. In this project, however, a fourth flow is made explicit in the subject of
my analysis: the time of the medium, or more accurately the time of a medium's particular
mediation. Media do not merely *represent* the world or the word. They *present* a world or a
word; literally they make it present—available to the here and now or preserved for a future here
and now. They represent *time.* A particular time (*stasis*), a movement of time (*chronos*), a sense
of timing (*kairos*): every representation is the reproduction of some object or event or person as a
present. This is not to say that this act of presentation is what gives media its sense of reality –

Heidegger is right to caution against thinking the vulgar temporalization of the present as being synonymous with the more fundamental experience of presence – but rather, presentation gives media its sense of real time, which is to say that it gives a sense of the time in which one encounters particular disseminations as a now. As different media become more dominant, the perception of their particular instantiation of "media time" in turn begins to structure our general experience of time's passing. Derrida remarks: "This other time, media time, gives rise above all to another distribution, to other spaces, rhythms, relays, forms of speaking out and public intervention."[91]

We have to remind ourselves that time is not an ontologically discrete object. We experience time, without doubt, but that experience is always already governed by the inherited practices of measuring time, be it through the minutiae of the hour, minute, and second, the slow change of months or seasons, or the historical perspective produced by conceptualizing a past, present, and future. The existential reality of the passage through time does not, in other words, require that time be measured, but the existence of a measure (or rather, the technics that make measurement possible) necessarily determines how one experiences the passage of time.

A double-edged sword, in other words: on the one hand, the passage of time is utterly existential. Existence is structured, as Michael Hyde has said, by the movement of the now to the not-yet.[92] On the other hand, the *experience* of the passage of that time is, for most people, dictated by the technics by which that passage is measured, i. e. temporalized. Take for instance, the technical reform of time that took place in Western Europe around the close of the thirteenth century: the birth of the mechanical clock. Rather than focus on fixing the calendar, as previous cultures were wont to do, the Europeans spent their time discerning how to measure the hour, to shrink the passage of time to more manageable units. The new hour clock (which took its name

from related French and German words meaning "bell" because it made precise the system of bells that announced various points of the day in European cities) helped to dissolve more fluid conceptions of time and replace them with a view of time as quanta. Historian Alfred Crosby writes:

> Time had seemed to most people an unsegmented flow. Therefore, experimenters and tinkerers wasted centuries attempting to measure time by imitating its flowing passage, that is, the flow of water, sand, mercury, ground porcelain, and so on – or the slow and steady burning of a candle out of the wind... Solving the problem becomes possible when one stops thinking of time as a smooth continuum and starts thinking of it as a succession of quanta.[93]

The "need" for speed followed immediately on the steps of this discovery. This new reaction, McLuhan explains, manifests because the clock makes it "possible to fix time as something that happens between two points" which transforms the passage of time into a measurable, discrete concept of "duration," and produces, concomitantly, "our impatience when we cannot endure the delay between events."[94] Nostalgia for the old days, when the world passed slowly, without all those mechanical doo-hickies, no doubt followed shortly thereafter. What made possible this shift in the experience of time – a shift that helped usher in the European obsession with quantification and measurement, and subsequently the reimagining of science – is a mediation of time by technics.[95] Of course, time is not uniform, nor is it uniformly destined by particular media, since different media and different measurements will constitute the experience of time differently.[96]

None of this is to argue that the experience of time is entirely determined by technical apparatuses, or even entirely determined by the psychic imprint of those apparatuses.

Heidegger's purpose in *Being and Time* is not just to think the essence of Being through the facticity of time, it is also to force a rethinking of time that is not beholden to its vulgar/technical reduction to quanta. That such a project is thinkable at all implies that technics cannot control entirely the experience of time. The degree of influence wielded by technics may be immense, and increasingly so as time-keeping continues to advance in precision, mobility, and interaction (e. g. cell phone alarms), but it does not preclude other ways of thinking time. This is entirely consistent with the discussion of technics above, since technics always involve a material and a rhetorical dimension. Here, with the question of time, the critic must think how this rhetorical dimension plays out in different ways of deploying the concept of time.

Certainly it will come as no surprise that time carries different valences in different situations and in different schools of thought, and it should come as no surprise that those valences are often profoundly political. There is, however, an expansive chasm between acknowledging that something is political (indeed, what concept or event worthy of a name would ever not be political?) and determining just what those political consequences might be. Philosopher Peter Osborne, in his groundbreaking *The Politics of Time*, has built an initial bridge across this chasm by attempting to articulate the different political arrangements operating in the various modernist treatments of time. For Osborne, breaking history into an era like modernity and postmodernity, independent of what is at stake in determining the break, or even what is at stake in classifying each particular period, has its most profound political impact in categorizing disparate ways of thinking into historical epochs. When Francois Lyotard announces the postmodern as a time dominated by an incredulity towards metanarratives, a time where science is questioned and social structures are fragmented, he nevertheless unites those fragments and doubts within a temporal structure – the epochal now of the postmodern. The same tendency can

be seen throughout Fredric Jameson's otherwise carefully paced *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. In so doing, the discourses of the postmodern remain irrepressibly modernist in their desire to classify and group thinking into eras and thus transform the different eras into a productive taxonomy.

The rhetorical buzzwords by which various thinkers and various thoughts have responded to the experiential character of time, itself a product of technics, are attempts to temporalize that experience. Words like modernity, revolution, destiny, permanence, acceleration—these terms "represent alternative temporal structures, alternative temporalizations of 'history', which articulate the relations between 'past', 'present', and 'future' in politically significantly different ways."[97] To offer two very brief examples: *first*, the claim that with the end of the cold war we had arrived at the end of history, a claim that receives almost excessively lengthy treatment in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, repeats the generally Hegelian structure of history whereby the powers that be at history's close are the powers that were destined to be, and those living in those times can rest assured that the progress of history has finally culminated in a version of the nation-state wedded to neoliberal economics and the ideal of the liberal/humanist subject; and *second*, the fantasy of accelerated evolution, most notable in the technomania of the growing, international Extropian movement, which advocates that humanity work to advance itself through genomics, nanotechnology, and cybernetic modification because the time has come when evolution simply moves too slowly—this conception places humanity outside of natural time and reworks historical destiny as a technological imagining, one that necessarily triages the natural order (which includes all those who cannot afford or who do not desire the technologies of advancement) in its pursuit of a manifest technological destiny and relegates billions of living and not-yet living to the already antiquated biomass of history. The first example has gradually

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given way, at least in terms of popularity, to the so-called "clash of civilizations" hypothesis, while the second continues to fuel a number of popular imaginaries (this impulse no doubt animates the particular transcendent dream that runs from Lacan through *The Matrix*, and which will be explored further and in more detail in chapter four).

As one of the organizing themes of this analysis, the temporalizing effects of different rhetorics of technics will require careful attention. These effects are also bound up with questions of spectrality, and any appreciation of temporalization will have to operate side by side with an appreciation for how the discourses in each case study manage spectrality. With specters undoing the simple divisions between the past and present, or between the now and the not yet, time (produced by technics) is as spectral as mediation (also produced by technics). Rhetoric, for example, is haunted by its past – the ghost of Plato continues to cast its astral aspersions in our direction, and with enough phatasmatic force that rhetoricians everywhere still feel the need to respond (in part that perceived need to respond is what continues to award Plato's ghost with power, since even the most caustic rejection reaffirms the the power of Plato's particular specter to demand a response). Such is the nature of what Heidegger calls historiality and what Derrida calls inheritance—one must deal with specters, like it or not. This is where rhetorical criticism can be useful, exploring how that deal with the dead takes place and thinking through the political consequences of the bargains struck and the strategies deployed.

(A parenthetical remark and example: we should not be content with noting the spectrality of time, simply, and then moving on. Spectrality upsets the apple-cart of metaphysics, which means that what technics produces through the rigid mechanics of measurement and the rhythms of media time, the spectrality of technics ultimately undoes. This is the tension at work in the time of mediation; each media time is both structured and undone by its own technicity. In

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a rather mundane sense, one can witness this undoing by tuning in to CNN Headline News, a

cable news channel that runs its thirty minute "headlines" in a continuous loop. On most days,

tuning in for a couple of hours means hearing the same set of stories four times. This constant

renewal operates like the rewriting of the prodigal son, each time returning as a repetition, and

each time returning with the threat of being different, thus undoing the possibility of purely being

repetition. At the same time, the compression of headline news, whatever the difficulties and

politics of its selection, nevertheless has its most pernicious political effect by limiting the

amount of information that can be included in the few minutes (or seconds) alloted to the

imparting of that information. I am not speaking here of the humanist vanity that would bifurcate

knowledge and information – a pathetic gesture, entirely about cultivating a particular *pathos* –

but rather, even in the most avowedly scientistic parsing of information, say something like Fred

Dretske's information theory,[98] which reduces all content to measurable bits. I am arguing that

even after realizing that all knowledge is really just information, even in the absence of valence

and the reduction of content to mere bits of information, there is nevertheless very little

information actually offered in these news stories. One finds the history of the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict reduced to a random sampling of recent events and a few historical footnotes, processed

with stock footage usually unrelated to the actual headline itself and presented in less than the

amount of time it takes to microwave popcorn. The twenty-four hours news cycle, so often

chastised for deluging the viewing public with too much information, actually spends its time

deluging the public with too little information and too much parsing of time. This rhythm, which

is obviously purposive and accommodating to the demands of commercial advertisers, is a

strategic choice as to how to respond to the spectral demands of mediation and time: the

impatience to do more, to show that so much is going on, and indeed, to show that so much is

going on that one has to *stay tuned* to see if the repeat, which occurs just a half hour later, will actually show anything different.)

Even this discussion of time, and the relation sketched between time, media, and spectrality, operates politically. The question is what a particular politics costs and what it gains. Certainly by opening time to the space of discussion, I am gesturing towards a "spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: 'now,' future present)"[99] In the opening paragraphs of this chapter, I even gave this gesture a name, preemptively referring to this section as the theme of the *messianic*, rather than the thematic of time. It is time to conjoin those two terminologies. In his conclusion to *Specters of Marx*, Derrida emphasizes that the possibility of haunting, the simultaneous threat and allure of the ghost, and the entire question of spectrality is bound to a certain way of conceptualizing the horizon of expectation, which is to say that it constitutes a particular call from the future:

> The question deserves perhaps to be put the other way: Could one *address oneself in general* if already some ghost did not come back? If he loves justice at least, the "scholar" of the future, the "Intellectual" of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let thus speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always *there,* spectres, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet.[100]

We should be careful here, since we do not want to confuse the future or the tomorrow with something akin to the vulgar conception of time rightly refuted by Heidegger. For Derrida, the future is *messianic*; it is never a future present (a future that will someday arrive) but rather a

future to-come. This messianic conception of time, loosely borrowed from Maurice Blanchot and Walter Benjamin, offers an interesting political alternative to the temporalizations that mark modernist thought. Instead of breaking up the passage of time into quanta, or into experiential breaks that mark the past, present, and future, Messianic time is out of joint, disconnected—it is an experience of time defined by the resistance to temporalization.

Despite its obvious religious connotations, the messianic is a critical, deconstructive gambit, and not an attempted return to religion. There have been overtly religious attempts to rework time, with Mircea Eliade's conception of "sacred time" being the obvious example. For Eliade, religious values are renewed through the enactment of religious ritual and adherence to religiously prescribed structure. Sacred time is a circular time, a time that repeats itself through practices designed to commune with the divine. By contrast, the messianic eschews the cycle of renewal in favor of perpetual preparation, opening, and waiting. I say perpetual because, as Derrida is fond of saying, the messianic must be free of Messianism; the messianic can only remain to-come if it never arrives.   If it were to arrive, it would no longer be to-come, and the horizon of the messianic would collapse, and the radical opening of the future would find itself replaced by the end of history. This is the constitutive paradox of the messianic: it must be awaited, it must even be made to come, but it cannot ever really come without dissolving itself. As a consequence, the sheltering of the messianic requires a critique and a thought that works constantly to open the possibilities of the future and that does so by being itself open to the unexpected singularity of the future (which is also the other as the *arrivant*—arriving without warning, the ghost as *revenant*—returning without warning, and the alterity of the event and the moment of decision—which, as Derrida will note later in *The Politics of Friendship*, can never be calculated in advance if it is to remain a decision rather than the application of a rule).

I will leave open this thinking of the messianic, and let it haunt the politics of time at work in the case studies. Like originary technics, the contrast between the two can provide a productive context from which to engage in critique. But I cannot let it go without at least another word regarding the word itself – the choice of the "messianic" as a marker of the future to-come. Why does Derrida offer up the figure of the messiah, rather than speaking simply of the to-come (Blanchot) or alternately of alterity (Levinas)? This figuration signifies something for Derrida, a religion without Religion.[101] It is a question of representation, a strategic representation, and like all representations, it should give us pause to think. Perhaps that is its purpose. And perhaps the choice represents the necessity of inheritance, of dealing with the ghosts of one's past, and doing so in the spirit of that past. Derrida's response is, not surprisingly, enigmatic: "What we are, we inherit."[102]

A Rabid and Ribald Mimetology

Let me return to the theater. The earlier reenactment of Marx this time gives way to a very different scene, one much older and belonging to Greek playwright Aristophanes. We enter at the midpoint of his famous play, the *Clouds*. Socrates and Strepsiades have just entered the "pondertorium" to engage in the not-so-venerable art of learning when, in what attentive rhetoricians will recognize as a parabasis, the chorus leader turns and speaks directly to the audience on behalf of Aristophanes and informs them that:

> I sweated night and day over a hot script to serve up to you
>
> the very first taste of the fruits of my labor. But look what happened.
>
> I was utterly defeated, thwarted by those other vile, despicable hacks!
>
> And it is you people who must bear the blame for the disgrace,

for you should have known better.

The reason for this authorial outburst is a personal one, to be sure. The original version of *Clouds* took third place at the festival of Dionysus, and the complaint *cum* parabasis displays Aristophanes' comic assessment of this professional setback. As humorous as this aside may be, and as incidental as it may be to the enjoyment of the rest of the play, this aside does pose an interesting question: if we are what we inherit, how are the technics of inheritance already controlled by the past? The *Clouds* that we know today, that we have inherited, has passed to us in a written form that is self-consciously and explicitly different from the original version. We do not have access to the original, and the text that we inherit *literally* "bears the blame" for Aristophanes' disgrace on its pages.

In a more general sense, the question of technics today, and the response to the growing ubiquity of mediation repeats this problem of inheritance, and the problem repeats itself in much the way that the transcription of *Clouds* repeats its control over the schema of its representation through the structure of its inscription. Modern media are more subtle, of course. The news anchor, the headline, or the email virus rarely turn towards the person absorbed by the screen and announce the exact manner in which the machinery of media controls the promulgation of the message. The opposite urge, in which the consumer is invited to participate, is instead much more common. From *Talkback Live* to Yahoo Chatrooms, from responding to polls to voting with the remote control, from buying into the viral lifestyle marketing of brands to shopping online, new media help maintain the myth of communion and community by producing the consumer as a (potential) participant. Sylviane Agacinski explains: "Media spaces, the current locales of democratic visibility, are again a matter of a theatrical structure, even if we are dealing with the screen. This structure organizes the 'production' of power as much as of public opinion.

It is theatrical, essentially and not by accident, because for a people, it is a matter of seeing and hearing itself." It is about, in a word, *representation*—particularly, the representation of (what counts as) reality. The power of the modern media networks rests in its ability to sell itself as the proper space in which the public can see themselves seeing the world (this provides at least a reasonable explanation for the inane strategy by which Fox News repeats, *ad nauseum*, that its coverage is "fair and balanced"—it isn't a question of fooling anyone into thinking that Fox News is objective, but rather the act of inviting the conservative portion of the public to view themselves as fair and balanced).

Engaging the process by which the real is represented means taking seriously the theme of mimesis. Mimesis, like so many of the terms I have been playing with so far, is a difficult target to lock down, especially because the meanings assigned to it vary radically through the course of history and the passing of time.[103] Most commonly (and unfairly) understood as a more technical or originary term for imitation, "mimesis" broaches a much broader theme, one that signifies the whole breadth of interactions with and determinations of representation. This no doubt includes *imitatio.* As I will show in the second chapter, the connection between mimesis and imitation has as much to do with particular historical and material conditions as it does with etymology. In the primary orality of ancient Greece, one learned by imitating the rhythmic patterns embedded in the great epics and poems of the day. Speaking was theatrical, since the discourse had to have a hook – much like contemporary pop music – if it was to be memorable. If the rhythmic intonations were easily imitated, through routinized movements of the body, pattern repetition, and the parsing regularities of inflection, then the task of memory was all the easier.

This task of memory changes with time, and mimesis changes with it. It is essential that we approach mimesis with the understanding that it is not a static concept, relegated to some

ancient regime of oral imitation and theatrical memory. Rather, since mimesis signifies the

operation by which humans relate to representation, the meaning and import of mimesis will

change in response to the changing forms and practices of representation.

Two sources are particularly useful here. The first, Gebauer and Wulf's *Mimesis*, traces

the historical transformations and different articulations of mimesis, from Greece onward.

Whereas Erich Auerbach's identically-titled and germinal study sees mimesis as a form (instead

of content), Gebauer and Wulf's tracing of the historical articulations of mimesis reveal a much

more fundamental role: mimesis is what makes possible, in particular expository contexts, the

tropological split between form and content, since both form and content are already at work in

any practice of representation. "Mimesis," they write, "is a *conditio humana* at the same time

that it is responsible for variations among individual human beings. A spectrum of meanings of

mimesis has unfolded over the course of its historical development, including the act of

resembling, of presenting the self, an expression as well as mimicry, *imitatio*, representation, and

nonsensuous similarity."[104] This human condition exists as such because human beings interact

through the technologies of language and art, and the particular instantiation of those

technologies through poetry, theater, the genres of everyday discourse, etc: "mimesis is always

concerned with a relational network of more than one person; the mimetic production of a

symbolic world refers to other worlds and to their creators and draws other persons into one's

own world."[105]   In other words, mimesis is a practice by which language attempts to represent

the reality of mediation, or rather to navigate the mediation of reality. This leads us to the second

source, the brilliant French thinker Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, whose entire philosophical project

stems from paying close attention to how the Western philosophical tradition has attempted to

castigate and cast down the necessity of mimesis. Lacoue-Labarthe's work is difficult to

summarize without doing it a great deal of violence (although as Renee Girard suggests, violence lies at the center of mimesis), but its difficulty is itself telling: to approach the determination of mimesis requires not just careful analysis and close reading, it also requires that one acknowledge how one approaches this determination in a manner already determined by mimesis, and more than a simple nod towards this inevitability, that one take seriously and perform their "reading" through mimesis. He explains, in a passage that impacts much of the *writing* of this project (not that any writing really has a choice):

> Mimesis is always from like to same. For such is the law of representation—or of (re) presentation: there is 'presented' in it what does not present itself and cannot present itself, that is, there is represented in it what has always already represented itself. This is why there is only one remedy against representation, infinitely precarious, dangerous, and unstable: representation itself. And this is why ritualization and dramatization—the tragicomedy of the sacrifice and of the spectacle—never end.[106]

Much more will be said about mimesis, particular the two modalities of mimesis marked by orality and writing, in chapter two.

Final Summary and Preparations

The next three chapters explore how different philosophical postures are themselves indebted to media, even as they work to define themselves for or against mediation. I attempt this exploration by trying to take seriously the poststructural critique of the subject and metaphysical certainty that comes from thinking originary technics. In these case studies, that seriousness will mean three things, albeit with differing degrees of emphasis. First: negotiating and exploring how different ways of thinking media produce particular divisions between

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knowledge and technics, subject and object, event and mediation. This investigation—perhaps by necessity, perhaps by choice—will revolve around different ways of encountering and controlling *spectrality*. Second: an appreciation for the *time* of mediation, which is to say, the different economies of time. These economies are, on the one hand, rigidly structured by technology (for example, the "real time" of television's news cycle) and, on the other, routinely undone by the spectrality of those technologies (for example, the recording of the live news feed for later consumption). Third, and finally: an emphasis on the sublimation and morphology of *mimesis*. The three case studies will show that different ways of responding to the question of representation—which previously surfaced in the space of the exergue—carry with them serious political and ideological consequences.

I will begin, like everyone else, with Plato.

Chapter 4

Souljacker:

The Grotesque Politics of Plato's *Phaedrus*

The *Phaedrus*! Who hasn't heard it mentioned at least once or twice in their introduction to philosophy or basic rhetorical theory classes? What student of rhetoric hasn't been forced to read it? It is the story of the wise Socrates and the youthful Phaedrus, two lovers of words who wander along the banks of the Ilissus outside of Athens and lie down together to rest and engage in "discourse." Phaedrus carries with him a speech by the renowned logographer Lysias, the reading of which prompts two subsequent speeches by Socrates and a rather lengthy discussion regarding the disadvantages of writing and the nature of rhetoric. It is considered one of the seminal texts of Western philosophy, both for its lengthy exposition of the soul and for its nuanced sublimation of rhetoric and writing to the truth and value of philosophy.

Indeed, among rhetoricians it is perhaps the most problematic and best known Platonic dialogue. Along with its topical predecessor the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedrus* defines the Platonic assault on rhetoric, an assault that contemporary scholars of rhetoric are still, rightly or wrongly, called on to repel. The dialogue sits at the front of our anthologies about the rhetorical tradition, foregrounding an assessment that finds rhetoric dangerous and less valuable because of its lack of concern for the truth. Of course the *Phaedrus* speaks to and challenges more than just those concerned about the demarcation of rhetoric and philosophy; it is also of monumental importance to media scholarship, as it offers up a critique of writing that continues, as Derrida has famously noted, to hold sway over subsequent philosophical and theoretical thought regarding the

relationship between media and speech. Plato's denigration of writing – that it will make its users dumber and more forgetful, and that it will distract them from the pursuit of proper knowledge – echoes in the all-too-similar denouncements made at the advent of daily newspapers, television, and more recently the Internet.

Philosophers, rhetoricians, and media scholars have been tracing and retracing the contours of these debates over philosophy and rhetoric, speech and writing, for a long, long time. So where are we now? After two and a half millennia of critical dissection, after scores and scores of rejoinders, affirmations, and clarifications, what more can be said about the *Phaedrus*? Not much. Perhaps nothing. I doubt seriously that this chapter will say anything particularly "new" about the dialogue itself. Instead, I am hoping to put the dialogue to work and in conversation with other Platonic dialogues in order to explore the conditions of emergence that made the *Phaedrus* thinkable in its day, and those conditions of possibility that continue to fuel (and complicate) its contemporary application.

In order to do so, I will separate this analysis into five parts. The first will consider the conditions that enabled the writing of the *Phaedrus* and the general body of work that we refer to under the rubric of "Plato." In particular, I want to stress the influence of literacy and writing upon the formulation of Platonic thought, something detailed primarily in the work of Eric Havelock. The second section will consider the role of mysticism in Plato's *Phaedrus*, and how it plays out in the lengthy discussion of the soul and the myth of the charioteer depicted in Socrates' palinode. The third section will offer a close reading of the *Phaedrus* in an attempt to consider the relationship between writing and rhetoric *qua* technics, and how Plato works to produce philosophy as the privileged other to both writing and rhetoric. I will argue that critical to Plato's historic success is a particular deployment and relegation of the soul/*psyche* in the

service of the epistēme and against the possibility of technics – a practice I will refer to as *souljacking*. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate that while this strategy suffers from its own internal failures, the gaps that mark those failures are themselves productive sources of invention for thinking current discourses on mediation. The fourth section of the essay will fold the previous sections in on themselves by considering Plato's double – the figure of Socrates. It is not enough, I contend, to engage Plato's discussion of the technics of writing without also examining the technics that make possible the appearance of that discussion: the Socratic mouthpiece, fictional and otherwise, engaged with one or more of his interlocutors. I will argue that careful attention to this practice sheds light on the role that mimesis plays in constituting the possibility of Plato's thought. The fifth and final section will offer some brief thoughts on the legacy of Platonic thought for those concerned with the status and nature of rhetoric and media in the early days of a new millennium.

Plato's Preface

I want to highlight two trends that converged to make the Platonic *Phaedrus* possible, both of which revolve to some extent around the onset of writing. *First*, the agora and polis emerged as the dominant organizing structures of Greek social life. Susan Jarratt makes much of this in her *Rereading the Sophists*,[107] as does Jean-Pierre Vernant in his wonderful *Origins of Greek Thought*.[108] As farming communities coalesced and grew, and the predecessors to the Greek city-states began to take serious shape, land-holding males would congregate in an open-air setting (*agora*) to discuss the events affecting them. Discussions about business and social relations became a proper object of conversation among the assembled public (*polis*), and eventually laws and customs (*nomoi*) were developed explicitly as a way of governing Greek society. Whereas

the myths and religious convictions that had governed convention were a common and an established part of the Greek *paideia*, these new legal arrangements had to be assembled into written form in order to provide a concrete, collective foundation for governance.

This is the context from which the early practices and formulations of rhetoric emerge. William Guthrie traces the history of rhetoric to the Italians, writing: "The 'invention' of rhetoric is attributed to two Sicilians of the first half of the fifth century, Corax and Tisias. Invention in this connexion had a specific meaning, namely the introduction of the appeal to probability instead of fact, the drawing up of rules for its application, and their embodiment in written handbooks."[109] I should stress, given its importance later, that Guthrie's description anchors the origins of rhetoric to three things simultaneously; sophistic rhetoric included, by definition, the probable, the rules by which one spoke, and the transcription of rules and practices in written form. George Kennedy aligns well with Guthrie on the importance of the written, highlighting the proliferation of formal handbooks regarding rhetoric in the latter half of the fifth century BCE and citing this emergent reality as the source of Plato's concerns in the *Phaedrus*.[110] Thomas Cole, in his *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*, argues that rhetoric was inextricably bound to its written transmission, noting that it might be "historically more accurate to define rhetoric as the written word attempting to do the work of the spoken word."[111] Of course, the manner in which this "attempt" took place borrowed much from its more poetic predecessors. John Poulakos, for example, stresses that early rhetorical practices were adapted from the poets (not coincidentally, another group subject to the Platonic animus), even as rhetoric hyped its supposed distance from poetry. He makes clear that the sophists' "rhetorical prose was one of the earliest efforts to break away from the cultural dominance of poetry; but it was a prose relying on the use of the poetical techniques of past poets. As Aristotle points out in his *Rhetoric*, the

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sophists were among the first to borrow the techniques of the poets on matters of style and delivery."[112]

The importance of writing, of rhetoric's being-written, has not found its way into the work of those contemporary scholars of rhetoric working to reclaim and recuperate their sophistic ancestry, despite the relatively common acknowledgment of its written status among histories of early rhetoric. Susan Jarratt, John Poulakos, and Victor Vitanza, who represent three of the major approaches to rethinking the (status of the) Sophists, have systematically emphasized a sense of playfulness or possibility over any set of technical practices, and these scholars remain lamentably silent as to whether (sophistic) rhetoric should also (or necessarily) imply written accompaniment.

To a certain extent, this seeming reluctance to note the ink and papyrus codification of rhetoric's early techniques makes sense. Whatever their particular attempt at recuperation, all three scholars see in the sophists a chance to rescue contemporary rhetoric from itself and reinject a sense of possibility and play. For Jarratt, that play allows a rethinking of composition pedagogy and feminist rhetoric(s). For Poulakos, sophistic rhetoric offers a needed and essential response to the problems of its day, and his recuperation of the sophists begins by acknowledging its particular ideological and social contingencies. For Vitanza, sophistic rhetoric demonstrates a way of producing rhetoric as "poststructural" from its beginning, and in so doing encourages a more thorough critique of the supposed (one might say imposed) foundations of the discipline.[113] In none of these projects does it *seem essential* that the early teachings about rhetoric often took the form of rhetorical handbooks, in which the techniques of rhetoric were written down for future student consumption. The contemporary debate over the value of early rhetoric becomes, all too often, a debate over valence, in which the recuperators laud sophistic rhetoric's sense of

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play and invention and the detractors castigate it for the formalized deception made possible by its persuasive techniques. No less than Calvin Schrag, writing as usual from the crossroads of contemporary rhetoric and hermeneutics, offers this historical description: "As is well-known, the Sophists of ancient Greece had already fallen victim to the miscontrual of rhetoric as a bag of devices and tricks to be used for the winning of an argument."[114] Similar dismissals of rhetoric's technical "bag of tricks" can be found, apropos the *Phaedrus*, in the work of those who followed in Plato's philosophical footprints.[115]

Socrates and Plato emerge within this same cultural milieu. But whereas the sophists were for the most part itinerant instructors, Socrates and Plato were born aristocratic Athenians who (under a certain *reading*) found the democratizing tendencies of rhetoric more than a little distasteful. Many of the sophists charged money for their instruction, and made quite the living from it—Gorgias' legendary statue, for example—deriving their income from students who Plato would want to woo instead to his Academy. One might easily assume that at least some of the animosity between Plato and the sophists was professional, even if the vast majority of their divide was also ideological.

Second, and this factor cannot be overstated, the increased prevalence of literacy and the availability of writing produced a shift in the way that Greeks thought, both in terms of their *Lebenswelt* and, more fundamentally, in terms of the process of thinking itself. This second trend is, as classical scholar Eric Havelock has demonstrated with authority, of special importance in understanding Plato's philosophical foundations. As such, a brief recapitulation of Havelock's groundbreaking *Preface to Plato* is in order.[116] Focusing on Books III and X of the *Republic*, Havelock summarizes Plato's seemingly inconsistent position against poetic mimesis. The problem in a nutshell: Plato uses the term *mimesis* to refer simultaneously to the act of poetic

creation, the imitation of poetic norms, and the audience's response to poetic narrative. To the modern mind, this reads somewhat confusingly, and thus a temptation to believe that either Plato must be employing the term mimesis in an overly broad and consequently unproductive manner, or that perhaps his intense dislike of poets has generated some articulatory confusion over what exactly it is that he finds so distasteful.

Not so, argues Havelock. The confusion is not Plato's, but his contemporary interpretors, and it is a confusion borne out of their (and our) literate conditioning. Plato is living at a moment in which orality is giving way to literacy, with the Greek alphabet becoming more and more widespread. And while literacy-as-a-norm would wait for generations after Plato, Plato's distaste for what he understood as poetry is, for Havelock, indebted unknowingly to the shift from oral to written mediation. The use of poetic mimesis in a culture of primary orality was necessary to transmit cultural norms and conventions through the establishment of a social/collective memory. Collective immersion in poetic/dramatic practices fulfilled the purposes of Greek education (*paideia*); the oral performance of epic, drama, and poetry worked by having those involved respond to the rhythms and mnemonic devices embedded in the performance. This enactment worked through the simultaneous manifestation of each of the three components Plato identifies with mimesis: rhythmic improvisation, imitation of character voices and narration, and an audience hypnotically consuming the narrative, modern church revival style. Mimesis functioned via theatre. For Plato, mimesis here construed becomes the danger against which a properly philosophical state (and subject) must be measured. This danger, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe explains, is "explicitly determined" by Plato "as production, fabrication, *demiurgy. Only the demiurgic interpretation of mimesis* permits the disengaging of its essence..."[117] Thus Plato's gloss on poetic mimesis: imitation begets artifice.

Plato's objections, and his subsequent search for the essence of reality *qua* form (*eidos*) reflects, for Havelock, a more literate sensitivity. Whereas poetic mimesis required that subjects submerge themselves in the rhythms and characters of the stories being told, and thus operated through *the conventions and techniques of orality*, the Platonic reflection on the "itself *per se*" required a perspective that separated the knower from the known—in other words, it required *knowledge and experience of writing and reading*, in which the material to be known existed external to the person engaging it. Noting an absence of previously normative rhythmic patterns and the appearance of new conceptual formations in Plato's writing, Havelock argues that the Platonic turn was predicated on this externalization of the word, and the attendant distance between one's body and the language that constitutes (food for) thought. It is this sense of distance as a reflective space that Havelock identifies as productive of calculative, rational thought. Language was no longer (within) us but (also) without us, and it allowed for a type of subjectivity constituted by the ability to reflect on our own subjective formation.

Nowhere in the philological spectrum does this shift become more notable than in the shifting definition of the soul or *psyche*, a shift that occurred during the lifetime of Plato and that is evidenced in his own writings: "[I]nstead of signifying a man's ghost or wraith, or a man's breath or his life blood, a thing devoid of sense and self-consciousness, [the soul] came to mean 'the ghost that thinks', that is capable both of moral decision and of scientific cognition, and is the seat of moral responsibility, something infinitely precious, an essence unique in the whole realm of nature" (Havelock, 1963, p. 197). This shift in meaning, which Havelock traces over a number of different texts from different moments in Greek history, demonstrates how important certain mediations (or technics) were to the formation of the very object at question in this essay – the deployment of the soul in Plato in general and the *Phaedrus* in particular. "The doctrine of

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the autonomous psyche," the origin of which Havelock locates in the teachings of Plato's Socrates, "is the counterpart of the rejection of oral culture."[118]

This dual convergence of material and discursive conditions allowed what we know now as Platonic thought to e-merge, to produce itself and posit itself as an object distinct from its intellectual competitors. Neither of these conditions, by themselves, helps us to understand the specific mechanics of the *Phaedrus*, but it remains important (given my purposes) to understand how dependent Platonic thought was upon the cultural milieu and media formations of the Hellenic period.

There is one more related digression to engage in before turning to the *Phaedrus* proper. Martin Heidegger (in his *The Essence of Truth*) finds in Plato, and I am simplifying somewhat here, the eventual downfall of Western philosophy and its collapse into metaphysics.[119] The problematic turn comes most overtly with Plato's narrative of the cave, which eventually displaces truth understood as unhiddenness (*aletheia*) with a concept of truth understood as verisimilitude. That thematic extends far beyond the allegory of the cave, and the question of reality vs. appearance is one that pervades Plato's discussion of rhetoric, and so is worth considering here. As the next chapter will show, Heidegger suffers from his own fetishization of pre-Socratic philosophy, and his own bias towards the oral force of the logos (*legein*), to be sure. But what is important is that Heidegger finds Plato problematic and distinctive largely for the same reasons that Havelock finds Plato so fundamentally revolutionary. That two thinkers with such different backgrounds and with such monumentally different projects would each find in Plato the moment of a cultural and philosophical shift is worthy of note. At a minimum it indicates the massive importance of Plato's work in shaping subsequent philosophical thought, and gives us more of a reason to return, yet again, to dialogues like the *Phaedrus*.[120]

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Which I will do now.

Plato's Grotto

The *Phaedrus* builds itself around two very singular *oddities*.

Oddity one: the heavy employment of **mythos**. Plato (and/or Socrates, depending on where the one ends and the other begins, a difficulty that should be kept in mind) is often known as the "father of Logos," the father of philosophy, the supposed champion of rational argument. Such a titular reputation is certainly deserved, but one should pay close attention to the fact that Plato spins out myth after myth in pursuit of his argumentative proofs. His parentage of logos notwithstanding, there is no doubt that he remains well-versed in the use of mythos, and nowhere is that skill put to more work than in the *Phaedrus*. Socrates himself describes in detail no less than three myths: one on the origin and nature of the soul – the myth of the charioteer; one explaining the singing of the locusts – the myth of the cicadas; and one on the origin and consequences of writing – the myth of Theuth and Thamus. As Derrida notes, drawing on earlier work by Perceval Frutiger, the *Phaedrus* "contains the only 'rigorously original Platonic myths.'"[121]

Oddity two: the importance of **location**. Whereas most Platonic dialogues pay little to no attention to the location in which the discourse occurs, the Phaedrus goes out of its way to highlight the duo's trip outside the city walls and offers copious details regarding the secluded, shaded riverbank in which Phaedrus' and Socrates' discussion takes "place." Indeed, the dialogue goes out of its way to call attention to this particular oddity, with Socrates at 229c accurately describing comfortable places a few furlongs down the river, complete with details regarding statues they will find there, and then, at 230d, noting jovially that Socrates never leaves the

city.[122] This confusing little aside – that Socrates can describe in detail places he has supposedly never seen – is of course resolvable in a number of different ways, but it nevertheless calls attention to a certain playfulness within the dialogue, a playfulness that Socrates will eventually stress is important if writing is to have value. This *topos* of location continues upon their arrival and settling down, and is accentuated by mystic overtones. So, for example, the plane tree that shades Phaedrus and Socrates as they make their speeches is described in 230b as a "charming resting place" that "seems to be a sacred place of some nymphs and of Achelous, judging by the figurines and the statues." In 230c, after mentioning the pleasant breeze, Socrates notes how their resting place "resounds with the ... chorus of cicadas," a comment that cannot be dismissed as a random aside given the myth of the cicadas that will follow sometime later.

I am certainly not alone in keying on the importance of place here. John Sallis, in his lengthy and landmark reading of the Platonic dialogues, makes much of this singular instance, arguing that it sets the ground – literally and figuratively – for the subsequent dialogue.[123] Martha Nussbaum also keys on the question of location, arguing that this rhetorical shift in focus demonstates that "Plato's thought, and writing, seem to have left the *Republic's* city house" and are "moving in the direction of greater wildness, sensuousness, and vulnerability."[124] From Socrates' opening interrogative – "My dear friend Phaedrus, where are you going? And where do you come from?" -- to the lengthy description of the riverbed, place is fore-grounded in a manner entirely distinct from other Platonic dialogues. As G.W.F. Ferrari notes, the *Phaedrus* exploits "the possibilities of direct speech to full effect. Topography becomes the topic of conversation in a highly obtrusive manner."[125]

These two oddities, I think, are intriguing. They stamp the *Phaedrus* with the mark of what Burke calls the grotesque – a fluid conjoining of mysticism with ostensibly rational argument.

Like the seemingly supernatural Roman grottoes from whence it gets its name, the grotesque comes to the fore when, as Burke puts it, a "confusion in the forensic pattern gives more prominence to the subjective elements of imagery than to the objective, or public elements."[126] Perhaps such is the case in this dialogue: Socrates and Phaedrus have entered their own supernatural place, to partake in private speeches about love and whatever else, and in so doing, will eventually be overcome by a divinely inspired disquisition about the soul. It is a dialogue steeped in mysticism, a kind of Jonathon Edwards' *Crossing Over* moment in philosophy. Ted Nelson's description of the grotesque seems here particularly appropriate: "The grotesque is a mode that is first and foremost about crossing into a different and transformative order or reality, and second about the unexpected recombinations of events, objects, species we encounter once we are inside."[127]

Investigating whether there is actually a "confusion in the forensic pattern" will wait until the next section of the essay, but the dialogue's mysticism is worth exploring further, especially considering the amount of space it consumes within the dialogue itself. Much has been written and thought regarding the account of the soul given in the palinode (indeed, some versions of the *Phaedrus* carry the subtitle "On the Soul"), and I do not wish to enter into much detail regarding the metaphysical tenets of Plato's formulation, the paradoxes of reincarnation and self-motion raised in its telling, how it interacts with his other accounts of the world-soul, or what have you. Instead, I want to consider what function the soul as presented here in the *Phaedrus* has in parsing and making thinkable the arguments that constitute the latter half of the dialogue.

Significantly, Socrates begins with a preamble of sorts, categorizing the types of madness, secular and divine. Divine madness, the kind that grips him and compels his palinode, is pronounced as the necessary precondition for substantive discourse. This at 245a: "he who

without the divine madness comes to the doors of the Muses, confident that he will be a good poet by art, meets with no success, and the poetry of the sane man vanishes into nothingness before that of the inspired madmen." Sane poetry – aka the poetic mimesis of Plato's day – means naught when confronted with the composition borne out of a madness that is, through and through, "philosophical." The same can be said of rhetoric, which as I have already noted, borrowed liberally from the devices of Greek poetry. Plato's diminution of technics, here and throughout the dialogue, thus proceeds by way of a simple and powerful opposition: *mysticism trumps "art,"* which in the above passage translates the Greek *tekhnē* (τέχνης).

Divine madness may provide the inspiration, but it cannot by itself circumvent the limitations of human intellect when confronting the "idea" (ἰδέας) of the soul. Instead, regarding its "form we must speak in the following manner. To tell what it really is would be a matter for utterly superhuman and long discourse, but it is within human power to describe it briefly in a *figure*..." (246a, emphasis mine). This passage is particularly interesting, not only because of the posited impossibility of (mere) human knowledge of the soul – since superhuman discourse is needed – but also because the *possibility* of that impossible knowledge is broached by means of a "figure," or what we might today call a rhetorical trope. The soul comes to be understood by allegory, through allegory, as allegory, even as that allegory lays the foundation for Socrates' subsequent polemic against the "tricks" of rhetoric. Some tricks are, it seems, more equal than others.

Finally, the allegory arrives. Having asserted the immortal nature of the human soul (245c-d), and having justified the value and necessity of his "figure" to come, Socrates then likens the soul, in one of his most enduring analogies (246a-d), to "the composite nature of a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. Now ... one of the horses is noble and of noble breed and the other quite

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the opposite in breed and character. Therefore in our case the driving is necessarily difficult and troublesome." While the noble horse will try to soar heavenward towards perfection, its baser cousin will pull the chariot back to earth. Thus the charioteer must engage in an epic struggle, a struggle over human nature – typified here by the discord between love and loss, and typified elsewhere by the struggle over every other Platonic binary – good and evil, truth and opinion, speech and writing, and so on and so forth. The consequences of that struggle are nothing more than the soul's life and death, complete with a lengthy argument for reincarnation, where living justly improves your lot and living unjustly worsens that future lot. For my purposes, the overlapping denouement comes at 249b-c:

> For a human being must understand a general conception formed by collecting into a unity by means of reason the many perceptions of the senses; and this is a recollection of those things which our soul once beheld, when it journeyed with God and, lifting its vision above the things which we now say exist, rose up into real being. And therefore it is just that the mind of the philosopher only has wings, for he is always, so far as he is able, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine. Now a man who employs such memories rightly is always being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect; but since he separates himself from human interests and turns his attention toward the divine, he is rebuked by the vulgar, who consider him mad and do not know that he is inspired.

The myth continues, eventually tackling love, beauty, and divinity – always in relation to the soul of course – all the way through 257b. But the above passage contains enough of what I want to talk about that I will spend some time and interrogate this particular bit of dialogue and leave the

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rest of it go for now. Instead, I want to highlight a few themes at work here that will play out more a bit later.

First, note the transition between the winged horses and the winged mind of the philosopher, and second, note that it is memory (μνήμη) here, more than knowledge, that gives philosophy its access/link to the soul. Perfection comes about through the philosopher's "employment of " and "communion with" memory. This serves not only to accentuate philosophy's noble nature – something that will become more important during the subsequent discussion of rhetoric and writing – but also to give philosophy a more divine and mystic purview. But one cannot simply reduce the influence of one to the health of the other; memory mediates the relationship between philosophy and soul, and while the specific technics of this mediation *qua* employment or *qua* communion is not talked out in the *Phaedrus*, it is interesting to note that even at his most mystic, Plato cannot escape the requirements of technicity and mediation. To some extent this should not be surprising. Mysticism is at its heart a type of mediation, albeit one dressed in an entirely different set of emporer's clothes. And certainly memory, here and throughout the myth, is strangely devoid of any concrete or detailed explanation as to how it functions (something not true in other Platonic dialogues – though I will have more to say about this later). Third and finally, note that the path to perfection runs through the grotesque, this time through the philosopher's initiation into divine or perfect "mysteries." The dialogue's emphasis on place becomes important here, and the frequent references throughout the dialogue to a divine presence or the singing cicadas, not to mention the divine mania inspiring Socrates' final speech, situate the dialogue itself as one of the mysteries to which the philosopher must turn.

The difficulty, though, is that any mystic turn in philosophy will necessarily require, if one is to follow the dictates of the myth, a constitutive other. Philosophy may be the charioteer, it may be the noble horse (I suspect that the allegory does not map itself that cleanly, and that philosophy can be either or both); but without the baser horse, the one driven by the appetites, the chariot would be lessened. The chariot requires both horses if it is to have any "oomph" to its drive, just as it requires someone to help steer the chariot in the right direction, a direction that at this point is bound mystically to the care of the soul or *psyche* (ψυχή in above). In so doing, this analogy, and the mythic formulation of the soul in which it is embedded, sets the stage for the arguments that will appear in the latter half of the dialogue. By defining the soul as the mystic source and destination of true knowledge or epistēme (most explicitly with ἐπιστήμης at 247c), the two terms serve to ground each other and to offer the primary, authoritative half of the epistēme / tekhnē binary. Not surprisingly, Charles Griswold, in his slavish, book-length study of the *Phaedrus*, locates the kernel of Plato's argument against rhetoric in the description of the *psyche*: "The problems of skepticism and solipsism are thus ingrained in the *Phaedrus*' account of the knowledge available to human souls... *The problem of rhetoric... is thus generated by the palinode's account of the human condition.*"[128]

Considered grotesquely, I would suggest that the entire *Phaedrus* is both overdetermined and structured by the question of the soul, or more accurately, the putting of that soul to work against the vagaries and dangers of technique. Allegories for rhetoric, explications of mania, and investigations of love aside, the soul comes to dominate and govern every important movement in the dialogue. It is the "sparkling" soul of Phaedrus that seduces Socrates outside the city, it is the soul that demands the final speech on love – a speech entirely about the nature of the soul,

and it is the soul that will eventually help Phaedrus and Socrates determine what separates good

writing from bad. It is this final movement and final use of the soul to which I now turn.

Plato's Prosthesis

    After the first two speeches on love have been given, both of which argue that sexual

favors should be granted to the non-lover rather than the lover, Socrates feigns as if to go, only to

"find" himself prevented from doing so by his *daimonion*. Socrates remarks on this at 242b-c:

> My good friend, when I was about to cross the stream, the spirit and the sign that usually
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> comes to me came—it always holds me back from something I am about to do—and I
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> thought I heard a voice from it which forbade my going away before clearing my
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> conscience, as if I had committed some sin against deity. Now I am a   seer, not a very
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> good one, but as the bad writers say, good enough for my own purposes; so now I
>
> understand my error. How prophetic the soul is, my friend!

How prophetic, indeed. The reason for being held back, the reader will recall, is Socrates'

intuition that he has wronged love, and that the true argument (which will be made in his

palinode) should favor the lover rather than the non-lover, inverting what he and Phaedrus had

previously contended. But this sense of wrong, this conscience of love so to speak, comes from

an interesting place. The spirit that holds him back, that signals to him (the spirit is itself a sign),

comes to him from somewhere else, and does so as if it was someone else—an *arrivant*, sent

from outside the subject in order to call that subject to order. His *daimonion* comes to him,

either as his soul or because of it, and restrains him by speaking to him through its own voice.

Here is the ghost that thinks, thinking aloud so that Socrates can hear.

Far from being merely a literary device that segues between Socrates' two speeches, this call from the outside produces its own particular excess in the text. On the one hand, this call performs the very life and love of philosophy that Socrates will argue for in the final section of the dialogue. The call, or even the possibility, of the *daimonion* signifies philosophical conviction, a way of being in the world that cannot be satisfied by partial truths. But on the other hand, this passage also speaks to the rather uncanny bridge between "sight" (in the broader sense of recognition and knowledge) and *psyche.* The soul enables prophecy/sight/correction of his error, obviously, but the details of this enabling are surprising, for when Socrates talks out his own limited powers of prophecy, writing quietly enters the conversation. Socrates is a poor seer *(mantis),* but like the "bad writers" (as opposed to potentially "good" writers), his skills are sufficient for his own purposes. Why this bizarre allusion to writing, an external means of inscription, as a way to explain a gift of sight situated firmly within the self?[129] And why juxtapose *bad writing* with *good prophecy*? These are not trivial questions, nor do they correspond to simple answers, yet they seem to remain well below the surface of those writing on the *Phaedrus*. G. Ferrari, for example, actually removes the reference via a convenient ellipses when talking through his interpretation of the passage.[130] Charles Griswold, who devotes about five pages to the short interlude between Socrates' first and second speeches, also ignores the reference to writing. Griswold even remarks, without any sense of the irony attending his omission, that the "various *inner sources* that lead Socrates to the palinode contrast sharply with the external sources that produced his first speech, not to mention the *external book* Phaedrus read."[131] Even Derrida, who goes out of his way to stress Plato's hostility to the *mantic* in other dialogues,[132] and who does so while characterizing Plato's larger hostility to writing, never takes account of this particular passage.

Of course, this passage should not be understood as some sort of hidden pivot within the dialogue. This allusion provides no secret key to the *meaning* of the *Phaedrus* as a whole, no surprising resolution of Platonic excess. Nevertheless, the passage does provide insight into the relationship between the soul and writing, a relationship whose exploration lies near the center of this essay. Those lines mark both the second appearance of the word *psyche* in the discourse (the first is just prior at 241c, when describing the soul as being of the utmost importance for truth, or *aletheia*) and the second mention of writing (the first comes, obviously with the written speech of Lysias). That the two should be conjoined so quickly in their respective journeys through the text highlights how important writing is in understanding the function of the soul. Writing is not so much maligned here as it is made analogical; as an expository device, writing helps us understand the technics of Socrates' mystic insight(s). As I will show below, this dual-pronged strategy—where the soul functions distinctly from the person it animates and its explanation in terms of technics, especially the technics of inscription—will repeat itself a number of times throughout the Platonic dialogues.

Of course I want to state more than merely the obvious. My concern is not that Plato must develop and deploy a vocabulary of/for the soul, since, after all, the concept of soul is predicated on transcending direct human understanding. As Josef Pieper notes, Plato's soul (or any concept of soul, I might add) is "difficult or impossible to grasp by direct non-metaphorical statement."[133] More is at work here than the now banal observation regarding the absence of an outside text. Rather, I want to stress that the vocabulary that Plato does deploy remains, by and large, limited to the technics of writing; in other words, the outside text of the soul is, *quite literally*, an outside text. Griswold's spurious separation between the inner and outer sources of Platonic invention, a separation that no doubt follows what is typically thought under the rubric of "Platonism," is

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undercut even at the moment of its own formation, something Griswold might have seen had he not skipped over the comparison to writing. Plato, whether conscious of his brief allusion's deconstructive effect or not, continues on with his myth of the soul, the figure of the charioteer, and his final discourse on love. And in the course of this mythologizing, the soul will detach itself in a grotesque fashion from its association with writing even as it focuses on those powers of "seeing"—how prophetic it is!—that the comparison with bad writing helped us to comprehend. Indeed, the *psyche* will explicitly avoid being linked to the written, both in the palinode and its aftermath, other than for the purpose of this peculiar exposition.

In effect, or rather as an effect, Plato's soul attaches to his philosophical posturing like a prosthetic device, a technological extension through which all the ambiguous divisions between knowledge and opinion, truth and falsehood, memory and recollection, and so on can be resolved through recourse to the grotesque, mystical nature of the human *psyche*. To reiterate: the functioning of the soul is articulated consistently as an expository effect of the technics of inscription, but thanks to its mythic allegory, the soul *itself* is dressed in clothing that seems entirely non-technical. Indeed, Plato will treat technics (*qua* writing) as the soul's outside, the non-mystic counterpart against which the value and *eidos* of the soul will define itself. This trick, which I will explore in a moment, is perhaps the most pernicious "trick" in all of Plato's philosophy, and whether it is the result of a conscious strategic deployment or rather a *mark* of what remains unthought within Plato, it nevertheless carries serious implications for understanding the fate of rhetoric and media after Plato, up to and including today.

I am conjoining rhetoric *and* media here, and I am doing so for a couple of reasons. First, I am not sure that the two concepts are either actually distinct or productively distinguished, whether in Plato or in general. Derrida has argued convincingly that thought is always already a

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form of general writing, and that the languages that give us the capacity for thought are consequently already a sort of teletechnology. Second, I conjoin the two concepts because in the *Phaedrus* Plato's attack on rhetoric operates side by side with his attack on writing. This double assault, which is more sustained and integrated than Derrida accounts for, needs to be examined further. Thus a research question of sorts: what if the denigration of rhetoric and the denigration of writing in the *Phaedrus*, rather than being two parallel but otherwise unrelated critiques, in fact necessitate each other? Put another way, what if there exists a certain Platonic stricture that requires of him that he malign *both* rhetoric and writing as the constitutive outsides of philosophy?

In order to tease out a possible answer, I will trace three different fissures at work in the arguments of the *Phaedrus* and beyond: the differentiation between good and bad writing, the relationship between writing and rhetoric, and the (unacknowledged or implicit) Platonic technics of memory.

First fissure: good writing vs. bad. Although Plato offers several sustained objections – mystic and otherwise – to the practice of writing as it is understood in the *Phaedrus*, he is not interested in authoring a blanket condemnation. And how could he be, realistically, given his own practice of writing? Instead, Plato will differentiate between a good writing and a bad writing, just as (and not coincidentally) he will argue for a good rhetoric and a bad rhetoric. As with many issues in the Platonic corpus, the difference is one of competing binary terms: good writing will provide amusement and assist in recollection, while bad writing will attempt serious discourse and engage in persuasion. This is made clearest at 277e-278b, where the written will be contrasted with the bliss of spoken dialogue:

But the man who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily much that is playful, and that no written discourse, whether in metre or in prose, deserves to be treated very seriously... but that the best of them really serve only to remind us of what we know; and who thinks that only in words about justice and beauty and goodness spoken by teachers for the sake of instruction and really written in the soul is clearness and perfection and serious value,... and who pays no attention to the other words, – that man, Phaedrus, is likely to be such as you and I might pray that we ourselves may become.

So what to say about these contrasts, between good and bad writing on the one hand, and between the written and the spoken on the other? First, at the risk of aping Derrida, I will note that these contrasts becomes all the more remarkable, all the more difficult, because the impotence of written discourse is contrasted with the power of speech (specifically *philosophical* speech) to *write* in the soul. In other words, the prosthesis of the soul is thought through in terms of its technical inscribability—the soul is what gets written (on). Given the economy at work in the myth of the charioteer, in which the philosopher must commune with memory in order to access true knowledge, the above excerpt makes it apparent (as it does for Derrida, albeit through a very different trajectory) that this communion with memory is literally *ex-posed* through the metaphor of writing, even as that exposition presupposes a *form* of writing somehow purified of the problems attending the written word. This purification must take place, somehow and somewhere, because Socrates makes it explicit that the specter of bad writing is so dangerous that one who takes seriously clearness, perfection, and value must avoid any related belief in the seriousness of writing. It is insufficient merely to appreciate the irreducibility of oral dialogue; one must also dismiss and denigrate the value of writing. This necessity to repress the written should not be taken lightly, since it is this repression that allows Socrates to describe

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subsequently how words are written in the soul without collapsing the written and the oral into a more general concern with communication.

For a moment at least, we will put this question of technics in abeyance. There is a second schema to note here: good writing writes what is already known. Here, and this is a pattern that will, I believe, repeat itself in every Platonic discourse on the subject, the epistēme will precede ontologically and axiologically the possibility of good writing. Indeed, in *Epistle VII*, Plato admonishes those who write for the benefit of an audience that lacks the prior proper knowledge, this at 344c: 'every serious man in dealing with really serious subjects carefully avoids writing, lest thereby he may possibly cast them as a prey to the envy and stupidity of the public."[134] Even the most casual of amateur philosophers will be aware of Plato's largely anti-democratic biases and his argument in favor of philosopher "kings" capable of leading the uneducated and unwashed *hoi polloi.* That these beliefs may be tied to his concerns with writing may seem equally obvious, but the explicit linkage in this brief passage are worth noting. Writing cannot be trusted because the public does not already know the truth of what they are reading, and Plato's solution relies on relegating writing to mere trivium.

So what sort of knowledge must be known prior to writing? Not surprisingly, the answer is abstract, holistic, and can only be garnered by the soul. Plato makes this clear when describing the types of knowledge needed to know the *thing in itself* at line 342c, same letter: "Fourth comes knowledge and intelligence and true opinion regarding these objects; and these we must assume to form a single whole, which does not exist in vocal utterance or in bodily forms but in souls..." This aporia—that knowledge of the whole exists in the soul and not in vocal utterance, and yet dialogue is responsible for writing such knowledge into the soul—invaginates and collapses epistēme and psyche, while also linking the pair to orality *qua* philosophical speech, a

bond that in the *Meno* (88e-89a) will extend to include *phronesis* as an outgrowth of *epistēme*. Further, Socrates will make it clear that the written can never by itself precede or produce knowledge of any sort because it lacks the capacity for dialogue. This lack is most explicit at *Phaedrus* 275d-e: "You might think that [written words] spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their saying, they always say only one and the same thing."

From here we could segue into a summary of Derrida's much more sustained reading of this portion of the *Phaedrus*, his highlighting of the "threat" of dissemination, the fatherless status of writing, and so on. We could, but we won't, not really. We wouldn't want to simply *repeat* his analysis. Instead, let us, with full knowledge and reference to Derrida's work in "Plato's Pharmacy," consider the strange status of repetition working in Plato. On the one hand, writing is impotent because it can only repeat itself, never adding, never refining, never crafting itself via dialogue in its quest for *eidos*. On the other hand, writing is dangerous because the uneducated, "stupid" public will take up what is written, in effect repeating it, without the proper philosophical preparation. Simultaneously insipid and inciting. These two characterizations are not as opposed as one might think, given that in both what remains problematic is the possibility of repetition itself. Writing is defined by iterability, performed through the recurrence of graphic marks, and realized by the possibility of reinscription; to be absolutely clear: *repetition is writing's particular mimetic quality*. And repetition implies distance: the distance between different *graphēs*, the distance between the reader and the read, the distance between the time of inscription and the time of consumption – all the things that Derrida connotes under the name of *différance*. And Plato knows the necessity of this distance, no doubt, and is responding accordingly, with all the vehemence he can muster.

His response may seem like a failure. *First* perhaps, because Plato has already predicated his philosophical system on the concept of form (*eidos*) and explicitly rejected the poetic, demiurgic mimesis of orality. He has already dismissed as *artificial* and unreflexive the technics of imitation. How then can he also cast down/aside/away the written technics of repetition? *Second* perhaps, because *eidos* is itself predicated on eternal, unchanging repetition. As Derrida remarks: "The *eidos* is that which can always be repeated as *the same*. The ideality and invisibility of the *eidos* are its power-to-be-repeated."[135] This is why, for Plato, the soul recollects what it already knows, and it is why the ascent from the cave must always occur during the brightness of the day. The forms do not change – no matter how one discovers them, no matter how one returns to them, each discovery will repeat the same, blinding truth. This capacity to return to the same, a feature made possible by writing, is exactly what Havelock identifies when arguing that Plato's *eidos* comes from experiencing the alphabetic. How then can Plato dismiss writing for the very quality that lends value to his own philosophy?

Before answering, let us explore another opening.

Second fissure: writing and rhetoric. We should recall from earlier that rhetoric, from the fifth century B.C.E. onward, was by and large bound to writing. And we should take seriously Schrag's admonition against the "bag of tricks" that comprised the techniques of sophistic rhetoric, if only to show how easily rhetoric can be reduced by the concern that it is merely technique (or knack). Plato will refer at 266d of the *Phaedrus* to these rules of rhetoric, the very ones he notes are "written in the books on rhetoric" as merely "the niceties of the art." Rhetoric, which is literally bound to the written, comes to be understood in terms of its technics, just as it comes to be offered up, in both the *Phaedrus* and the *Gorgias*, as a supplement to philosophy. Without philosophy to guide them writers are merely *doxosophoi*—simulated wise men, sophists

par excellence. Indeed, for Plato the connection between sophistry/rhetoric and writing is so pernicious that, in a passage that seems immensely important for our current engagement, Plato will actually compare the rhetorical shenanigans of the sophists to a book. This passage comes in *Protagoras*, at 329a-b:

> Suppose you put a question to one of them—they are just like books, incapable of either answering you or putting a question of their own; if you question even a small point in what has been said, just as brazen vessels ring a long time after they have been struck and prolong the note unless you put your hand on them, these orators too, on being asked a little question, extend their speech over a full-length course.

Sophists and books: two peas in an insular pod, incapable of "deeper" dialogue. In both instances, this incapacity comes about as the price of a certain technics, for writing its dissemination and reproducibility, and for rhetoric its poetic "eloquence" and emphasis on probabilities. As Griswold explains, echoing the earlier assessment of the "threat" of uncontrolled repetition: "since these rhetorical 'Arts' are no more than collections of useful precepts and devices, a student could learn how they are useful without learning how to use them. And the point does not hang on the style of the actual manuals... but simply on their nature as *books*: that is their consisting of strings of explicit statements."[136]

In the *Phaedrus*, the absent figure of Lysias, who signifies both the written word and the art of rhetoric, offers the most interesting inroad into this relationship. Lysias was a well known orator, famous mostly for his writing and delivery of forensic speeches regarding legal affairs as well as for teaching his craft. In the dialogue bearing his name, Phaedrus has just come from Lysias and is bearing a copy of a speech drafted by him that argues that sexual favors be granted to the non-lover rather than the lover. It is this speech that Phaedrus hides under the left sleeve

of his cloak, and that Socrates forces out into the open. That early scene is worth highlighting.

At first, before Socrates calls attention to the scroll, Phaedrus doth protest too much, and does so

by stressing the difference between memory and written composition (228a): "Do you suppose

that I, who am a mere ordinary man, can tell from memory, in a way that is worthy of Lysias,

what he, the cleverest writer of our day, composed at his leisure and took a long time for?"

Socrates of course dismisses these concerns – they are merely technical concerns at that – and

instead asks for the scroll itself, but does so by equating the presence of the scroll with the

presence of Lysias himself (228d-e): "I suspect you have the actual discourse. And if that is the

case, believe this of me, that I am very fond of you, but when Lysias is here I have not the

slightest intention of lending you my ears to practice on." One might be tempted to read this

strategy of equivalence (the scroll *as* Lysias) as awarding to writing more power and more

presence than Plato seems to grant it elsewhere. That is until we realize that this is actually a

clever, double denigration: Lysias literally is a book, just as a book might as well be Lysias

himself because neither, present or not, could really engage in the sort of dialogue necessary to

arrive at epistēme. And one should not skip over the subtle dismissal of repetition here in

Socrates' unwillingness to be just another audience on which Phaedrus can practice his delivery.

This particular tactic—the dismissal of Lysias by calling attention to his bookness, i.e. his

technics—continues as Socrates dispenses judgment at the close of Phaedrus's reading of the

scroll. This at 234e-235a:

> What? Are you and I to praise the discourse because the author has said what he ought
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> and not merely because all the expressions are clear and well rounded and finely tuned?
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> For if that is expected, I must grant it for your sake, since, because of my stupidity, I did
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> not notice it. I was attending only to the rhetorical manner, and I thought even Lysias

himself would not think that satisfactory. It seemed to me, Phaedrus, unless you disagree, that he said the same thing two or three times, as if he did not find it easy to say many things about one subject, or perhaps he did not care about such a detail and he appeared to me in youthful fashion to be exhibiting his ability to say the same thing in two different ways and in both ways excellently.

Socrates grounds his disdain for the fruits of Lysias's labor in the devaluation of the techniques of rhetoric. Indeed, Socrates is deliberately obtuse, initially refusing to engage Lysias at the level of content, and instead maligning him for his use and misuse of rhetorical tricks. This recalcitrance makes sense; Lysias is just a book, and as such he cannot answer questions dealing with content or pose his own. And Lysias will continue to provide the whipping boy (or is it the straw man?) throughout the remainder of the dialogue, and will serve repeatedly as the technical foil to the soul-inspired, mystic oratory that Socrates offers as the final pronouncement on love. Lysias the orator and Lysias the scroll become one and the same, and they do so because they share a certain technics, one distinct from knowledge of the soul and all that such knowledge implies, philosophically, for Plato. At the end, Socrates and Phaedrus can only pray that Lysias will be converted, Darth Vader style, to the good side of the force. Praying to Eros, Socrates entreats (257a-b): "Pardon, I pray, my former words and accept these words with favor; be kind and gracious... And if in our former discourse Phaedrus and I said anything harsh against thee, blame Lysias, the father of that discourse, make him to cease from such speeches, and turn him, as his brother Polemarchus is turned, toward philosophy."

In both fissures—the relationship between rhetoric and writing on the one hand and the assessment of good and bad writing on the other—the philosophical appreciation for knowledge understood as epistēme must precede (metaphysically) the deployment of any secondary practice.

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Both rhetoric and writing can be put to work in the service of philosophy, but they will never be afforded access to true knowledge, much less access to the soul itself. Books carry no soul, they are dead letters, and thus cannot produce or contain knowledge; and rhetoric cannot produce or contain knowledge because it does not have a prior appreciation of the soul. This hijacking of the psyche – what I call *souljacking* – maps the rest of the philosophical meme, and does so by separating the possibility of knowing (*epistēme*) from the techniques of knowing (*tekhnē*). Only the soul can provide a whitespace for the writing of knowledge, only the soul can respond to the harsh light outside the cave. Documents, and at least in the *Thaetetus*, rhetoricians, lack the soul's natural inclination to the good (instead, their inclination is cosmetic, something clarified earlier in the *Gorgias*). This is why, as Ferrari notes when discussing rhetoric's inability to produce knowledge: "The *Phaedrus*' response to the problem, namely, *dialegesthai*, is not made explicit until the retraction of *techne* is introduced by the Theuth/Thamus story."[137]

This duo, rhetoric and writing, allegedly lack the capacity to respond. Why? Practically speaking, writing can preempt and respond to objections with a bit of foresight, and rhetoricians are certainly capable of their own responses to detractors. For Plato, and for his Socratic mouthpiece, something more has to be at work if writing and rhetoric are to be prohibited from being properly epistemic. That something is, I believe, the question of tekhne, or at least the question of a certain conception of tekhnē. The mechanistic practices of rhetoric (like alliteration, rhythm, anadiplosis, kairos, etc., all of which were being transcribed in rhetorical handbooks in or before Plato's time) correspond to the mechanics of writing only in so much as Plato dismisses their facilitation of content and stresses their technical capacity, which is to say, their function *sans* soul.

So at this point, and by way of summary, I want to suggest that Plato's invective against rhetoric is not so much a question of reality vs. non-reality, or truth vs. appearance, but rather an objection to a certain technics, a technics found by Plato to be at work both in writing and in rhetoric. This is the point at which I will depart from Derrida, assuming such a departure is possible or necessary. Plato's problem with writing is not born out of an innate phonocentrism – something complicated by Havelock, I think – but rather with a certain conception of technics as the other of philosophy, of which logocentrism and phonocentrism are particular aspects. *Doxa* and logography are, for Plato, lesser things, but their degenerate status stems from their method and not their madness. The *epistēme*, which will always be tied to the soul for Plato: that is where the heart and possibility of philosophy lies.

Plato's Double

(And the) *third fissure: the technics of memory*. Before returning to the questions posed earlier regarding Plato's distaste for the repetition linked to written mimesis, let us engage a bit more thoroughly one other excess: the question of memory. This question returns us to the tissue of mimesis and does so by threatening to undo, from within, the Platonic separation of tekhnē from epistēme. I had hinted at this threat earlier, during the discussion of the grotesque, but here I want to make explicit that memory for Plato is not just important as the *sine qua non* of the philosopher's connection to the soul, it is equally essential because it is always and only possibly conceptualized through a metonymic set of technics. Two quick instances, the first from *Thaetetus* (191c-192a):

> Please assume, then, for the sake of argument, that there is in our souls a block of wax, in one case larger, in another smaller, in one case the wax is purer, in another more impure

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and harder, in some cases softer, and in some of proper quality... Let us, then, say that

this is the gift of Memory, the mother of the Muses, and that whenever we wish to

remember anything we see or hear or think of in our own minds, we hold this wax under

the perceptions and thoughts and imprint them upon it...

Much like the magic writing tablet that animates Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, the wax

blocks function to make sense of memory as a process of inscription. They substitute for the

abstraction of memory itself, and memory comes to be defined via mnemotechnics as a

representational practice: in a word, memory remains entirely about mimesis, but a mimesis that

functions by way of the cave and the maligning of the poets to rethink memory through the

practice of writing. In other words, even were one to maintain the pretense or possibility of an

oral culture, after Plato's formulation that culture comes to be understood in terms of its literate

successor. This fusion of memory and writing should be expected: communion with memory

was the philosopher's gateway to the soul, and the soul—as idea and *eidos*—was already

understood through the technics of repetition. Memory had to follow suit, if only to maintain the

coherence of the interface. This is carried to an almost paradoxical extreme in Plato's *Philebus*,

in which Socrates engages Protarchus in a dialogue about the relationship between psyche and

memory. Plato writes:

I think that the soul at such a time is like a book (βιβλίῳ)... Memory unites with the

senses, and they and the feelings which are connected with them seem to me almost to

write words in our souls; and when the feeling in question writes the truth, true opinions

and true statements are produced in us; but when the writer within us writes falsehoods,

the resulting opinions and statements are the opposite of true.

The usual binaries are operating here – inside/outside, true/false – and we would do well to hesitate in endorsing them. But something else is rotten in Athens: Plato, who downplays the possibility of writing anything seriously chooses to discourse about the most serious subjects through the allegorical appropriation of writing. This shouldn't be considered a failure – that would imply some degree of choice or alternative, and I am not sure that an alternative exists. But the ever present question of the mediation of memory, or better still, mediation *as* memory, does call into question the lines Plato tries to draw between philosophy and rhetoric *and* between philosophy and writing. Rhetoricians and books are incapable of responding to questions, incapable of engaging in dialectic and diairesis, but the wax blocks and the books within can? Despite being understood through repetition, like *eidos*, and represented by inscription, like the soul, memory remains free of the dangers of being-written. Thank Eros for the grotesque!

What then can we say about mimesis and its relationship to Memory, mother of the Muses? Mommy dearest has not, as we will see in a moment, been that kind to Plato. Or is it Socrates? Here we run up against the condition of possibility and of closure for Platonism, a condition painfully obvious and yet all too often ignored in commentary on the *Phaedrus* (or most other Platonic dialogues): Socrates is not Plato and Plato is not Socrates. *Socrates is a figure*, a trope, much like the charioteer, driving the text heavenward. And he steers the chariot by means of his dialogue, his elenchus, his mystic *daimonion*. He is the literary intersection of written and oral mimesis, the forced repetition and simulation of the flows and rhythm of an oral exchange. And if the deck is seemingly stacked by Plato through the weakness of Socrates' figural opposition, it is marked and rigged and controlled from the onset by the theatrical staging of Socrates as a figure. Socrates, already dead when Plato begins "channeling" his dialogues, signifies the ghost-that-thinks in an almost comical fashion. And yet, despite embodying every mimetic quality that

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Plato will argue against – imitation, artifice, repetition, dissemination – the *Phaedrus* continues arguing unabashedly for a rejection of technics, even as all of the techniques in question are linked to a particular determination of written or poetic mimesis. Through the entire length of the dialogue, Plato seems perfectly happy pretending to be Socrates, writing as Socrates, and speaking through Socrates.

Except once. There is one moment in the dialogue in which the tropological character of Socrates is called into question, and perhaps not surprisingly, it happens because of a lapse in memory. At 265, Socrates asserts that in his previous speeches he a) assigned each of the four types of madness to a particular deity, and b) that he had spoken of love as a type of madness in both of his speeches on the subject. Nope. A quick look back at the relevant portions of the text, at 245a and 239-240 respectively, shows that Socrates only assigned one type of madness to a deity (the Muses), leaving the others quite haphazardly categorized, and that Socrates originally associated love with irrational desire, not madness. Clearly, something must have contaminated somebody's wax block.[138] A confusion in the forensic pattern, indeed.

We can read this in a number of different ways. On the one hand, we could rationalize the slippage as strategy, praise the genius of the author, and work hermeneutically to recover the secret insights provided by these mischaracterizations. This reading would require recourse to intentionality, a general sympathy towards Platonic binaries, and a considerable amount of charity. On the other hand, we could see this as a moment of breakdown, an oversight of the first order, where the abilities of the author are suddenly overwhelmed trying to navigate his own tortured constructions. This reading would require (still) a recourse to intentionality, a general sympathy towards the possible perfection of metaphysics, and a considerable amount of inhospitality to Plato. As a third gesture, and the one I hope to employ, we could affirm the

aberration between the speeches and the memory of those speeches as the insolvent necessity of mediation, which is to say, the failure and the success of technics. Memory repeats, but it repeats with difference. In other words, memory functions by not being *eidos*, by not being universal and unchanging. It does so by means of the figure, and the figure of Socrates testifies through his lapse in memory to his own status as a mimetic actuality and accomplishes this testimony through his/its technical inscription in and as the dialogue. Memory remains a Muse, and as Havelock has famously quipped, the muse has learned to write.[139]

All of which is to say something rather obvious: mimesis cannot be banished by thought since thought is made possible by mimesis. This does not mean that thought will not attempt to control and determine the role that mimesis will be allowed to play in a style of thinking or way of being like that of Platonism. Quite the opposite, in fact; philosophical thought has long obsessed over its origins, even if only to write them in a way that enhances its lineage. We can now return to the questions posed at the close of the first fissure: how can Plato reject written mimesis when he has already opposed himself to the poetic mimesis of orality, and how can Plato rail against a technics that clearly make possible his own philosophical foundations? The first answer is simple: poetic and written mimesis are not opposed to each other; if anything, each delimit and constitutes the other.[140] The second answer is more complex, but essential: Plato must also reject written mimesis even if he is undoubtedly indebted to it – because mimesis is itself the enemy of (his) philosophy. Mimesis engenders thinking, like an originary philosophical trauma, and as such philosophy has a terribly difficult time coping with it. After all, how does one explain something that makes explanation possible? Further, how does one explore the thinking of mimesis without requiring an infinitely regressive mimetic representation of mimesis itself? Instead of succumning to this conceptual aporia, Platonism outlines a different, mystic

response: representation cannot be understood as underlying philosophy, it must remain external, secondary, and secular. In other words, the critical point is not that mimesis is bad, but rather that Plato must *argue that mimesis is bad*. This gesture, which is an attempt to control and determine mimesis as an outside, even when it is painfully apparent that Platonic thought requires a certain "internal" complicity with mimesis, is arguably the foundational move of Platonism, even as it is also its most political component. It also explains why rhetoric and media must be denigrated together; the two are linked through their explicit embrace of the technics of mimesis and those technics threaten the possibility of escaping the cave. Since all representations are flawed save the one that demonstrates and proves that representations are flawed, only the grotesque possibilities of philosophical conviction can provide salvation for the human subject, and subsequently for human society. Platonism thus conceived is fundamentally reactionary—a conservative revolution against the spread of literacy among masses who had previously known only the demiurgic, imitative thrust of poetic mimesis, and consequently lacked the conditions Plato deemed proper for the "good life." Instead of repetition with difference, Platonism enshrines an unyielding sense of the reality of the same, even as that reality is accessed by a very particular and very aesthetic response to the difficulties of representation. It is Plato's grotesque way or the highway.[141] From there it is a small skip, a jump and a stone's throw to the oppressive apparatuses of authoritarianism.

Plato's Legacy

This chapter has attempted to show two things: first, that Plato's distaste for (or fear of) mimesis requires a simultaneous, double denigration of rhetoric and media constituted by denying any direct access or relationship between technics and knowledge; and second, that this

theoretical treatment of technics matters, politically and philosophically. But this chapter also shows that this theoretical treatment, no matter how robust its operations, will never completely determine the fate of technics, since technics are, by necessity, already at work in the treatment itself. As such, the question for contemporary rhetoricians and media scholars returns to one of inheritance.

I think that it is insufficient to say, as Brian Vickers and other have,[142] that Plato privileges philosophy over rhetoric because the first produces truth and knowledge and the other deals merely with opinion. To repeat this simplification already cedes too much and skips what is properly rhetorical about Plato's bifurcation: the careful bonding of psyche to epistēme and the exiling of tekhnē as a constitutive outside to philosophy. The true/false and reality/appearance dichotomies already presuppose and require the epistēme/tekhnē binary, and repeating them, even to fight against them, means playing on a field where the rules of engagement are always already decided by Platonic philosophy. For Plato, there cannot be knowledge without soul, or (eventually) any soul without knowledge. Even in the one moment where Plato's *Phaedrus* positively talks out the influence of rhetoric upon the soul (261a), rhetoric is seen as a seductive force that leads the soul inexorably towards bad unless reigned in by the philosophical process of division. The homology between the discussion of rhetoric and the disquisition on the soul is clear; rhetoric is best understood as the dark horse that must be reigned in by the philosophical charioteer, and it is this homology that helps cement for Plato the reduction of rhetoric to tekhnē – something to be mastered, but never something in and of itself worthy of direct affiliation with the soul. The psyche, the "ghost that thinks," thinks only in so much as it thinks philosophically.

That was then, and this is now. Platonism has been put into crisis by a good number of sustained indictments over the two and a half millennia, starting almost immediately with

Aristotle and continuing with some of the biggest names in Western philosophy: Descartes, Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida and so on. But despite the success of these indictments, the tenets of Platonism that provoke this essay remain surprisingly alive and well. There is a reason why a thinker as powerful as Alfred North Whitehead can lump all the disparate threads of Western metaphysics and label them but a footnote to Plato,[143] and that reason, as Jan Patočka points out, has everything to do with the Platonic instantiation of the soul.[144] Even as new media begins to call into question the success of the Platonic privileging of epistēme over tekhnē, our academic consideration of the newest cultural imaginaries of cyberspace seems to happily tow Plato's line. How else can one explain the content of the recent book *Matrix and Philosophy*, in which nearly every essay that mentions Plato ultimately agrees that *The Matrix* is the modern rendition of Plato's cave? Small wonder that audiences freaked out when Neo disables sentinels in the supposedly real world at the end of *The Matrix Reloaded*. "How can that be?" they asked. "Perhaps the real world is a second Matrix, perhaps it is a dream, perhaps he is still in the Matrix," and so on and so forth, *ad nauseum*. In very restrictive ways, we continue to labor under the myth of reality vs. appearance as the overdetermining metaphysical narrative, and ignore how it is that the grotesque, spiritual side of human subjectivity or essence is deployed in the service of technological and philosophical discourses. This paucity in contemporary thinking regarding technics plagues us precisely because we doggedly continue to pursue Plato's footsteps, separating *tekhnē* in all its forms from the reality of knowledge or the possibility of human spirituality. This originary separation may have helped us at some point in time, but our shifting media ecology demands that we take seriously the undoing of this originary separation and begin to think technics as always already imbricated with the possibility of subjectivity.

Souljacking offers one approach to theorizing mediation—that of *appropriation*. Mediation, constituted by spectrality, carries with it spiritual components, be those manifest in demiurgic communion or emanating from the dead letters of the dearly departed. Platonism attempts to thwart the difficulties of representation by articulating explicitly and without reservation the association of the spirit/soul/psyche with the fundamentally human, philosophical approach to existence. This approach is not without its modern adherents. Thinkers like Lewis Mumford, Albert Borgmann and Todd Gitlin continue to hold onto some ineffable, humanist essence as the final bulwark against the ravages of media technologies and rhetorical chicanery. But souljacking's appropriation of the spectral is only one of the ways conservative glosses on media and mediation have functioned. In the next chapter, I will consider a strategy of exorcism, i.e. a logic of expropriation, that attempts to dispel the spectrality of new media. For that I will return to the work of Martin Heidegger.

Chapter 5

Ghosts in the Medium:

The Haunting of Heidegger's Technological Question

"A medium is a medium is a medium." So remarks Friedrich Kittler when describing the discourse network of 1900.[145] This triple invocation of a word whose plural form has come to dominate academic discussions of culture a century later might seem curious to those to whom media represent only contemporary modes of communication. Curious but accurate: the term medium simultaneously refers to the middle or in-between, a technology of communication, and a psychic communion with the supernatural. Between two subjects, between two worlds, between two spaces, between two meanings: media is never one or the other but a third way, a way between or a middle—not in the sense of some Hegelian synthesis or compromise, but rather as something problematic, different, and resistant to assimilation.

As the technologies and contours of cyberspace become more pronounced in the early days of a new millennium, the question of the medium announces itself with increasing seriousness. New media are reshaping human subjectivity and remapping social relations, although critics remain uncertain as to what the future mold and map will look like. A growing faction of media analysts believe that these new media technologies pose such a risk to the enlightened strands of the social fabric that vituperative critique offers the only appropriate response.[146] These concerns over technological change are nothing new; as discussed in the previous chapter, Plato expressed similar concerns about the new medium of writing almost twenty-five hundred years ago. Writing survived the academic assault, and one might consider

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this survival one of the first media ironies: today we know that writing survived Plato's negative assessment precisely because that assessment was transcribed in the *Phaedrus*. The new media of the next millennium have shown a similar resistance to intellectual condemnation, although, to its credit, the intellectual condemnation has in turn resisted media's indifference. Nevertheless, the critique of media technologies often ignores what I believe Kittler's triple invocation attempts to stress: that a medium is always more than merely a technology of communication.[147]

This excess can be seen in a medium invented alongside those media that Kittler identifies as forming the unique discourse network of 1900, a medium that Kittler rarely discusses: radio. Marconi's invention of the wireless telegraph surely had a role in changing the social perceptions at the dawn of the twentieth century, at least as much as the role played by the gramophone, typewriter or film, yet Kittler largely ignores its development in the two books devoted to the 1900s network. This lapse is all the more unfortunate because one finds with radio the forecasting—one might say broadcasting—of those themes today associated with new media, cyberspace, and virtual reality. As such, radio offers itself as an initial grounding for the discussion of the medium and its detractors, a link between the discourse network of 1900 and the media network of 2000.

In those intervening years, philosophy was reformulated by a man who said more over the radio than he said about the radio itself, a German thinker who sided with National Socialism before and during World War II and against modern technology in the years that followed. For Martin Heidegger, the age of philosophy had ended and the time for thinking, the time for "fundamental ontology" and the experience of Being, had to follow. The accelerated growth of modern technology, the culmination of over two millennia of metaphysics and its modern science, stood in the way, corrupting language by an emphasis on efficiency and information and

threatening the prospects for the truth (*aletheia*) of Being.[148] But Heidegger's "question

concerning technology" remained concerned with technology's essence, which is to say, with the

abstraction of the technological that animates technology. As a consequence, no sustained

critique of any singular instantiation of technology can be found in Heidegger's work. Instead,

Heidegger populates his essays with brief examples, one of which, repeated on several different

occasions, is radio. Thus this chapter's conjugation of radio as media technology and Heidegger

as a technological thinker: what is the rhetorical status of radio within Heidegger's work? What

if we were to interrogate Heidegger on behalf of radio? Examining this intersection of thought in

Heidegger offers two insights into how one thinks media: first, the difficulty of thinking media as

synonymous and coterminous with the more generic concept of technology, and second, the role

that media plays within Heidegger's thought, where the fundamental ontology exorcises the

spiritual and psychic dimension of media technology.

This chapter will explore this exorcism by first examining Rudyard Kipling's

"'Wireless,'" an early story about radio well known but little commented upon. After exploring

the spiritual themes of the story, I will offer a brief introduction of Derrida's hauntology and the

role that it might play in media studies. Finally, I will examine the discourse of Martin

Heidegger in order to examine the potential play of media in the rhetoric of his "question

concerning technology."

Kipling's Believe It or Not

Rudyard Kipling's "Wireless" appeared in 1902, only six years after Marconi filed the

first patent for the communication medium that we know now as radio.[149] Perhaps the first piece

of fiction focusing upon this new technology, "Wireless" announces at the dawn of the twentieth

century those themes that saturate discussions of so-called "new media" at the dawn of the twenty-first.[150] Recounted by a nameless narrator, "Wireless" tells the story of two apothecaries, one an employee named Mr. Shaynor, an older gentleman in poor health who keeps the company of a girl named Fanny Brand, the other the employer, named Mr. Cashell, a younger gent with a keen amateur interest in wireless telegraphy. As the story progresses, the narrator fixes a strong liquor for Shaynor's cough. After imbibing, Shaynor quickly passes out while seated at a desk writing letters. Mr. Cashell, meanwhile, is busy in the next room preparing a radio to transmit and receive Morse code messages to a friend, miles off, with a similar apparatus. A parallel track of miscommunication then takes place: Cashell is unable to contact his friend, instead receiving transmissions from two ships in the English Channel who can successfully transmit messages but not receive them, only receiving "a dot and a dash there, nothing clear" (p. 220), and the intoxicated Shaynor begins suddenly to channel the poetry of John Keats, albeit with a few subtle changes along the way. The two miscommunications come to an end, with Cashell eventually able to contact his friend, and Shaynor waking up and revealing, upon questioning from the narrator, that he has never read any of Keats' poetry. The narrator, exhausted from the evening's events, politely excuses himself and returns home to bed.

A number of themes in this story merit consideration. The first, and most obvious, is the blending between the spiritual and the material made possible in some mysterious way by the development and application of radio. Even before Shaynor's spiritual connection (spirit in the double sense of alcohol and the dead), the narrator requests an explanation about the workings of the radio from Mr. Cashell (pp. 202-203):

> 'But what *is* it?' I asked. 'Electricity is out of my beat altogether.'

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'Ah, if you knew *that* you'd know something nobody knows. It's just It—what

we call Electricity, but the magic—the manifestations—the Hertzian waves—are all

revealed by *this*. The coherer, we call it.'

He picked up a glass tube not much thicker than a thermometer, in which, almost

touching, were two tiny silver plugs, and between them an infinitesimal pinch of metallic

dust. 'That's all,' he said, proudly, as though himself responsible for the wonder. 'That

is the thing that will reveal to us the Powers—whatever the Powers may be—at work—

through space—a long distance away.'

The radio clearly becomes associated with things beyond the scope and comprehension of its

technology, even at the same moment in which the technology becomes the source of pride to

those, like Cashell, able to utilize it. The technology itself is magic, while the electricity that

travels through the air constitutes something more mysterious, "the Powers," in all their

mysterious and capitalized glory. Despite this sense of the transcendent beyond the ken of the

technology, Kipling still identifies a misplaced pride in Cashell, who seems so taken with the

creation so as to speak of it as his own. Given Kipling's well known technophilia, this

assignation of pride cannot be seen as a blanket condemnation of technology itself, or even radio

technology per se, but rather an incidental development that accompanies the ability to contact

and conduct Powers that "nobody" understands.

Several pages later (p. 207), with Shaynor asleep and inanimate, having not yet channeled

the voice of Keats, Kipling provides the explanation for what is to come, with Mr. Cashell

explaining the nature of induction to a mildly confused narrator:

'Now it's important to remember that the current is an induced current. There are

a good many kinds of induction—'

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'Yes, but what *is* induction?'

'That's rather hard to explain untechnically. But the long and the short of it is that when a current of electricity passes through a wire there's a lot of magnetism present round that wire; and if you put another wire parallel to, and within what we call its magnetic field—why then, the second wire will also become charged with electricity.'

'On its own account?'

'On its own account.'

Shaynor begins to compose and recompose "The Eve of St. Agnes" three pages later; he undergoes a spiritual induction. No intent, no agency, no subject in any strict sense is necessary for this effect, since induction occurs on its own account when two objects enter the same field. Shaynor, whose career, love-life, and health align with those of Keats eighty-four years earlier,[151] begins to channel the magic of Keats' poetic voice just as the radio coherer begins to channel from the Powers those confused transmissions of the boats at sea.

The narrator, who has left Mr. Cashell to puzzle over the radio transmissions and come to check on Shaynor's condition, can only stand and stare in amazement. Given the explanation that Cashell equipped him with earlier, he quickly theorizes Shaynor's strange behavior, offering two improbable explanations, both predicated fundamentally on some notion of ether, be it alcoholic or heavenly (p. 213):

All that I now recall of that epoch making theory are the lofty words: 'If he has read Keats, it's the chloric-ether. If hasn't, it's the identical bacillus, or Hertzian wave of tuberculosis, *plus* Fanny Brand and the professional status which, in conjunction with the main-stream of subconscious thought common to all mankind has thrown up temporarily an induced Keats.'

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This dual-ether hypothesis offers an important hint to understanding the story's mystic take on radio, a take clarified later (p. 217) when the narrator describes the final moment of induction: "again his face grew peaked and anxious with the sense of loss I had first seen when the Power snatched him." The same term used to describe the radio arcing of the electrical signal—the Power—is here used to describe the mystic force that carries the voice of the departed Keats into the stupified form of Mr. Shaynor. These forces are one and the same; the medium of wireless telegraphy provides access to both by opening up an ear to one, by making possible the knowledge and application of induction. As Mr. Cashell has already explained, "there are a good many kinds of induction."

The second and third themes follow on the heels of the first. In the wake of such a spiritual and material conjoining, Kipling describes in his narrator the same sense of fractured subjectivity rampantly described and decried in the discourses of cyberspace. Subjected to something beyond understanding and thus beyond the knowing pride of Mr. Cashell (who never does learn of Mr. Shaynor's behavior), the narrator experiences a strange splitting of his sense of self (p. 212), saying: "For an instant, that was half an eternity, the shop spun before me in a rainbow-tinted whirl, in and through which my own soul most dispassionately considered my own soul as that fought with an over mastering fear… I was whispering encouragement, evidently to my other self, sounding sentences, such as men pronounce in dreams." Two instances of channeling and miscommunication result in two instantiations of the self. While this fragmented subject can in part be explained by the two worlds of communication consistently promulgated in the story, the "material" and "spiritual" domains, part of the fragmentation can only be understood as the product of the space between these two realms, the middle territory where explanation stops. Despite the theoretical model and knowledge of induction, the

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narrator's sense of self remains fractured (p. 213): "Still, the other half of my soul refused to be comforted. It was cowering in some minute and inadequate corner—at an immense distance." The knowledge of the workings of this new medium is insufficient to return the subject to a more stable foundation. Hence the curious formulation: the narrator knows the other self is hiding, but the attempt is insufficient, precisely because of the gap between communication and event, what Eric Havelock has called the gap between the knower and the known.

To overcome the fear that grips him, the narrator must turn to something other than the theoretical articulation of this new medium; he must return to the older medium of print. Immediately after the "immense distance" between the two halves of his soul described above, the narrator regains his composure by fixing his gaze metonymically to the more familiar medium of writing: "I found myself one person again, my hands still gripping my knees, and my eyes glued to the page before Mr. Shaynor" (p. 214). Indeed, as Shaynor "blocks out" the later stanzas of Keats' work, the narrator's fear evaporates with "the smoke of the pastille." So potent is writing in returning normalcy and wholeness to the narrator's sense of self that he is even able to add his voice to the encouraging Power cohering in Mr. Shaynor: "'That's it,' I murmured. 'That's how it's blocked out. Go on! Ink it in, man! Ink it in!'" Apparently, when the question of the subject rests on ink rather than induction, the narrator can answer with a much more unified voice.

Like the second theme, the third theme—fragmented communication—stresses the differánce of radio, the mystery of the successful signal within unsuccessful communication. Shaynor makes small alterations in the language of Keats and is unable to complete the "Eve of St. Agnes" before awaking from his intoxicated induction, and Cashell fails to receive a reply from his radio friend until the very end of the story. The two ships whose transmissions Cashell

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does pick up and decode are unable to properly receive each other's transmissions, instead mirroring their mutual lack of comprehension by sending more missives to fall upon each other's deaf ears (p. 220): "'K.K.V. Can make nothing of your signals.'" answered by "'M.M.V. Signals unintelligible.'" Communication from induction never achieves completion in "Wireless;" the signals taken in by the coherer never match identically the signals sent by and through the Powers. Foreshadowing the language of Heidegger, one might say: radio communication never comes fully to presence. Mr. Cashell remains unconcerned. When the narrator inquires as to why the ships are miscommunicating, Cashell responds: "God knows—and Science will know to-morrow. Perhaps the induction is faulty; perhaps the receivers aren't tuned to receive just the number of vibrations per second that the transmitter sends. Only a word here and there. Just enough to tantalize."

But the reader of the story, like the narrator, knows that something else has been teased—the sense of one's reality before the wireless telegraph. Science will know why the ships were unable to properly receive each other's signals, but the story gives no indication that it will know precisely why Shaynor channeled Keats, much less with slight modifications. The narrator informs neither Cashell (the amateur scientist) nor Shaynor (the psychic vehicle) of the strange intersection of the dead and the living within the induction of wireless media. Indeed, both Shaynor and Cashell foreclose the possibility through a curious exchange at the close of the story (pp. 220-221). Cashell remarks: "'It's quite pathetic. Have you ever seen a spiritualistic séance? It reminds me of that sometimes—odds and ends of messages coming out of nowhere—a word here and there—and no good at all.'" Shaynor's response strikes the modern reader, who knows the future application of the word "medium" in describing the very process of communication Cashell has been attempting, with no small historical irony: "'But mediums are all impostors…

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They only do it for the money they can make. I've seen 'em.'" Shaynor, who the reader and narrator have seen as a medium (spiritual) amongst a medium (radio) within a medium (print), dismisses even the prospect for comparing the spiritual and the technical. Cashell recognizes the comparison but not the connection, but before he can reply to Shaynor's dismissal, his technological pride short-circuits the potential for response; the long-awaited signal from his friend arrives at last—"clear as a bell." The narrator, more knowledgeable than both, knows that clarity is the least interesting thing about this Power; when asked if there's anything he'd like to tell Cashell's friend via radio, the narrator declines, saying: "'No, I don't think so…I'll go home and go to bed. I'm feeling a little tired.'"

Mediated Presence and the Absence of Absence

As Kipling's story intimates, radio revolutionizes how one thinks the concept of communication. Unlike the telephone and telegraph that preceded it, radio frees signals formerly tethered to a land-locked physical substrate, transforming the heavens (*Himmel*) into both recipient and source of communication. Signals are simply there, invisible and intangible, but strangely audible: a "very loud electromagnetic voice, heard by him who had the electromagnetic ear, silent to him who had it not."[152] Eerily, radio signals simply float in the ether waiting to be, or to use a double entendre made obvious in our discussion of "Wireless," to be *channeled*. P.T. McGrath, writing in *Century* magazine the year after Marconi's transatlantic broadcast, offered a fascinating formulation: "It would be almost like dreamland and a ghostland, not the ghostland cultivated by a heated imagination, but a real communication from a distance based on true physical laws."[153] Note the points of comparison; real communication—and not its effects—is now somehow less than real, a world of dreams and ghosts nevertheless predicated on scientific

truth: the unreal understood through real science. With radio, as with the pantheon of technologies that make cyberspace possible, reality seems less real. Like those communication technologies that followed it, radio shakes the faith in an established and experiential conception of a particular reality. Today's media revolution resounds with the same crisis of faith, and adjectival assurances abound: virtual reality, real time, etc.

It should come as no surprise that new communication technologies would question the real precisely in relation to the spiritual. As John Peters has noted, the introduction of the telegraph corresponded positively to a massive increase in interest regarding spiritual phenomenon, from telepathy to communication with the dead.[154] Marshall McLuhan offered the vague definition of media as extensions of the self, but technologies that operate in a manner ungraspable by the basic senses (e.g., telegraphy and especially radio) create a need to consider the extent of that extension. How far has the subject stretched? To where has it extended its reach, its voice, its presence? In "Wireless," the self extends through induction into the spiritual field of the dead and gone, albeit with poetic consequences. It also stretches to the paroxysmal point of breakdown, a fracture recuperated in this instance by the comfortable familiarity of print. Extension of the subject need not be limited to extension within purely material and physical conceptions of space and time. Remember the medium's triple invocation: middle, technology, and spirit. In every instance of media, more operates than merely a means of communication.

As a case-in-point, one cannot deny the spiritual and magical nature of modern telecommunication: the voice turned digital and broadcast incarnate, the computer-assisted reproduction, generation, and morphology of images without origin, the advent of machines controlled by impulses in the brain. Arthur Clarke's oft-quoted formulation—that technology, sufficiently advanced, is indistinguishable from magic—seems particularly apt. Few understand

the theories that let such media devices work much less their individuated moments of application, but everyone can witness the conjuring trick of real time and telepresence. If we accept new media magic as new media science, it is not because we understand the technology *per se* but because of the positivist groupthink that assures us, though never explicitly, that the question of technology's mysticism need not be asked. Like Mr. Cashell tells Kipling's narrator, we are told to worry not about the yet-to-be-explained for "science will know to-morrow."

But this assumption remains feasible only if media technologies are divorced from the spiritual imaginary that interprets the extensions of the self they effectuate. Indeed, I find it fascinating that Shaynor would channel John Keats, the father of "negative capability,"[155] the capacity "of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason…." "Wireless" no doubt raises enough questions to demand a bit of negative capability on the part of any reader. Not even considering the potential validity of Shaynor's channeling of classic poetry, one cannot explain away the tension in "Wireless" between the material and the spiritual, their mutual manifestation within the same medium means, the subsequent dismissal of psychic mediums, and the pervasive sense of incompleteness juxtaposed to the wonder and mystery of the new communication technology. The spiritual haunts the story without explanation; as Kittler remarks: "Media always already provide the appearances of specters."[156]

Had Gilbert Ryle lived through the computer revolution, perhaps "ghost in the machine" might have carried a double entendre similar to the one Kipling gives to induction. While Ryle concerned himself with negating the claim that the mind functioned independently of the body, that humans were simply, as he put it eloquently, ghosts in the machine of that body, Kipling's concern with the spiritual essence of radio, with the ghostly conjunction of the Power of the dead

in the Power of electricity, lends a different slant to Ryle's expression. Machines, especially

communication machines, may already carry ghosts within them. If the human cannot be

reduced to a ghost in the machine, then neither can our media technologies. Pictures of the

departed—aren't these the intentional haunting of the present with the spirits of the past? Do not

the whole of astronomy and the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence predicate themselves upon

the light and sound of entities no longer present by the time the signals are received? Does the

indeterminable truth of the supernatural preclude belief in the supernatural or the conviction of

life after death? Despite the intellectual posturing of modernity and the end of religion

prophesied from Freud through Marx to Lyotard, the belief in something other than the material

reality of the manifest present persists. Its connection to media has been mapped by those with

more time and historical knowledge than myself, but the connections and tensions displayed in

Kipling's "Wireless" provide good evidence of the effect.[157] Radio becomes exemplary in this

regard: it opens up the heavens to the vicissitudes of spiritual communication. Keats' voice

carried on the air and implanted in the ether for nearly a century before being induced in Mr.

Shaynor—and with an attempt at revisions! This progression of the dead within the media of the

living, where the departed are never really absent and presence is always mediated, these are the

conditions that make something like Pierre Tielhard du Chardin's "noosphere" thinkable.[158]

This connection between spirit and media, between the dead and the living, becomes of

critical importance in talking about the contemporary scene of rhetoric and communication.

Further, if the problematic of the spirit of/within media is taken seriously, this haunting calls into

question the metaphysics of presence that have served as the foundation of Occidental

philosophy since Plato. This path has been taken by Jacques Derrida in his articulation of

"hauntology" but has been largely ignored by those (Kittler, Sconce, and Peters) who have

elaborated the connection between spirit and media. In order to move beyond these historical

critiques, as well as to provide a counterpoint to the discourse of Heidegger that will be

examined in the last third of this chapter, I will offer a brief assessment of Derrida's concepts of

hauntology, spirits and specters, and their relationship to media.

"Es Spukt!"

"There is then *some spirit*. Spirits. And *one must* reckon with them."[159]

In *Specters of Marx* Derrida argues that the past can never fully be exorcised from the

present, nor from other versions of itself. Today multiple specters of Marx haunt the current

philosophical and political world scene: the specter of communist totalitarianism, the continued

articulation of class struggle despite the arbitrary nature of those classes, the millennial renewal

of the so-called opiate of the masses, etc. These ghosts continue to exist, to haunt, even as the

present moment appears to be, by and large, moving beyond Marx and towards the articulation of

the "end of history." For Derrida, Marx attempted the same move beyond an unacknowledged

Shakespeare, and Derrida reads Marx consistently against the ghost of the father in *Hamlet*. This

is not to say that these ghosts exist in the sense of some material or social formation—the Soviet

Union really no longer exists—but rather that the politics of memory are such that the Soviet

Union returns to haunt. It *remains*, like any corpse.

For Derrida, justice can only be thought between the living and the dead, even if the dead

are the not yet living. One cannot conceive an action based merely on some metaphysical

pragmatism of the present and call it just. Current distributions of social and economic capital

and current patterns of environmental degradation and resource consumption have a much

simpler time justifying themselves if they need not consider future generations or the histories of social relations that assisted present configurations. The conservative reclamation of affirmative action rests entirely upon this limited logic: it's not fair to punish us (the white males) now for what was done in the past (nor do we need to consider how the distribution of goods in the present will affect and replicate the present in generations of the future) when quality of work and strength of intelligence should determine success in business/school/etc.

Enough generalization. For my present purposes, I wish to examine three hauntological traces that emerge as a consequence of Derrida's discussion of Marx and that have significant implications for the remainder of this chapter.

First, hauntology offers an alternative (not an opposition) to ontology. A homonym in the original French (where the 'h' is silent), hauntology's emphasis on the non-present presence of the specter poses a fundamental challenge to fundamental ontology. Instead of focusing on the problem of presence, as Heidegger does, hauntology calls into question the fundamental division between being and non-being, and the sense of presence attendant to that division. Without staking any claim to knowledge of ends and means, hauntology opens up a space for voices whose exclusion makes ontological thought possible. As with Derrida's differánce, hauntology precedes and exceeds the ontological, since the ontological begins by selecting which voices can haunt thought by establishing a standard of legitimate presence.[160]

Second, hauntology offers more robust means of considering media than do either fundamental ontology or conventional metaphysics. If truth exists only as a coming to presence, then those media technologies that disrupt a notion of presence impose upon themselves fundamental limits to their critical engagement. While I will explore the textual construction of those limits within Heidegger's thought in some detail below, it seems obvious that ontology

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produces a thematic difficulty in analyzing telecommunication and virtual reality in that the analysis exhausts itself at the very moment of its initiation—the recognition of those technologies' relationship to presence. By definition and by function, telecommunication must, it seems, pose a threat to the truth (coming to presence) of Being. Derrida, who has long been an unacknowledged thinker of media, takes time in *Specters of Marx* to highlight this limitation when noting that tele-technology

> obliges us more than ever to think the virtualization of space and time, the possibility of virtual events whose movement and speed prohibit us more than ever (more and otherwise than ever, for this is not absolutely and thoroughly new) from opposing presence to its representation, 'real time' to 'deferred time,' effectivity to its simulacrum, the living to the non-living, in short the living to the living-dead of its ghosts.[161]

John D. Caputo, well versed in both Heidegger and Derrida, agrees, albeit with a much more caustic intonation (1997, p. 125): "Unlike a poor, lame ontology of presence and absence, hauntology soars through the para-ontological world of virtual reality, where the *phainaesthai* of phenomena runs wild, shaking the 'assured distinction' between being and non-being to its root."[162]

Third, hauntology celebrates the very thing that marks the medium as medium, the middle or in-between. Media exist as technological extensions of the self. Radio grafts electromagnetic shouting onto the human subject, television extends the eye through the screen with its Trinitron prosthetic, etc. As such, media can never be reduced to the technological objects that make it possible or to the ability extended. Radio cannot be understood merely as a collection of Hertzian waves by the coherer just as it cannot be engaged if theorized as simply an electromagnetic style of shouting. A medium is always a middle, the non-space between

language and its technological prosthesis. This exploration of the between, a between not resolved or known through an examination of either terminal point, lies at the heart of the hauntological concern:

> If it—learning to live—remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death *alone*. What happens between two, and between all the 'two's' one likes, such as between life and death, can only *maintain itself* with some ghost, can only *talk with or about* some ghost. So it would be necessary to learn spirits. Even and especially if this, the spectral, *is not*. Even and especially if this, which is neither substance, nor essence, nor existence, *is never present as such*.[163]

This injunction, which is at once a preclusion of the existence of the margins and a command to find the spirits in-between that would otherwise remain hidden, aligns the hauntological with the ghosts in the medium.

There is one last haunting to reference, if only briefly, before moving onward. Derrida is himself haunted—by himself. Six years before presenting *Specters of Marx*, Derrida presented another famous disquisition on spirit, *Of Spirit*, that reflected on the presence and nature of "spirit" in Heidegger.[164] Curiously, despite a number of references to Heidegger in *Specters* and innumerable descriptions of spirits and specters, not a single sustained connection is made between the analysis of Marx and the antecedent analysis of Heidegger, an uncommon movement for a thinker known for some degree of self-referentiality. Nevertheless, it is worth noting Derrida's arguments for the political implications of the German "spirit." Heidegger frequently attempts to link the German tongue with an originary Greek essence through etymology, to connect the spirit of the German language with the spirit of the Greek, but for Derrida the language of spirit makes any link impossible, and ultimately politically dangerous. The spirit

(*Geist*) of the German language/people can never truly be derivative and linked with the spirit (*Pneuma*) of the Greeks because the terminal points of that linkage—spirit as *Geist* and spirit as *Pneuma*—requires a differentiation that only makes sense within the German concept of *Geist*, which Heidegger specifically identifies with flame and fire (a *flame* and *fire* that speaks, all too eerily to the Europe of and under the Third Reich) and distances from the less essential concepts of *spiritus* or *pneuma*. As the counterpart of corporeal nature, spirit retains a metaphysical and political axis; it is an axis discussed but not referenced in *Specters of Marx*, perhaps because Derrida wishes not to retain the political encapsulation Heidegger draws from the poetry of Trakl. Nevertheless, the politics of the spirit haunt Derrida's Marx, just as they will haunt our subsequent discussion of Heidegger.

Heidegger's Abulum

Heidegger's "question" revolves around two ontological poles: the essence of the technological and the potential for authentic language. As Heidegger will make clear, technology is at its worst when it reorders the language of Being in order to serve itself, and in so doing alters our being-in-the-world toward calculative, technological ends. Before considering the relationship between radio (particularly Kipling's radio) and Heidegger's question, some background material must be considered. In the paragraphs that follow, I hope to trace out an unresolved tension between Heidegger's laudatory engagement with the word and his often condemnatory assessment of the technological.

Heidegger consistently highlights the role of language in the inquiry of and encounter with Being: "The being of anything that is resides in the word. Therefore this statement holds true: Language is the house of being."[165] Being (and consequently for Heidegger, meaning) thus

stems from the linguistic structures through which we communicate, the means by which we approach ontology. Thus, the rhetorical has being-in-the-world that exists connected to, but independent from, the being of the rhetor. In the Heideggerian dynamic, language is given the status of active agent, for it is the source and the medium of inquiry. Trapped by the being (present) of language, it becomes the human operating system, a Windows for the word (and the world): "In order to be who we are, we human beings remain committed to and within the being of language, and can never step out of it and look at it from somewhere else. Thus we always see the nature of language only to the extent to which language itself has us in view, as appropriated us to itself."[166] "How language means" is thus generative; being and the investigation of being involves being used by the symbol-systems employed in the analysis. Differing slightly from Kenneth Burke, Heidegger describes the essence of language as a "framing" of the essence of the object: "This relation [of word to thing] is not, however, a connection between the thing that is on one side and the word that is on the other. The word itself is the relation which in each instance retains the thing within itself in such a manner that it 'is' a thing."[167] Or as Heidegger notes later: "We are, then, within language and with language before all else."[168] In this formulation, language holds the power of formulation, not the rhetor.

Given this (metaphoric) formulation, Heidegger confronts and dismisses the rhetor's dilemma as an impediment to inquiry. Instead, the complexities of language open the doorway to rhetorical inquiry. In the classic sense of paradox (*para doxa*), exploring how language means both reifies *and* expands the understanding of the rhetorical. He notes:

No matter how many ways we may devise to get our inquiry into language and the investigation
  of its nature started, all our efforts will be in vain as long as we close our minds in one
  very important respect which by no means concerns only the questions here touched

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upon. If we put questions to language, questions about its nature, its being, then clearly language itself must already have been granted to us. Similarly, if we want to inquire into the being of language, then that which is called nature or being must also be already granted to us. Inquiry and investigation here and everywhere require the prior grant of whatever it is they approach and pursue their queries. Every posing of every question takes place within the very grant of what is put in question. What do we discover when we give sufficient thought to the matter? This, that the authentic attitude of thinking is not a putting of questions – rather, it is a listening to the grant, the promise of what is to be put in question.[169]

Heidegger consistently advocates poetry as the means by which we can listen to this appropriating grant of language. Poetry functions as a source of non-calculative insight through which we can untangle the web in which "what we speak of, language, is always ahead of us," and we find ourselves "continually lagging behind what we first ought to have overtaken and taken up in order to speak about it."[170] Heidegger maintained a strong opposition to what he termed "calculative thought," a way of be-ing that concealed being-in-the-world through routine, efficiency and/or mastery. Standing in opposition to this dangerous routinization of *Dasein* were the pathways of reflective thought, found first and foremost in poetry and secondly in the "task of thinking," the contemplation of meaning through a letting-be of, and listening to, the world. As Heidegger notes, "the reflective use of language cannot be guided by the common, usual understandings of meanings; rather it must be guided by the hidden riches that language holds in store for us, so that these riches may summon us for the saying of language."[171]

Despite discussing the negative implications of the typewriter explicitly,[172] Heidegger rarely reflects on the impact of media *on language itself*. No doubt the radio varies significantly

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from a typewriter. Radio translates oral discourse electromagnetically, fostering orality without corporeality or copresence, and ties speaking and strength of voice to the power of signal, the mouth's distance from microphone, the ear's distance from speaker, the format of a particular broadcast, etc. The typewriter, especially the conventional typewriters of Heidegger's day, with their heavy keys and mechanical thuds, changes the feel of writing and thus the composition of words themselves. While the typewriter continues its advance in the modern computer and word processor, the consequences of this "progress" are so uncertain that most Heidegger scholars are unsure how the computer compares with Heidegger's earlier denigrations of the typewriter.[173] So what of the in-between of media, of radio? Before one can examine the realm between language and technology, one must appreciate Heidegger's take on the other half of the equation.

After his departure from the National Socialists, Heidegger's thinking becomes increasingly centered upon the question of technology and technics. The twentieth century was a period of immense technological advancement, exploding with the full force of the first World War and culminating in the mass deployment of computers and digital technology. With the technological advances available in the wake of World War II, Heidegger quickly identified the growing trend toward technological solutions and the concomitant, rapid dissemination and integration of new technologies as an advanced and calcified form of the calculative thought of metaphysics, a form of technological subservience that demanded ontological inquiry. As Heidegger rightly notes: "We shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely represent and pursue the technological, put up with it, or evade it. Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it."[174]

Of course, with Heidegger nothing is as simple or straightforward as it first appears. The anti-modernist stance that was the seed of Heidegger's disavowal of technology was a reaction to a particular technological method, rooted in the calculative thought that was (is) modernity's way of being. Inquiring into the essence of technology, Heidegger sees two mutually supporting conceptualizations, both of which mask the nature of the technological: first, "Technology is a means to an end," and second, "Technology is a human activity."[175] Human beings employ technology, from a hammer to hydraulics, to perform particular tasks. The hammer extends and adds power to the hand and arm. Hydraulics work independently of human action; they are their own hand and arm. The distinction Heidegger will draw is obvious; technology itself—e.g. the "primitive" hammer or other similar tools—is not by nature deleterious to the understanding of Being, but modern technology, with its distant efficiency, is. The danger, as with metaphysics, is that the task at-hand, the task performed, is accomplished by modern technology in such a manner as to obscure one's being-in-the-world. As with worldliness, the essence of technology depends upon its way of being and *Dasein's* relation to it: "Technology is not equivalent to the essence of technology… the essence of technology is by no means anything technological."[176]

Heidegger identifies two opposing forces at work: revealing and ordering. Finding the etymological roots of technology in the Greek conception of technē, Heidegger (p. 318) observes: "technē is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. Technē belongs to bringing-forth, to poiēsis; it is something poetic." As such, technē functions as an opening, a revealing: "Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *alētheia*, truth, happens."[177]

Technology's revealing changes with the advent of modern technology. The revealing of technology gives way to the drive for technological mastery—ordering. Energy is regulated and

secured through the manipulation of chemical and electrical reactions. The automobile sits idle until needed, severing the conventional linkage between distance and time. The telephone converts the voice into signal and obviates some of the need for face-to-face contact. The word-processor combines the act of writing with the act of editing, all while safeguarding the text. "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering."[178] This standing-reserve of things recalls Heidegger's distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand, though with an important twist. Metaphysics finds the present-at-hand to be sufficient evidence of its own existence (its presence) whereas the ordering of modern technology, what Heidegger names enframing (*Gestell*), attempts to master and manipulate the present-at-hand into standing-reserve. The danger technology poses to Being is greater than that of metaphysics, for while metaphysics obscures the question of being, the *Gestell* of modern technology drives Being into obscurity, and with it any hope for the being-there of human beings (*Dasein*). For Heidegger, the ultimate consequence of technological enframing is the end of *Dasein's* relation to Being: "As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as an object, but exclusively as a standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to…the point where he himself will have to be taken as a standing-reserve." *Dasein* gives way to the power of *Gestell*, deluding human beings into thinking that their submission to *Gestell* is actually a sign of humanity's technological mastery (know-how): "Meanwhile, man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself and postures as lord of the earth. In this way the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself." In such a state, there can be no

being-in-the-world. This, for Heidegger, is the real danger of modern technology, greater than (though akin to) the threat of nuclear annihilation, chemical warfare, and environmental destruction.

But it would be misleading to continue to paint Heidegger as a simple technophobe. The danger of the technological makes possible for Heidegger the very possibility of *Dasein's* recovery of Being. Thus Heidegger's great technological hope: the saving power. Modern technology remains a human activity; for while it may enframe *Dasein*, push it into the role of the orderer and seek its quiet capitulation, it does not destroy it. As such, the essence of human being rests within technological *Gestell* like a .zip file waiting for extraction: "It is precisely in enframing, which threatens to sweep man away into ordering as the ostensibly sole way of revealing, and so thrusts man into the danger of the surrender of his free essence—it is precisely in this extreme danger that the innermost indestructible belongingness of man…may come to light…"[179] For Heidegger, the saving power of *Dasein*, its Being, can be unconcealed (*alēthiea*) amidst the very danger of its enframing by modern technology. Thus Heidegger's missionary decree: to interrogate the technological and, in its essence, mine the nature of *Dasein*: "The essential unfolding of technology harbors in itself what we least suspect, the possible rise of the saving power. Everything, then, depends upon this: that we ponder this rising, and that recollecting, we watch over it."

If the saving power remains an ambiguous formation, or rather if it remains unambiguous only when thought through in those most ambiguous terms of poetry, it is because the saving power derives theoretically from the same drive for pure thinking that governs Heidegger's thinking of technology. After all, the idea that the essence of technology can be understood as something non-technological repeats the basic Platonic gesture by which epistēme is separated

from tekhnē. Derrida notes that "even if we confine ourselves to Heidegger's least ambiguous statements, it remains the case that he tries to think a thought of technics that would not be technical. Isn't he tempted to subtract, in this way, the thinkable or thinking from the field of technics? Doesn't he suggest that there is a thinking pure of all technics?"[180] This drive for purity fails necessarily once we begin trying to think technology in terms of the medium.

Comparing the two formulations, the role of language and the threat of technology, provides some hint as to the deconstructive "nature" of the in-between that is media. Three themes emerge. First, the quasi-nostalgia Heidegger expresses about machinic technologies in his writings on technology mirrors the nostalgia that surfaces in his emphasis on the initial encounter with language as a speaking, a privileging of the physical co-presence of the face-to-face. This nostalgia is only thinkable through an implicit denial of modern media: he relies primarily on Goethe, Hölderlin, and Hebel to reveal the essence of language as Saying precisely because even the etymological recognition of language as Saying becomes problematic after the dissemination of modern communication technologies. And while Heidegger makes explicit that Saying is really Showing (*epideixis*) and Saying need not mean speaking, his explanation for this still emphasizes orality; he stresses the potent effects of a person's silence in revealing the essence of language or the inability to find an appropriate word to name something.[181] This emphasis retains the importance of oral discourse, even as it is the potential presence, rather than the actualization, of the oral, that is celebrated. Heidegger's "danger" thus appears to reflect a profound nostalgia for some lost ontology, laden with the fear that all technologies that move us away from the ontological primordial saying make our return to the ontological increasingly difficult. It comes as no surprise then that Heidegger will link the downfall of philosophy to the first Greek to embody, in Eric Havelock's assessment, a philosophy of the alphabetic—Plato,

who took being and reduced it to a form. And so Heidegger's revival of fundamental ontology coincides with an etymological conceit that searches for an originary purity to a language that was always already and forever anything but. This nostalgia begs certain questions of Heidegger's division between technology and language, but does not, by itself, condemn or collapse the distinction.

Second, the division between technology and language presumes the extremity of their separation. In those few texts where Heidegger discusses technology and language together ("The Nature of Language"; "Hebel – Friend of the House"; and "Technological Language and Traditional Language") his concern over the disappearing essence of language is never tied to media but rather to technological apparatuses, like the Telstar satellite and the mainframe computer. The concern was not that the mechanical transmission of language was problematic but rather than the technological will to mastery—the *Gestell*—would alter the nature of language itself. Consider his caustic appraisal of comparative linguistics:

> But this, to undergo an experience with language, is something else again than to gather information about language. Such information—linguists and philologists of the most diverse languages, psychologists and analytic philosophers supply it to us, and constantly increase the supply, *ad infinitum*. Of late, the scientific and philosophical investigation of languages is aiming ever more resolutely at the production of what is called 'metalanguage.' Analytical philosophy, which is set on producing this super-language, is thus quite consistent when it considers itself metalinguistics. That sounds like metaphysics—not only sounds like it, it *is* metaphysics. Metalinguistics is the metaphysics of the thoroughgoing technicalization of all languages into the sole operative

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instrument of interplanetary information. Metalanguage and sputnik, metalinguistics and

rocketry are the Same.[182]

Technology changes language by challenging language to produce speedy and efficient reams of

information, thus curtailing the potential of language to shine-forth (its epideictic capacity) and

thus bring Being to presence (its poietic potential). Technology does not, in these formulations,

transform language through its transmission, but rather through *Dasein's* encounter with it:

> Because Framing challenges man, that is, provokes him to order and set up all that is
>
> present being as technical inventory, Framing persists after the manner of Appropriation,
>
> specifically by simultaneously obstructing Appropriation, in that all ordering finds itself
>
> channeled into calculative thinking and therefore speaks the language of Framing.[183]

> Certainly media, with the rapid dissemination of information they provide, support this

trend towards the injection of the technological, even if they themselves are not a direct method

of injection. But even this secondary division—radio and media as indirect contributors to

Gestell rather than direct sources of it—collapses at a certain locus that Heidegger terms the

language-machine: "We know that, in connection with the construction of electronic brains, not

only calculating machines but also thinking and translating machines are now being built. Yet all

calculating…all thinking and translating, move in the element of language. By means of those

machines just mentioned, the *language machine* has become an actuality."[184] The danger of this

language machine suffers not at all for the vagueness of its definition: "the language machine

regulates and adjusts from the beginning the mode of our possible usage of language through

mechanical energies and functions. The language machine is – and above all, is still becoming –

one manner in which modern technology controls the mode and the world of language as such."

So what is a language machine? Any device that interferes with the construction and use of

language qualifies, no doubt, which means that the typewriter and the word processor clearly fall within its terminological boundaries. But then so does a pen or pencil and the type of paper. Gel ink and graphite do not produce the same feel when writing, and construction paper yields a different sense of tactility from that of papyrus. Indeed, it seems that the original Rosetta stone and the process of etching that brought it into being are, in some ways, also language machines. As broad as the formulation might be, it gets worse; Heidegger makes clear that the language machine is an influence on language itself, which means that anything that affects the deployment of language in any guise (typographic print choices, skywriting, voice boxes, etc.— all of these devices influence and corrupt in some sense the essence of language. Nevertheless, with a strange terminological addition Heidegger offers an equally vague aside and exemption: "The language machine, in the sense of the technical complex of calculating and translating machines, is different from the speaking machine. We are acquainted with the latter in the form of an apparatus which records and reproduces our speaking, and consequently does not yet intrude into the speaking of language itself." So a dictaphone or a megaphone or (even) a gramophone are somehow exempt from the concerns of the language machine? Perhaps a more pertinent question: why employ a speaking machine to record language unless to pose to the spoken word some question of repetition, clarity, or verisimilitude? As soon as language becomes converted into a resource through its audiographic inscription, it would seem to become standing-reserve, just another and perhaps more insidious means of enframing language. One sees now the importance of beginning this discussion with Kipling's take on radio, since radio, perhaps better than any medium, poses a fundamental challenge to the division between the speaking machine and the language machine: it "records" the oral in electrical wavelengths and plays them on the air, broadcast until the signal dies and/or is received, yet its format and

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technological superstructure change the use and nature of the language recorded, even if only slightly.[185] As Allen Weiss notes: "Recording the voice poses an ontological risk: the recorded voice is the stolen voice that returns to the self as the hallucinatory presence of another."[186] So what to do with this strange and seemingly failed division of technology and language?

I wish to note two *potential* conclusions to be drawn from this division. First, the division simply fails. It holds no merit. Unable to draw a line between the speaking machine and the language machine, the attempt to differentiate good technologies of language from bad technologies of language collapses under its own weight, and takes general proclamations of technologies' relationship to language down with it. In that in-between of media, in that middle between the essence of technology and the essence of language, no clear and simple line can be drawn, and because of that, the entire structure of the separation stems from an opposition of extremes that loses coherence when the extremities are brought into relief. After all, isn't language in its simplest formulation a technology? And isn't technology a language? Heidegger would of course answer affirmatively, but would note that their "essences" are different, that they offer different ways of revealing the coming-to-presence of Being. But this recourse to essence implies that a separation of their essences is indeed possible, that the technological can be separated from language and vice versa. If this separation collapses, Heidegger's writings lose some of their saliency. Second conclusion, the converse of the above: every intersection of technology is both a speaking machine and language machine. Technologies can be both dangerous for language and beneficial for language, or if not beneficial, at least not detrimental. This collapse of valence then becomes a question not of media *per se* but of content—the role that rhetoric and discourse analysis has always played when engaging historically contingent discourses. Hence the need to question technology, not necessarily in terms of the abstraction of

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its essence, but also and therefore moreso, in terms of its particular applications and the consequences for Being as *shown* in particular discourses.

With that, I will turn to the third theme, a theme forecast already: the role of spirit in the intersection between technology and language that is radio.

Heidegger's Exorcism

Yes, Heidegger exhibits a potent nostalgia. Yes, Heidegger's differentiation between technology and language suffers from a somewhat artificial division. But these two themes address, respectively, only two components of media—the technology of communication and the status of medium as middle. The spiritual and psychical component of "a medium is a medium is a medium" remains to be found, rotting or haunting, in Heidegger's question concerning technology. After all, "there are a good many types of induction."

Before describing the language machine at the close of "Hebel – Friend of the House," Heidegger offers this description of genuine, which is to say non-technological, language:

> What is contained in the spirit of a genuine language? It preserves in itself inconspicuous but basic connections with God, with the world, with humans and their works, with their actions and inactions. Contained in the spirit of language is that loftiness, that all-pervasiveness from which each thing has its provenance in such a way that is has a recognized value and bears fruit.[187]

Spirit has returned, and one cannot, after Derrida, think the spirit of language in Heidegger without thinking of a specific spirit of a *German* language or a German people, in this case, the German personage of Johann Hebel. With that political implication in mind, we nevertheless see Heidegger return to the rural nostalgia and mysticism famous in his later writings. After

denouncing the religious (Christian) heritage of metaphysics in his earlier writings, Heidegger returns to invoke both the divinities (in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking") and the Last God (in *Contribution to Philosophy*). Rather than mere reclamations of religious iconographies, these mystical assignations are couched in terms of awaiting or a future, in which Dasein enters into a "right relationship" with Being, a task of preeminent importance: "Preparation for the appearing of the last god is the utmost venture of the truth of be-ing, by virtue of which alone man succeeds in restoring beings."[188] With the spirit of genuine language, Heidegger finds the chance for that preparation in the essence of language itself, which as I have already noted, comes from its etymological and primary meanings as Saying and showing. As Heidegger remarks: "The quest of thinking always remains the search for the first and ultimate grounds. Why? Because this, that something is and what it is, the persistent presence of being, has from of old been determined to be the ground and foundation."[189] This grounding constitutes the coming-to-presence of unconcealment, of truth in the sense of *alethiea*.

Coming to presence can thus be seen as a rather precarious formulation. Made possible by an etymological reach to the great age of the Greeks in order to prepare for the metaphorical future of the Last God, presence becomes possible only because of the constant haunting of the present by those spirits that are everywhere other than the present. Language provides the link—the original medium—between the realm of the present and those spirit worlds that make the present possible. The nature of language thus comes to be experienced between the closing of the past and the opening of the future, in which the etymological foundations that make the truth of Being thinkable point simultaneously to a future anterior of the divinities—a new history and new relationship with the thinking of Being that is in truth the past association of Being known

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best by Parmenides and Heraclitus. The past and the future thus form a tortured univocality that Heidegger calls "presence."

As anyone familiar with Derrida's "*Ousia* and *Gramme*" might have expected from the outset, the difficulty I have attempted to identify in Heidegger's considerations of technology and language stems from the insistence of presence. The value of this chapter's theoretical approach, of interrogating Heidegger's thought on behalf of Kipling's radio, comes from highlighting the interconnections between technological nostalgia, the metaphysics of presence, and politics. The moment of *aletheia*—the formation of truth as a coming to presence—is the moment of *exorcism* within Heidegger, when the spirit as specter becomes relegated to the presencing of two not-presents. Greek voices speak from an originary past; the last god beckons from an imaginary future. This formulation leaves only language, the house of being, as the medium capable of channeling spirit. Hence the reason Heidegger continues to find pride in the German language, and all the political implications of a German spirit. That's why the language machine so threatens Being, not because the human entity is reduced to calculation—the very existence of Heidegger's ruminations on Being shows that *Gestell* threatens but doesn't overwhelm—but because the language machine reduces the play of language, it limits its channels and excludes the channeling of those few ghosts Heidegger continues to hold dear. But Heidegger's belief in this technological limitation reflects an overly broad generalization; different technological media produce difference senses of presence, different essences. There are, literally, ghosts in our machines. Isn't this what Kipling identifies in "Wireless," in the "Powers" that float in the ether? And how can Heidegger, so attuned to the Greek wisdom of the past, not recognize the German *Geist* of flame and fire in radio's manipulation of the *ether*, derived from the Greek *aithen*, to blaze? "Wireless" reflects, in an amazingly literal way, the *Zeitgeist* of the 20th

century. Heidegger's psychic banishment of the ghost in the language machine, the ghost in the medium, to the spirit of a genuine language treats with fear, and no doubt some political repression, Mr. Cashell's missive: "God knows—and Science will know to-morrow." Indeed, in his own way, Heidegger mirrors the conservative recuperation at work in Kipling's narrator; Heidegger returns to an oral foundation in order to recuperate some notion of subjectivity just as the narrator recovers his own subject by fixing his gaze upon the written word.

And so, after a long theoretical movement, Kipling's "Wireless" returns with definitive implications for understanding Heidegger's thought. For Kipling, the technology of radio calls the self into question in a manner that promotes the promise of uncertainty rather than the delimitations of science, even if earlier media help navigate the encounter with that uncertainty. Heidegger's position on technology in general differs greatly, even if that difference carries with it its own attendant uncertainties. As such, the question of radio's role in Heidegger's theorizing deserves some attention. On the one hand, radio frees the wide dissemination of information from the confines of print and the written word and returns importance to oral discourse. As Havelock notes of his own early encounter with the power of radio: "Here was the moving mouth, the resonant ear, and nothing more… Here was orality indeed reborn."[190] The mystic overtones associated with this capacity—its acousmetric phantasm, its role in thinking the ether —stem from this rebirth. A similar emphasis, absent any appreciation for media or mediation, takes place in Heidegger's discussion of Hebel, who writes of blooming in the "ether" and bearing fruit. Heidegger notes: "The ether (the sky) – this word in Hebel's sentence designates all we perceive, but not with our sense-organs – the non-sensuous, sense (*Sinn*), spirit."[191] None of this spiritualist appreciation will make its way to discussing the power of radio.

On the other hand, radio alters the relationship between speech and being, separates voice from body, and refigures the "natural" reach of the human tongue. Heidegger, not surprisingly, chooses to concentrate on these latter effects. Despite an overall scarcity of explicit discussions of media, he does cite radio on occasion as an example of a technology that threatens being-in-the-world. I will highlight three examples that differ only slightly in substance. First example: in 1938's "The Age of the World Picture," he comments:

> The gigantic presses forward in a form that actually seems to make it disappear—the annihilation of great distances by the airplane, in the setting before us of foreign and remote worlds in their everydayness, which is produced at random through radio by a flick of the hand.[192]

Here radio's compression of distance transforms the world into the banality of the everyday (which Heidegger links to inauthentic existence eleven years earlier in *Being and Time*). Radio communicates foreign worlds as something present-at-hand rather than a Showing or encounter with an actual place.

Second example, four years later: discussing Holderlin's Hymn "The Ister," Heidegger upgrades the assessment of radio's threat, noting:

> Yet we need mention only the airplane and the radio in order to see at once that not only are both machines devices that have arisen in the context of modern natural science, but that they are also determining the course of the most recent history of the modern era… the airplane and the radio are intrinsically, that is, in terms of their machine essence and in terms of the extensive scope of their essence, determining the new leeway for playing out possibilities that can be planned and accomplished through human willpower and for its putting things into effect.[193]

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No longer content with the reorganization of space into everydayness, radio now has advanced upon the very conceptions of time that allow a thinking of history as well as the limits of the possible. The details remain sketchy—Heidegger tends to prefer brief and implicit pronouncements—but the *essential* threat of radio is broadcast rather clearly. Moving from the specific to the general, Heidegger eventually links these new technologies to the modern concept of space-time and the forgetting of the "locale." No longer is the effect of radio limited to obviating distance and denigrating foreign worlds—instead the entirety of the world has come under its electromagnetic sway.

Third and final example: returning to an investigation of Being's relationship to and within the things themselves in 1950's lecture "The Thing," Heidegger places radio on a continuum that begins (again) with the airplane and concludes with television:

> All distances in time and space are shrinking. Man now reaches overnight, by plane, places which formerly took weeks and months of travel. He now receives instant information, by radio, of events which he formerly learned about only years later, if at all… The peak of this abolition of every possibility of remoteness is reached by television, which will soon pervade and dominate the whole machinery of communication.[194]

Time now joins space in being warped by radio technology. The instant of communication made possible by radio broadcasts comes to pervert any relationship between "man" and "things," putting into oblivion the possibility of remoteness or nearness, of any sort of non-calculative, phenomenological approach to being-in-the-world, and it does so by altering the *experience of time*. As a consequence, and for the first time explicitly, communication is altered—not communication *per se*, but rather the *machinery* of communication. Something

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uncharacteristically metaphysical announces itself here: for this alteration to occur, there must have been some original rhythm at which language operates. Bernard Stiegler agrees: "The only condition on which Heidegger can oppose speech to instrumental technics in the first place is that speech bears this originary temporality of time, which calculative and technical instrumentality obscures..."[195] How is one to adduce this originary rhythm, especially given that its articulation comes today in the form of the dead, unmoving instantiation of a text rather than a seminar or lecture? More problematic, the composition of such a recording, whether accomplished through graphic inscription or phonography, already and by necessity alters its rhythm, just as it alters the time of its consumption, every time it is consumed. With this difficulty, Heidegger has returned to (or forecast) the distinctions he will later draw between the language machine and the speaking machine, which of course returns us to the fundamental impasse between those distinctions, albeit with a slight addendum: radio is part of the technological fall of language in the language machine, even if it remains much less threatening than the most recent media newcomer: television.

It is essential to note that none of these formulations discuss the impact of radio on language itself. Instead the discussions remain abstract, theoretical—in a word, ontological. Herein lies the rhetorical trick of Heidegger's phenomenological assessment: stressing radio's role as a technology rather than as a medium. For Heidegger, radio reorders space and time in the same manner as the airplane; it obviates distance through the act of broadcasting. This rhetorical strategy, juxtaposing radio with the airplane (one always appears within moments of the other), depicts radio as more machine than medium subsequently reducing the import of radio to merely a means of transmission. It is as if Heidegger must not speak explicitly of radio as mimetic, as mimesis, for fear that it will begin to undo the very separation between language and

technics that he wants so desperately to maintain. Heidegger cannot (or at least refuses to) conceive of radio as the rebirth or rejuvenation of orality *a la* Havelock because Heidegger cannot (or at least refuses to) see radio as anything more than a machine. Therein lies the difficulty with Heidegger's question concerning technology: even with the amorphous possibility of the saving power (a possibility grounded in German poetry), Heidegger's condemnation of technology remains too broad in its indictment and too limited in its analysis. Even as it delimits the technological, it ignores the ghosts in the medium. As Peters remarks: "Every new medium is a machine for the production of ghosts."[196] Heidegger's indictment of technology permits little room to discuss the role that media technology plays in opening the very space for reflection and for spirit that Heidegger has premised his notion of presence upon. For Heidegger the modern technological machine severs our connection to the world, to history, to time, and transforms the world into standing-reserve. Thus the *sine qua non* of the technological: it robs the world and the object—in effect, existence—of its spiritual mystique, devoid of ghosts and devoid of the potential for ghosts. Spirit becomes banished to Being or beings, discoverable only through the poetry (*poiesis*) of language. It moves, in effect, from the subject to the superstructure, just so long as that subject matter purges itself of the dangers of a certain technics.

Conclusion: The Forgetting of Air Waves in Martin Heidegger

The road from *Gestell* is paved with good intentions; Heidegger has every reason to be concerned with the adverse consequences of modern technology. Modern technology does indeed put survival in jeopardy, and as far as his formulation of Being is concerned, technology does much to efface Dasein's relationship with Being. But there remains an internal heuristic limit to his analysis. After the failed political endeavor of 1933, Heidegger will go on to link

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everything from Americanism to Communism to Nazism to a question of technicity, which should be understood at this point as a question of spirit and uncertainty as an implied opposition to calculative/technological thought. Hence Heidegger's strange prognosis in the 1966 *Der Spiegel* interview: "Only a God can save us."[197] Rather than Havelock's "orality reborn, " Heidegger finds radio contributing to the oblivion of Being and of the remoteness of presence. I believe this view to be short sighted.

Which is not to say that media can aid in the assumption and resurrection of presence; it cannot. Tele-presence is modern media's fundamental point of origin and their ultimate point of departure. But if the analysis above has offered anything, it is the insight that a medium, understood in light of Kittler's triple invocation, reveals much that modern science, conventional metaphysics and fundamental ontology would exclude: the constant play of spirit and ghost in haunting any claim to a final judgment on the nature and realm of truth, and following Derrida, in opening up the space to think justice in a new and radical way. Like the narrator of "Wireless," we must realize that the clarity of communication in media is its least interesting quality.

If Heidegger's conception of language is to be reclaimed, it lies not in language's capacity for Saying but for Showing. In its broadest sense, every discourse is epideictic; rhetoric is a showing-forth (*epideixis*) of itself. It need not be a bringing-forth (*poiesis*) into presence. The metaphysics of presence that marks Heidegger's hermeneutic truth need not contaminate the whole of the hermeneutic endeavor, nor exclude as problematic the in-between of media and media ecology. This is where rhetorical criticism must be blended with an aggressive rethinking of media and media theory, not only in engaging particular events in order to determine the impact of the proliferating technologies and events that comprise new media but also in order to

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highlight the rhetorical strategies at work in thinkers of technology even as we as scholars assess the benefits of their thought.

Such is the necessity with Heidegger's two rhetorical tricks: first, the theorizing of media as ontologically synonymous with technology and second, the exorcism and containment of spirit from that media technology. The two go hand-in-hand, binding Heidegger's saving power to a media ecology (orality) presumed possible precisely because of its spiritual distance from the calculative throes of the technological. The problem here is not that media and technology are objectively distinct but rather that engaging technological objects—"the things themselves"—as evidence merely of the technological blinds critique to the spiritual in-between made possible by the mutual translation between objects and their subjects; subjects and their objects. Media must be understood as more than technologies, not because of a particular heuristic truism, but because this regressive approach to the technological advances of any era will continue to generate incommensurate drives, founded in a sort of *technostalgia*, in which thinkers bemoan the present technological moment precisely because its presence cannot measure up to the tortured univocality their theorizing demands of it and look to a technological predecessor as a means of reestablishing their selves, their world, and their politics.[198]

Whether Heidegger has had a direct influence on other scholars or not, this analysis marks a trajectory of thought that raises some suspicions toward other contemporary thinkers of technology and media. Neil Postman, prominent media ecologist and thinker of technology, has argued for returning to the thoughts of those unafflicted by nearly every modern medium: the political philosophers of the eighteenth century, with similar interests in the near-prophetic power of the era's poetry and appreciation for our "place" in the world. While happier about the airplane, Postman nevertheless reverts to spiritual dictums, fearing that the modern age has lost

its ability to dream,[199] and yearning for a quasi-religious transcendence through which to ground human existence.[200] Echoing Heidegger's hope and terminology, Postman elsewhere contends that unlike the calculative reason of the twentieth century sociologist, the novelist of preceding centuries "proceeds by showing."[201] Somehow Postman believes we will simply, through sheer dint of will, return to the age of showing, and all might yet be made aright, if – and this is a big if – we can just hold onto that past strongly enough.[202] Similar strategies can be found in the writings of Jacques Ellul, Hubert Dreyfus, and Harold Innis, all of whom are considered powerful voices in understanding modern media.

Ultimately, the problem lies not in a longing for a simpler technological past, but rather with the injection of the politics of spirit into that longing, banishing from media the uncertainty of the in-between and the haunting spirit of its attendant ghosts. The allure of the lost spirit is always already a particular political allure, full of political consequences in how we theorize technology, the subject, and ideology. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, with new media continuing to redefine itself in the digital and virtual frontiers, the challenge posed is the same, if more urgent challenge posed by all media once marked as new: to discover ways of interrogating their contingent benefits and dangers without replicating the same technostalgiac drives that have plagued the critique of technology since Plato's condemnation of writing. Ghosts in the medium exist. We have tried exorcism. Perhaps the time has come to try something else.

Of course, we must be cautious here. If exorcism offers one of the more potent and common methods of disparaging mediation, if it provides a strategy by which one can preserve a separation between thinking and knowing on the one hand and the artificial and the technological on the other, we must not think that this fundamentally conservative theoretical gesture is that singular in its spectral politics. So far, I have focused on ways of locating the spectral that

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correspond to generally negative glosses on the social and philosophical impacts of mediation, but those logics that lend themselves to a more positive assessment of mediation have their own specters to contend with, and their own strategies for doing so. Thus far, I have outlined a logic of appropriation (souljacking) and expropriation (exorcism). The the next chapter engages a strategy for the spectral that emerges from an entirely different drive – the lauding of technology through the *sublimation* of spirit, a strategy I hope to expose through a reading that pairs the mirror-stage of Jacques Lacan with the mirror-obsessed blockbuster *The Matrix*. And so we move from the poetic sense (*Sinn*) of the "ether" to the reflection (*Besinnung*) of the mirror...

Chapter 6

The Mirror in *The Matrix* of Media Ecology

In 1999, the Wachowski brothers released their second film, *The Matrix*, to critical and popular acclaim. The guiding premise of the film can be described as follows: the world with which the audience is familiar is in fact a virtual world, a "consensual hallucination," maintained by artificially intelligent machines in the distant future. Those few humans who live outside of the Matrix are engaged in a war with the machines, a guerrilla conflict waged within the computer simulation, with the fate of humanity (freedom or food) hanging in the balance. Decisive in that battle is Neo, the anagrammatic and mystical "one", who intuitively senses the incompleteness of the Matrix. He searches for the mysterious Morpheus, a resistance leader who has in turn been searching for the savior that is (or will be) Neo. Before Neo can save humanity, he must first be released from the virtual grip of the Matrix.

If the characters and events in *The Matrix* have any allegorical or archetypal value, if the dominance of the Matrix represents anything more than a dramatic device, then it is important to examine how the hero subject in *The Matrix*, initially "born into bondage," escapes from that prison. While I will offer a more detailed rendering of the scene of this release below, I would like to recall one of its essential features: the mirror. Having ingested the red pill offered by Morpheus, Neo is placed in a chair and connected to some sensors. To his right sits a fractured mirror that mysteriously repairs itself under his visual examination, eventually presenting a whole and unbroken reflection. Neo, confused, reaches out to touch the mirror only to have his fingers sink beneath its liquid surface, submerging them into a mercurial substance that remains

coated like slime to his fingertips even after he withdraws them from the mirror. The substance begins to ooze down his arm and over the entirety of his skin before cascading down his throat along with the camera view and the crescendo of a modem scream—fade-to-black and then a new scene: Neo has been reborn, released from the Matrix.

This chapter will consider this ninth chapter of *The Matrix*, entitled "Down the Rabbit Hole," and its implications for theorizing the subject, and it will do so, ultimately, by focusing upon the medium of the mirror. This requires more than a lonely cinematic analysis; it means considering seriously those discourses that precede and inform it, since I believe that one cannot begin to appreciate Neo's merging-with/emergence-from the mirror without its obvious linkage to Jacques Lacan and his theory of the "mirror stage."[203] In both artifacts the mirror holds a privileged position; for Lacan, the mirror makes possible the formation of the subject, and in *The Matrix* the mirror provides the gateway between the bondage of simulation and the advent of "real" subjectivity. Despite the relative similarity of function, these two mirrors are marked by substantial differences in their formulation. How is it that both Lacan and *The Matrix* depict the mirror as such an important factor in the birth of their respective subjects, and what are the implications of the differences between these depictions? I believe that an examination of these differences reveals more than cinematic license; instead, the change in the mirror reflects a change in the theoretical appreciation and articulation of subjectivity due to alterations in media ecology. This chapter will thus have two goals: first, to blend rhetorical criticism, poststructuralism, and media ecology into a viable method of critique, and second, to explore the role that the medium of the mirror might play in the theoretical articulation of subjectivity from Lacan to *The Matrix* and beyond.

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It might seem strange that a Hollywood blockbuster would spark the reevaluation of any theory, much less the particular theoretical development of a concept more than fifty years old and developed on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. But it is precisely the success of *The Matrix* that makes such a causal reevaluation thinkable; the combination of serious philosophy and blockbuster special effects announces via visual bonanza what cyberpunk literature has been hinting at in the two decades since Vernor Vinge's *True Names*: new digital media have inaugurated a new world, that is, a new way of seeing. Neo's eyes burn after his rebirth precisely because, as Morpheus informs him, he's never used them. In a culture that fetishizes the image, cinema naturally integrates itself into the *élan vital* of philosophical thought, even if that *élan vital* emerges from a digital, cyberpunk ecology. Rethinking Lacan as a consequence seems not only prudent but also necessary, for no other thinker so explicitly pairs optical reflection with the possibility of self-reflection. Faced with the differences between the mirror of *The Matrix* and the mirror of Lacan, we must begin by thinking about which media might be operating within— influencing and/or founding—the Lacanian formulation of the mirror.

Of Mirrors and Media

In his landmark introduction to the nascent discipline of media ecology, Walter Ong writes: "The very reflectiveness of writing – enforced by the slowness of the writing process as compared to oral delivery as well as by the isolation of the writer as compared to the oral performer – encourages growth of consciousness out of the unconscious."[204] This brief statement, written to explain the rise of the modern detective story and the modes of its resolution, poses a much more substantial mystery: can the whole of the psychoanalytic enterprise, from Freud through Lacan, be explained by indebtedness to particular media of

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communication? That question cannot be answered conclusively within the present essay, but I will argue that a close examination of Lacan's mirror stage would benefit from highlighting its relationship with the media ecology of print.

The rapid diffusion of print in Europe, the onset of the so-called Gutenberg Galaxy, produced a standardized and efficient reading text, transforming the codex book into a portable and widely accessible commodity. As typography progressed beyond approximations of script into more readable typefaces, it introduced a standard text format to the prospect of mass production, cementing and extending the initial consequences of a shift toward literacy. Once language can be inscribed, a distance opens between the written word and the reader, a distance not possible to those who know only the spoken tongue. This distance, what Eric Havelock calls the separation of the knower from the known, produces a different potential relationship between language and its user: unlike the performative and hypnotic mimesis of Homer's epics, the written word retains presence without its author or its reader being present. As a consequence, the reader can return to a given text regardless of the number of times she has turned away. With the shift from script to print, the standardization and easy reproduction of texts makes this return both simpler and more pronounced, since the same text now exists in thousands of distinct and disseminated copies. This capacity to "turn back" to a text constitutes what Ong describes as the *reflectiveness of writing*; the reader can think both the text itself and the distance between the text and the reader. This "space between" focuses thought increasingly toward the visual, an effect reflected even in descriptions of the imagination.[205] Fixity and visual perspective were the hallmarks of typography in a manner and to a degree impossible in a manuscript culture. Marshall McLuhan explains:

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As the literal or "the letter" later became identified with light *on* rather than light *through* the text, there was also the equivalent stress on 'point of view' or the fixed position of the reader… Such a visual stress was quite impossible before print stepped up the visual intensity of the written page to the point of entire uniformity and repeatability. This uniformity and repeatability of typography, quite alien to manuscript culture, is the necessary preliminary to unified or pictorial space and "perspective."[206]

Print thus opened a literal space for reflection, the reader's "turning back" to a text. Enter Jacques Lacan, who rhetorically transforms the event of specular reflection into the foundational advent of self-reflection, the inaugural point for his theories of the three registers. These registers—the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real—remain at the core of Lacan's theorizing throughout his career, from their initial association with the mirror stage in 1936 to the development of the Borromean knot in the 1970s.[207] By way of a brief explanation, the imaginary is wedded to the image and is most strongly associated with the infant, who putatively lacks any sense of itself as an individual, crying when other infants cry, and understanding its body and its motions as unconnected fragments. The symbolic is the register of language and signification, the play of signifiers and the deployment of binaries. Lying beyond the symbolic is the real, the untouchable and unknowable register with qualities that can never be expressed, since expression requires recourse to the symbolic. Lacan illuminates the three registers through an analysis of the color red, asserting that the apperception of the color's wavelength reflects the real, the interrelationship of that wavelength to a history of images (blood, robin redbreast) and emotions (anger) constitutes its imaginary, and the difference between red and other recognized colors (e.g., black or blue) constitutes its symbolic component.[208] The mirror stage stands at somewhat of a contrast with these registers, a moment of transition before which the infant

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"knows" only the imaginary and after which the infant is constituted as an Ideal "I" within the already extant register of the symbolic.

Because the symbolic is the realm of language, it is within and through the symbolic that this chapter operates—just as all of Lacan's registers are themselves understood only as functions of or within the symbolic. As Lacan explains, with a vocabulary that corresponds favorably to McLuhan's insights on typography, "in the relation of the imaginary and the real, and in the constitution of the world such as results from it, everything depends upon the position of the subject. And the position of the subject…is essentially characterized by its place in the symbolic world…"[209] Famous for his critique of structuralism and his argument for the necessary failure of signification, the symbolic offers the primary means of understanding the other registers not only because the symbolic is the only register available but because it is always already incomplete. Heavily invested in "Freud's genius," Lacan "knew" there had to be more than merely the symbolic, but what was it? Where did it come from, and where did it go? For that he took a long, hard look at the mirror. In the following section, I offer a close, critical reading of what Lacan saw there. My deconstructive engagement is with the text that inaugurates his mirror stage, but much of my critique has been produced, albeit in fragmented form and with different purpose, in other assessments of the Lacanian subject.[210] (see Roustang, 1990; Weber, 1991; Copjec, 1994; Fink, 1996; Stockholder, 1998).

Imago, Imago on the Wall

Originally presented in August 1936 at the 14th International Psychoanalytic Conference as "*Le stade du miroir*," then revised and delivered at the 16th International Psychoanalytic Congress in July of 1949, Lacan's "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as

Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" begins by noting how a male (not female) child's "recognition" of his "own image in a mirror" results in an "illuminative mimicry" as the child realizes that its actions are mirrored in the image before it.[211] One notices the heavy emphasis on the visual (illumination, image) and its connection to thinking (re-cognition). The third paragraph of the address clarifies the nature of the mimicry: "a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment…" One can picture the child, slowly moving his arms or head in a series of gestures, realizing that those gestures are reduplicated in the image before him (albeit a bit reversed by a trick of the light), smiling and laughing with the insight that he is the image. But before explicitly linking this visual recognition to the theory of the mirror stage, the address does something curious at the start of paragraph four: it casually notes that this pattern of image recognition among children "has often made me reflect upon the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror." Whether intended as a pun or not, the semantic slippage between reflection-as-image and reflection-as-thought demonstrates not only the visual and spatial structuring of language but also the tenuous distinction between the specular object of the imaginary and the binary calculus of the symbolic.[212] As a term, the "imaginary" is only a linguistic marker—just another signifier within the register of the symbolic—but its written existence stresses its status as an image—a series of marks on paper that must then be filtered through the symbolic. As with signification in general, the word as grapheme – a graphic image – makes sense through a diacritical assessment, a differentiation from those other graphic images that precede and accompany it, and as such, every encounter with an image will entrain the symbolic register. The line between the symbolic and the imaginary is, to say the least, somewhat indistinct.

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The difficulty in distinguishing between these two registers and the rhetorical slippage between them seen in paragraph four will quietly haunt the remainder of the mirror stage address, begging the question of distinction, for if one cannot distinguish theoretically between the imaginary and the symbolic, what then does the mirror stage accomplish? Perhaps as an attempt to preempt this overarching concern, the fourth paragraph concludes with an abrupt shift in verb choices.[213] Whereas Lacan previously describes the male child as initiating a fluid and dynamic series of gestures in relation to his image, Lacan now describes the hypothetical child as "fixing (*suspendre*) his attitude" toward the image "in order to hold (*pour le fixer*) it in his gaze." *Fixing* and *holding* thus define the child's appropriation of the image. This rhetorical move becomes a means of holding the earlier slippage at bay as Lacan links the mirror stage to identification of self with self in the subsequent paragraph. He writes: "We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification…the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use…of the ancient term *imago*." Not as overtly spiritualist as the discourses targeted in the previous two chapters, Lacan's emphasis on the imago's ancient origins and his association of its effect with predestination hint at the strategy of sublimation at work in his mirror-stage, a theme that will be played out more explicitly in *The Matrix*.

What Lacan describes as a phase-effect, the temporal and spatial fixing of "an image" (now always singular), reinforces the static quality of the mirror. As renowned Lacanian Slavoj Žižek notes, Lacan repeatedly stresses the fixed singularity of the image: "the feature to be emphasized is…a kind of 'freeze of time': the flow of life is suspended, the Real of the dynamic living process is replaced by a 'dead', immobilized image – Lacan himself…compares the ego to the fixed image which the spectator perceives when the [film] reel gets jammed."[214] Indeed, so

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important is the rhetorical focus on *fixing* and *holding* that Lacan must introduce a term qualified apparently only by its age—"the ancient term *imago*"—to dispel alternate interpretations of the image in the mirror. *Imago*, defined contextually, thus comes to be understood as the exotic fixity of the child's reflected image, a definition that might seem curious in light of the apparent fluidity of the symbolic and imaginary registers. It is as if Lacan wants to emphasize explicitly the certitude of the mirror image even as he implicitly acknowledges the impossible certitude of the symbolic to which the mirror sublimates the imaginary.

To make this argument effectively, Lacan must transform the imaginary *before* the mirror into an imaginary *beyond* the mirror; the *imago* must be understood, as he characterizes it in the ninth paragraph, as an "exteriority…which…is certainly more constituent than constituted…a contrasting size that fixes it…in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him." A clever trick of the tongue, so to speak: the mirror stage becomes both a moment of transition (between the univocal dominance of the imaginary and the subsequent trumping of the imaginary by the introduction of the symbolic) and a means of quietly refiguring the imaginary as something extrinsic to the subject. The imaginary becomes not so much displaced as re-placed; the symbolic that gives birth to the subject in a moment of spatial fixation forces the imaginary to be fixed as something outside the subject: the child feels the turbulent movement without feeling like he himself *is* that turbulence. Strangely, in a move perhaps thinkable only because of the exoticism of the term, Lacan's depiction of the *imago* as an exteriority to the symbolic does not mean that it resides instead with the imaginary, but rather somewhere between the two, for as he states in the tenth paragraph, "the mirror-image would seem to be the threshold (*seuil*) of the visible world."[215] Thus the paradox of the *imago* (its production of a symbolic subject without itself being a part of the symbolic) is perhaps resolved;

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the *imago* is the gatekeeper between the imaginary and the symbolic—the fixed limit of otherwise fluid registers.

Having assigned the *imago*/mirror stage to its proper non-place, Lacan's semantic slippage returns at the close of paragraph thirteen: "These *reflections* lead me to *recognize* in the spatial captation manifested in the mirror-stage, even before the social dialectic, the effect in man of an organic insufficiency in his natural reality – in so far as any meaning can be given to the word nature" (p. 4, emphasis mine). Lacan has "turned back" to the double-entendre of reflection, but it clearly has lost whatever sense of crisis that may have flowed from it earlier, for now Lacan is able to declare assuredly in the very next paragraph: "I am led, therefore, to regard the function of the mirror-stage as a particular case of the function of the *imago*, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality – or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*."[216] These two brief passages merit particular scrutiny.

First, whereas the first instance of reflection (as thought) is followed by an attempt to clarify the rigid nature of reflection (as image), no such anxiety about semantic slippage can be detected in this second moment of reflection. It is as if the slipperiness of the symbolic and its potential implosion into the imaginary has been resolved, at least temporarily, by the fixing power of the mirror.

Second, Lacan explicitly links the theory of the mirror to the revelation that man is naturally insufficient. This insufficiency occurs even before the social dialectic, which is to say that it both anticipates and follows the onset of the symbolic, which is also to say that the symbolic plays only a limited role regarding whatever this insufficiency might be. As to the actual nature of this insufficiency—"at least in so far as any meaning can be given to the word nature"—Lacan offers next to nothing. True, the first half of paragraph thirteen concerns

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epistemological limitations in human perception, but these limitations are explicitly linked to those social dialectics that have little overall effect on the supposed insufficiency. One can deduce two possibilities inherent within the idea of an "organic insufficiency" itself: either a failure to measure up to the potential of the organic, either through disability or something akin to lethargy, or the insufficient potential of the organic itself, a problem with the organic body proper. The latter formulation seems more consistent with the overall tone and theme of the address, but begs all the usual questions: who measures sufficiency? What counts as sufficient? What lies beyond sufficiency? These questions will remain, but at least Lacan pinpoints their origin; the fixity of the mirror makes possible the discovery of organic insufficiency.

Third, the mirror's gatekeeper function expands in the above passages to one of regulation, with the *imago* now being made responsible for reconciling the inner and the outer worlds of the subject, even though it is the distinction between those inner and outer worlds that made the *imago* necessary originally. If one never stabilizes the conceptual border dividing the symbolic and the imaginary there would be no inner and outer world for the mirror stage to regulate. Given that the only binary that parallels and precedes the sudden separation of the organism from its reality is the separation of the symbolic from the imaginary, we must conclude that these binaries share some implicit structural connection—in other words, that the capacity of the mirror to distinguish these two registers grounds the differentiation between interior and exterior.

Fourth, what are we to make of this strange diction, the decision to suddenly introduce a series of terms never used in an expository fashion elsewhere in the address? Given the syntactic structure of the sentence, one expects "organism" to correspond to *Innenwelt* and "reality" to correspond to *Umwelt*, but why vanquish reality to the environment/outside? I am tempted to

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believe that the order of these sentences is not entirely coincidental, and that reality's exile has everything to do with the mysterious organic insufficiency identified previously. The separation of the organism from its reality/environment might thus explain the nature of the insufficiency: the organism is insufficient in its nature precisely because of its natural separation from its environment. Those traces of the organic—the whole, mundane range of the corporeal—can only interact with the environment, never integrate with it. The organic retains this failure from birth through the mirror stage and beyond, unable to cope despite the entire range of social dialectics that comprise the symbolic. Interestingly, this insufficiency is revealed only by the fixity of the *imago* in the mirror, and yet the mirror stage will be able to regulate its relationships.

Fifth, and finally, the mirror stage is only one possible function of the *imago*. The other functions are not mentioned, at least not in this essay.[217]

Unfortunately this complex and subtle play of differentiation (between the symbolic and the imaginary, between the organism and reality, between the interior and the exterior) reinjects the entire problematic of metaphysics into Lacan's theorizing. The situation is not a simple continuation of the conventional *cogito ergo sum*, but rather a Hegelian sublation: Lacan's theory of the mirror dismisses the Cartesian subject by effectively *doubling* it (the child object conjoins the mirror object, the dialectic of desire, etc.). Descartes' evil demon is displaced in the symbolic register by the mystical bar that separates signifier from signified and against which every articulation of the subject must be tested. While the Cartesian subject had to submit to the optical question of perspective, its Lacanian successor is able to masquerade as the Janus-like *imago*—which properly understood is nothing less than the *founding possibility* of subjectivity itself. The symbolic may make the subject possible by preceding its formation from without, but the imaginary *precedes* the subject from within. Not from a "within" of the corporeal—there's

no sidestepping the organic insufficiency of humanity—but from a "within" of some unavailable and thus unassailable essence. Prior to the symbolic, the imaginary simply is, even if it exists as the imaginary only in the wake of the mirror stage. The imaginary thus conceived stands as a link to something greater and more primordial than itself: a lost essence only visible in that specular moment of clarity that the "ancients" called the *imago.* Why else stress the age of such an exotic term rather than the nuances of its meaning? Why else declare the *imago* to be greater and more potent than the mirror stage that makes it visible? As the gateway between the symbolic and the imaginary, as the threshold of the visible world, as the mediator of the internal and the external, Lacan's articulation of the *imago* offers itself as a last chance to understand a lost essence. The *cogito* replaced by *aspicio*—I see, therefore I am—with the subtle prospect that with Lacan, one sees *more*.

This tension returns us to mimesis, founded as it is on the recognition of a mirror image's repetition/imitation of the child's gestures before the mirror. Unlike the inscription of writing that Plato finds so problematic, and unlike the more originary sense of rhythm that Heidegger finds in the spirit of poetic orality, the mirror repeats my means of duplication; one sees more by seeing the self as an other—the eternal repetition of the same. Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, writing in *Mimesis*, highlight the importance of these duplicative faculties in the active and external determination of the subject: "Lacan's mirror is not a passive medium; it not only portrays but also contributes in a certain sense to the production of the one who is portrayed. The mirror is not a dead object, but partner in a dialogue that goes on outside the awareness of the person being reflected (209."[218]

It comes as no surprise then that in paragraph seventeen the mirror becomes the foundation for this new conception of subjectivity, manufacturing "for the subject …the

succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality…to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development." The fixity of the *imago* produces the "rigid armour" of alienation ("rigid armour" translates the French "structure", which also carries connotations of a place of refuge), which in effect produces identity as a consequence of its double; the subject knows itself by the difference between what it sees and what it is. The subject exists only in that it remains alienated from itself. The symbolic will never match the appearance of "totality" afforded by the image in the mirror and so the subject can never be complete, even if, as Lacan argues, it is this incompleteness that allows the subject to be at all. One must not ignore the recurrent theme of the *imago*: the continued emphasis on stability and fixity provided by the mirror stage. Precisely because of its definition as gatekeeper of the symbolic and imaginary registers, the mirror becomes somehow exempt from both the failure of signification within the symbolic and the fragmentary and partial constraints of the imaginary. Absent this exemption, the theoretical development of the mirror stage is impossible, not only because one could never satisfy the chain of signifiers, but also because the mirror itself would dissolve within the intermingling of the imaginary and symbolic. The rhetoric of fixity makes thinkable the split between interior and exterior by mapping the subject as the distance between the self and its *imago*, a mapping that can only occur as a function of the symbolic. And so, while the Cartesian subject celebrated itself, the very different Lacanian subject celebrates its lack—a far more subtle and more dangerous formulation, since rejoinders can be simply swept up in the *Aufhebung* of the symbolic: always reacting, always progressing, but never there. As Lacan announces in the twenty-second paragraph: "This moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates,

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by the identification with the *imago*…the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations."[219]

I would like to suggest that the strange metaphysics and failures of the mirror stage are in fact emblematic of a particular mode of thought engendered by the media ecology of print. This connection does not absolve Lacan's theorizing of any of its own potential insufficiencies, but it does lay the groundwork for understanding how and why the mirror of *The Matrix* might differ. In addition, investigations of the connections between thought and media, regardless of their subtlety, offer ways of advancing poststructural critique by mapping alterations in the metaphysics of presence that result from technological change. The mirror remains alive and well in the *Matrix*, so what of its particular metaphysics? To answer that question requires a basis of comparison, and so we must first consider and confirm the relationship between the mirror and media. The following section will lay the groundwork for that comparison by considering the relationship between media and Lacan's mirror stage, not so as to provide a corrective, but rather to offer a reflection upon Lacan's reflection, a look at his essay on the "Mirror Stage" that parallels his look at the concept of the mirror stage. Thus I respond to a different question than the one that animates Lacan, a question not of truth but of representation: what might the metaphorical dream of the mirror reflect?

Through the Looking Glass

To some extent, Lacan hints at a possible answer. Declaring in paragraph twenty-three that the end of the mirror stage "decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other," Lacan already introduces as expository a concept his text otherwise refuses to engage: the role of the media in the constitution of the "Ideal-I." For

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Lacan, mediatization is an after-effect of the *imago*, a desire to achieve the fullness of the fixed image within the confining insolvency of the symbolic. The subject becomes mediated by its desires for the other, and not by the medium of the symbolic itself. This becomes the basis for what, in the next paragraph, he refers to as "primary narcissism:"[220] the love of the self that can never be fulfilled. The turn to Narcissus makes sense for a psychoanalyst, but it is particularly interesting in light of Marshall McLuhan's rereading of the Narcissus myth. Noting the relation between Narcissus and *narcosis*, McLuhan contends that communication media produce a "numbness" in the psyche of those reared on them.[221] Extending the nervous system through media serves both to amplify and amputate elements of human subjectivity, altering the subjectivity conditioned by previous media. The print revolution produced a standardized textual exterior, making universal claims about the capacities of consciousness possible,[222] just as writing had allowed philosophical introspection to become a possibility in a manner that the Homeric imagination precluded.[223]

McLuhan's insight is that this numbness blinds us to the constitutive effects of media in acts of interpretation. Contending that "the point of this [Narcissus] myth is the fact that men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves,"[224] McLuhan then declares: "It is, perhaps, indicative of the bias of our intensely technological and, therefore narcotic culture that we have long interpreted the Narcissus story to mean that he fell in love with himself, that he imagined the reflection to be Narcissus!"[225] On the contrary, argues McLuhan, Narcissus fell in love with an image. In a culture dominated by the motif of reflection, where the mirror image is understood as synonymous with the subject, the myth of Narcissus speaks of vanity and self-love. Instead, argues McLuhan, Narcissus falls in love with his extension, his presence in another medium. Perhaps Lacan has done the same—fallen in love

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with the heuristic image of himself, and awarded to it all the power his Freudian roots forbid him from claiming for himself?

Perhaps not. McLuhan's formulation of the mirror as narcosis remains too riddled with problems of its own to properly provide a warrant for Lacan's mirror as a grand self-delusion. In many respects, McLuhan's understanding of reflection aligns quite well with Lacan's; both see the reflection as an object distinct from the subject and both see this image as the generative source of lack, be it as the paralysis of numbness or the subsequent desire for the other. But the differences between the two thinkers offer the chance for a mutual corrective of sorts. By formulating media as "extensions of the self," McLuhan presumes something from which to extend. While this "something prior" to media remains theoretically vague in McLuhan's texts, one nevertheless gets the impression of some originary subject, existing prior to media, or at least prior to whatever the first medium might be in McLuhan's formulation. Lacan's realization, that the subject only becomes the subject through its entry into the symbolic, forces a subtle rearticulation of McLuhan's position, since now media (as the technological substrate of the symbolic) subsequently must be understood to constitute the subject rather than modify it. There can be no extension of a *self* because the self only comes into being in and through the inaugural moment of what McLuhan calls extension; in other words, the subject is always already mediated. On the flipside of the corrective, Lacan never considers the mirror/*imago's* status as a technological agent, even at the same time that he describes it in terms of technology.[226] Thus the value of McLuhan in advancing the theory of the mirror: the mirror metaphor is nothing if not techno-logical, and had Lacan deployed a different mechanism for describing the process of identification of self with self, the process may well have been conceptualized quite differently. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe marks the mirror's technological function as well, noting that "the

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mirror is an absolute instrument, as has been known ever since (at least) the story of Perseus: it is

the apparatus for gorgonizing Medusa, a fabulous "machine." It allows every possible turn, and

is of a formidable—and, moreover, disquieting—efficacy."[227]

Thinking of the mirror as a technological object, as a medium of and for the *imago*, one

can see the relationship that print media ecology might have played in the formation of the mirror

stage as a psychoanalytic concept. Consider the above analysis of Lacan's address through my

own attempt at "illuminative mimicry." Lacan predicates the mirror stage upon the concept of

fixity; the image of the self in the mirror remains static and fixed, the referent that constitutes the

"I" out of the fragmentary imaginary and places that "I" within/through the realm of the

symbolic. Thus the introduction of the Lacanian lack: the symbolic remains incomplete, a failure

of signification that can never complete the apperception of completeness witnessed in one's

reflection. The fixed image in the mirror stage produces a fiction, creating a belief in the

subject's wholeness that can never be actualized within the confines of the symbolic.

I believe that this formulation rests upon a particular media ecology—that of print. The

fixity of the image is the fixity of text, in which its status as a signifier remains constant even as

its concluding act of signification remains forever deferred. Indeed, one could read the mirror

stage as an allegory for print: the fixed image as a standardization of the text, the primordial

imaginary as the elusive status of the author and of meaning, and the symbolic as the process by

which we attempt to explain (read: signify) both. The symbolic, like the printed word that

produces it, must exist external to the subject even as it constitutes subjectivity. How else can

one reconcile Lacan's belief in the inaccessibility of the "real" with his conviction in its

existence? That the "real" is itself a semiotic component of the symbolic is too banal and simple

to properly explain Lacan's insistence; instead we can see the real as a *reflection* of the very

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conditions that make the symbolic thinkable at all as a linguistic marker—its status as an exterior field, the exteriority of the printed word, standard and ubiquitous.

In terms of their textual relationships, the real cannot be separated from the symbolic any more than the symbolic can be separated from the imaginary, since both the real and the imaginary define (and are defined by) the terminal points of the symbolic. The symbolic begins where and when the imaginary ends just as the real announces itself only at the finite limit of the symbolic, the point where the symbolic can no longer even pretend to signify. The imaginary and the real are both exterior to the symbolic (even while trapped within it—the same paradox seen above when discussing the *imago's* relation to the subject), and in so doing constitute the symbolic through negation. As Lacan announces in 1954, "the imaginary and the real act on the same level."[228] Both are functions of the same process of failed signification, and so both would be identical if not for the *parsing metaphor of the mirror* that marks the relationship between the symbolic and imaginary as being distinct from the relationship between the symbolic and the real.[229] In a conception of subjectivity fundamentally predicated and constituted by a conception of lack, the mirror stands out as the fixed presence by which lack is constituted. Lacan, of course, concedes that the mirror is (in part) only a metaphor. But the importance of the mirror as metaphor rests with its specular quality of a one to one correspondence. He writes: "All sorts of things in the world behave like mirrors. All that's needed is that the conditions be such that to one point of a reality there should correspond an effect at another point, that a bi-univocal correspondence occurs between two points in real space."[230] Fixity and ocular correspondence— these qualities define objects worthy enough to earn the label of "mirror." But the fact that Lacan would describe the mirror like a metaphor only adds to the import of its status as edifice: unlike other rhetorical tropes, metaphors present a one-to-one correspondence between terms, just as

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Lacan believes mirrors present a one-to-one correspondence between registers. Describing the mirror as a metaphor in this sense only begs the question: a metaphor for what? Lacanians would respond that the mirror simply represents that moment in which a notion or image of the self as an object within the world comes into being via its ongoing emplacement within the realm of the symbolic.[231] But what if the mirror and the stage that carries its namesake are considered more as products of a particular media ecology, rather than as an analysis of a more generalizable subjectivity? The rhetorical function of the mirror changes—no longer a metaphor for a point of transition but a metonymy for the economy of print and the cognitive conditions that print produces. The fixity of the mirror only makes sense as a substitution for the fixity of the symbolic in the ecology of print. How else can one explain the mirror's awkward and aporetic status as a gatekeeper? The mirror is both exterior and the manufacturer of exteriority; it fulfills the same functions that Ong finds fulfilled by writing and print. No other medium than print explains the mirror stage's tortured formulation or the strange metaphysics of the *imago*; the ascendancy of electronic and televisual communication sacrifice fixity for a celebration of speed and movement and writing lacks the fixity and universal normalization afforded by print. Ong explains: "Writing had reconstituted the originally oral, spoken word in visual space. Print embedded the word in space more definitively… Print encouraged human beings to think of their own interior conscious and unconscious resources as more and more thing-like, impersonal and religiously neutral."[232] Finally, we can propose an answer to what Lacan's reflections might actually reflect: the mirror is a medium—and that is the address's message.

And Down the Rabbit Hole

Given the above, it is worth reflecting on how the conceptualization of the mirror stage might change given the growing ubiquity and advancement of new media technologies. Some of the groundwork for this rethinking has been done in Katherine Hayles' brilliant work on informatics and virtual bodies. In *How We Became Posthuman*, she advocates a shift in critical focus, away from the Lacanian notion of the "floating signifier" and its attendant chain of signification, and toward the concept of a "flickering signifier" characterized not by the play of presence and absence but rather the interrelation of pattern and randomness. Questions of the subject's presence become more difficult, and ultimately more heuristically restrictive, when discussing the location of the subject in cyberspace or virtual reality. As Hayles notes: "Questions about presence and absence do not yield much leverage in this situation, for the avatar both is and is not present, just as the user both is and is not inside the screen. Instead the focus shifts to questions about pattern and randomness."[233] Like the difference between the harsh print of the typewriter and the easily-manipulated text of the word processor, the "contrasting size" that Lacan saw in the *imago* has become more and more malleable and subservient to the technology that produces it—subservience not necessitated by the technology of a mere mirror. Fixity as a cognitive constant has, or is becoming, strangely unfixed. Absent this unhinging of the sign from its fixed presence, the distinction Hayles draws would not even have been conceivable. In terms of their values as signs, the floating signifier and its flickering cousin lack distinction. Both are wrapped in (and warped by) Derrida's *differánce*; both mock the culmination of meaning in the signified. But a distinction can be perceived nevertheless, for while both represent chains of signifiers, both carry with them a trace or signifier of their medium. That Lacan does not explicitly recognize the trace of the medium within the signifier

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only serves to support the idea that his theorizing is embedded within the ecology of the medium itself; the banal ubiquity of its presence produces a numbness to alternative modal productions of the signifier. No wonder Lacan would eventually make clear his desire to investigate *la langue* instead of *la parole*; the whole of Lacanian psychoanalyses is predicated upon the unfixity of meaning within the fixity of its medium.[234]

The mirror of *The Matrix* reflects this change in medium. *The Matrix* is a film obsessed with the mirror, but its obsession seems to resemble nothing similar to the totemic formulations offered by Lacan fifty years prior. Instead, the mirror of 1999 offers more than simple reflection; now every *imago* undergoes refraction and rarefaction. Sunglasses reflect shades of what their wearer sees; bending spoons further distort already warped images; and the quicksilver fabric of the mirror envelops Neo before disappearing down his throat. The ninth chapter, with its titular allusion to *Alice in Wonderland*, must be understood both as an outgrowth of Lacan's mirror and as a response to the changing of the medium in which the mirror and its subject are thought.

Let us consider the scene more closely. The chapter actually begins (28:52) in an antechamber to the mirror room, with the camera shooting the profiles of a forward leaning Neo sitting across from a backward-leaning Morpheus, each in large, brown leather chairs. A small table sits between them with a lone glass of water atop it. The room is darkly lit, and the camera lens is saturated by the green tint present in almost all scenes filmed within the Matrix. As if to dramatize the importance of the scene, the eighth chapter concludes with one of *The Matrix's* most famous lines, this one spoken by a reclining Morpheus (28:41): "Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself." So what does the audience *see*, in the wake of this pronouncement? Morpheus extracts two pills from a silver case, offering both to Neo. As he offers the first pill, the first mirror movement of the scene occurs (29:00), with

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Morpheus leaning forward and Neo reclining in response, a reversal of their previous body postures. Morpheus explains: "This is your last chance. After this, there is no *turning back*. You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed, and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes" (emphasis mine). Thus the choice that Neo must make, a choice entirely of and about reflection ("turning back"): to stay in the world of the Matrix or to risk the unknown, the mystery of the rabbit hole.

A switch in camera shot stresses the theme of reflection—now offering a close-up of Morpheus's face, with each lens of his ubiquitous and stylish sunglasses reflecting a slightly warped image of Neo, whose face seems to express equal parts confusion and contemplation. Thinking for a few seconds, Neo begins to reach for the red pill, only to pause as Morpheus interjects a final comment on the matter (29:30): "Remember… all I'm offering is the truth. Nothing more." The camera shifts perspective, this time pushing the close-up of Morpheus's face to the extreme, his sunglasses now filling the width of the screen and reflecting Neo's left hand hovering above the red pill. The camera returns to its profile perspective as Neo takes the red pill, grabs hold of the glass of water, and begins to drink. A camera shift shows a smile beginning to play on Morpheus' lips, and a peel of thunder dramatizes Neo's ingestion of the red pill (29:45). Standing, Morpheus commands: "Follow me."

The camera follows Morpheus and Neo as they open a set of double doors and enter the "mirror room," incidentally introducing visually the characters of Apoc, Switch, and Cypher, each of whom are performing a number of technological tasks. Cypher monitors something unknown to the audience through a pair of exotic, technologically advanced goggles; Apoc works diligently behind a handful of monitors, keyboards, and similar technological gear, and Switch

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presides over a number of controls near a broken full-length mirror in the back left corner of the room. Announcing that "Time is always against us" (30:01), Morpheus then directs Neo to a chair to the right of the mirror. Trinity begins attaching a number of sensors and wires to Neo's body, and a confused Neo asks (30:21): "You did all this?" Trinity's brief reply: "Mm-hmm." A beautiful juxtaposition of the old and the new plays throughout much of *The Matrix*, and that juxtaposition is particularly strong in this scene as Morpheus sets in motion a worn rotary phone, connected through exposed gears to some technology of unknown purpose and design. The camera frame switches from the antiquarian phone to the stylish, leather clad Morpheus, who announces that the red pill is part of something called a "trace program…designed to disrupt your [Neo's] input/output signal," a comment that no doubt seems overly jargon-laden for those unaware of the movie's premise. Even Neo asks (30:36): "What does that mean?" Interestingly, Cypher, the traitor of the film, responds with a cultural allusion to the *Wizard of Oz*, a film over 200 years old to those in the "real" world: "It means buckle your seatbelt, Dorothy, 'cause Kansas is going bye-bye." Thunder dramatizes the moment again.

At this point, a confused Neo seems to resign himself to his bewilderment and begins gathering himself for whatever must be coming to sweep "Kansas" away (30:52). As Neo takes a deep breath, the camera begins to watch him as he collects himself, a shot that lasts nearly 30 seconds, easily the longest single camera shot of the chapter. In the last moments of the shot, Neo begins to turn to his right, noticing for the first time the broken mirror that has silently decorated the background of the room in previous camera frames. The mirror stands broken, placid, and quiet—which already sets it apart from the movement of flashing lights, video images, and mechanical equipment that dominates filming in the mirror room until this point. Indeed, up until this point, the mirror has been passive to the point of absence. Panning to the

left as Neo turns slowly to his right, the camera focuses its gaze upon the Neo of the mirror, rather than the Neo in the chair (31:10), though his face remains partially obscured by the fracture of the mirror's surface; at this point, his reflection, his *imago*, remains incomplete. Jumping back to a shot of the Neo-in-the-chair's face, a startled look and strange sound effect announce that something must be happening to the mirror (31:15). The camera jumps back to the Neo in the mirror, the sound effect continuing, as the fractured lines begin to smooth over, a ripple of movement that begins at the outer edges of the mirror and coalesces at its center, leaving the mirror unbroken and completing the unblemished mirror image of Neo. The decision to cut back and forth between the chair Neo and the mirror Neo needs some consideration, especially given that the moment that announces the "unreality" of the mirror begins with the camera no longer focused on the mirror itself. Instead, the mirror changes as the camera "turns back" to the image of Neo in the chair, a return to that subject called Neo that exists prior to the completed and "fixed" image. As with Lacan, the realization of the *imago* intimates, this time visually, that something within and before the subject in the mirror makes the *imago* possible. But one must note that this occurrence, this referential reflection of the subject before the mirror, seems to be unique for Neo. The evidence for this occurs at 31:20, when a startled and confused Neo turns to Trinity and asks "Did you—?" Trinity, despite already confirming the similarity of her own experience, nevertheless appears to be confused by this event and instead turns questioningly to Morpheus. Morpheus, ardent believer in the messianic essence within Neo, walks closer to Neo though the dark lenses that cover his eyes make it uncertain if he, too, is looking for explanation, or if he is pleased that his faith appears to be rewarded. As Neo reaches for the surface of the mirror and feels his fingers descend beneath its liquid exterior, Morpheus asks (31:33): "Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? [Another

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thunder peel is heard.] What if you were unable to wake from that dream?   How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?"

With a weak protest that "This can't be" (31:49), Neo watches with a mixture of horror and fascination as the quicksilver liquid coated to his fingers begins to expand and envelop his hand. Morpheus interjects: "Be what? Be real?" The camera shifts importantly in this sequence, first from a composite position in front and below Neo that situates his quicksilver hand between the camera lens and his face, and then to a position closer aligned with Neo's own eyes ("you have to see it for yourself"), showing the distorted and morphing reflection of his visage in the mercurial coat spreading over his palm. Indeed, there are actually two reflections present in the hand, mirror opposites of each other—one stretched vertically, gaunt and thin, and one flattened and extended horizontally. Neither image is particularly clear or coherent, and neither image remains entirely distinct from the other; the stretch marks bleed into each other at various intersections in the palm. One cannot tell if the images are in actuality discrete—the boundaries between the two faces collapse the two visages into one very distorted image, a reflective Janus of Neo.

Perhaps in order to clarify that this enveloping liquid remains metal, perhaps to provide a contrast to the subsequent rebirth/awakening at the power plant, or better still, perhaps to announce the onset of technological narcosis, Neo shouts at a whisper (32:00): "It's cold. It's cold!" As the liquid begins to slide toward his head, Neo cranes his neck as if to prevent the spread, but to no avail. Morpheus phones Tank to request a signal, and a flurry of computer activity involving targeting and heart monitoring follows. As the mercury works its way onto Neo's face, his eyes wide and his mouth open, Morpheus demands (32:22): "Now, Tank, now!" With that, the mercury envelops the remaining untouched skin of Neo and cascades down his

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throat, with Neo's horrified scream collapsing into the electric screech of a modem handshake. The camera switches from a profile shot of the liquid's spread up Neo's face to a position seemingly within the silver slime itself, sliding down Neo's throat with the rest of the quicksilver before fading into darkness. Chapter nine ends and chapter ten, "Slimy Rebirth," begins with a hairless Neo bolting upright out of a glass bubble filled with disturbingly pink goo. Neo has awakened. As Morpheus will say later (35:19), "Welcome to the real world."

Given this reading of chapter nine, what can we say about the mirror in *The Matrix*?

Enjoy the Mutation

The obsession with reflection present throughout *The Matrix* seems especially evident in this description of chapter nine. But "Down the Rabbit Hole" shows more than a simple distortion of the mirror; the *concept* of the mirror itself becomes warped, and with it its mimetic function. The mirror is no longer that which reflects even a distorted *imago*, it is the collapse of the separation between *imago* and subject. No longer the presence of the *imago* for a symbolic subject founded on absence; now the image and the symbol collapse into each other and even the audience remains uncertain where Thomas Anderson ends and the mercury of the mirror begins. Thought through the electronic medium of virtual reality and simulation, saturated with the logic of the flickering signifier, the mirror of *The Matrix* collapses the fundamental binary of presence and absence by collapsing the distance between the subject-to-be and the mirror. That distance, which makes the *imago* thinkable as distinct from the subject it ferments for Lacan, no longer exists. When Neo touches the mirror to reveal its preternatural liquid depths, only to discover in turn that those depths remain on him—eventually in him—even as he attempts to withdraw from them, he not only unfixes the rigid formulation of the *imago*—he also undoes the separation of

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the *imago* from himself. Frentz and Rushing's assessment that the mirror wishes to destroy its source ignores the already artificial projection of that source (the "real" Neo only appears after this merger of virtual flesh with virtual metal) and consigns the reading of that scene to one predicated on an unchanging, print-bound reading of the mirror stage and of simulation.[235] Instead of destruction, which implies primacy of one object (image) over another (body), *The Matrix* celebrates a mutation of the two that vitiates the ontological separation of either.

This cinematic attempt to fetishize the "mutation" of the mirror explains the sequence of camera shots that precede it. The prolonged camera focus on Neo as he gathers his thoughts before looking in the mirror, unique both in frame content and shot duration, emphasizes the importance of the subject's composition before the mirror image. By age, Neo falls well beyond the developmental stage that Lacan describes, but that age reflects only biology; the Matrix has kept him ignorant of the "truth" and undermined his "real" development. As a consequence, Neo's time of self-reflection, of self-composition, remains strangely hollow, especially given the complete lack of comprehension he possesses prior to his awakening, and the utter lack of explanation he receives. Remember, he cannot be told what the Matrix is—he has to *see* it for himself. The recognition of the mirror that concludes the gathering of his thoughts and that forces a switch in camera perspective, and the subsequent unveiling of the unreality of the world of the Matrix, is that first moment of visual revelation. With the restoration of its unbroken surface, the mirror announces Neo's awakening, just as the mirror image announces the awakening of the child to the Lacanian symbolic. Unlike Lacan, who offers little recognition of the mirror as a technological object, the mirror of The Matrix screams its status as technological agent. The mirror brings the subject of Neo into being, at least in the sense of "real" being, of recognition of the symbolic overdetermination of the Matrix, but it does so not through its fixity

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and the play of presence and absence but rather through its mutation within the dynamic of pattern and randomness. There can be no fixity of the mirror image, no *imago* in the sense that Lacan prescribes, because now the distance between the mirror and its subject is no more; subjectivity exists because the patterns of the Matrix can be ruptured—indeed are ruptured repeatedly—and because this rupture can, in a fortuitous moment and with assistance, be grasped by the subject. This moment of awakening can no longer be described by what Lacan terms "illuminative mimicry," but rather as the advent of an "immersive mimicry," in which the subject experiences the abject of the symbolic and is thus transformed.

This experience of the abject—that in-between that challenges and disgusts the coherence of identity—can be seen best in chapter nine's mirrored theme of ingestion. "Down the Rabbit Hole" begins with the decision to consume, willingly, but without knowledge, a little red pill. Neo has no idea what it is, he has no idea what it will do; he has only the promise of a transcendent truth. At the beginning of chapter nine, he embraces it. By the close of the chapter, he finds this possibility of truth unreal, uncontrollable, and horrific. That this horror would in turn usher in Neo's release from bondage merits some close scrutiny. Rather than sanitizing the abject, *The Matrix* recasts it as a productive and vitalizing force, and does so by linking the abject to the importance of pattern alteration (disrupting the "input/output signal"). The trace program begun with the red pill concludes with the quicksilver of the mirror, visually erasing one trace in order to manufacture another. Silver slime gives way to pink goo just as the virtual Thomas Anderson gives birth to the now "realized" Neo. The transition between mirror and rebirth, a shift of scene that takes place under the cover of a cinematic fade-to-black (a purely symbolic fade-to-reality), marks the emergence of a new pattern and a new way of seeing. Further it makes

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possible the eventual turning back to the Matrix required for the onset of Neo's superhuman

powers and his messianic awakening.

The chapter's titular rabbit hole is, in other words, Neo's own throat. Wonderland is

inside him! His release from the Matrix recapitulates the lesson garnered from the rereading of

Lacan—that the foundational essence of the subject precedes the subject's own realization. But

The Matrix takes this lesson and supercharges it, thanks in no small part to the shift from the

primary importance of presence to the apotheosis of pattern. With the collapse of distance

between *imago* and body, a collapse that takes place through the internalization of that *imago*, the

critical question becomes one of access: how does one "jack in" to these hidden resources of the

subject? The two-part answer: a technological interface and pattern recognition ("you must see it

for yourself"). For Lacan, the religious "predestination" of the *imago* makes subjectivity

possible. For *The Matrix*, which is much more openly religious – even pseudo-Messianic – the

internalized *imago* combines with the technological circumvention of the symbolic to make true

transcendence attainable.

What I have ignored thus far, and what may seem glaringly obvious to any reader, is that

the Neo before the mirror is never the "real" Neo. The entire drama of the mirror in "Down the

Rabbit Hole" remains predicated on the presumption that the reality of the mirror never matters

because the mirror itself was never real. How can conclusions be drawn about the rethinking of

the mirror stage when the scene that ostensibly does the rethinking denies the truth-value of what

it purports to demonstrate? I believe that this initial and obtrusive lack of reality is what makes

chapter nine so important to the thinking of the mirror. There are no *mirrors* in *The Matrix's*

"real" world, only dull metal surfaces and computer screens. The battle for the freedom of

humanity has been lost in the real world; only the symbolic world of the Matrix matters in terms

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of the revolution, even in terms of divine salvation. The machines can only be beaten in the

artificial world they have made. But beating the machines that control the Matrix and hence the

production of meaning, identity, the social, etc—in effect, the entirety of the symbolic and

semiotic code—only happens if the code is recognized for its artifice, for its arbitrary and

capricious nature. *The Matrix* offers a cinematic vision not unlike many rhetorical critics and

postmodern philosophers; wake to the semiotic violence and "free your mind."

And the rest will follow. Lacan declared the symbolic to be "the world of the machine,"

something taken to its literal extreme in *The Matrix*. But this hypertrophy of the symbolic can

be pushed even further; the real world of *The Matrix* is fiction, just a movie projection of a

hypothetical future. The Matrix still maintains the pretense of reality, simply pushing it

towards some distant, dystopian future. Or does it? On the recently released *Matrix Revisited*

(2001), a DVD extra offers short interviews with a group of "true believers" who take

seriously the premise that the world of the viewer may be an illusion or simulation, either in

the discursive sense of forced meanings or in the "material" sense of an alien or computer

simulation. Reality has bled,[236] its boundaries no longer distinct, and the Lacanian real has

bled with it. This is *The Matrix* at its most psychoanalytic, taking Christian Metz's notion of

film as an "imaginary signifier"[237] and symbolically reconstituting the everyday reality of the

viewer through whispers of the Lacanian real.

What becomes apparent in The Matrix is that these "whispers" are in and of themselves

always tied to the explicitness of the symbolic. In the virtual world of the Matrix, everything is

aestheticized: goth-punk clothing, the crowded city, frequent references to succulent food, etc. In

the "real world," the film does its best to quiet its aesthetic impulses: gray clothing, the dull

metal ship, and tasteless slop for food. In the virtual world, everything calls attention to its

symbolic import, whereas in the so-called real world, most things are dull, lifeless, and uninteresting. This does not let the so-called real world escape the symbolic – far from it – since the contrast that maintains the film's distinction between real and virtual relies upon this extreme shift in aesthetics. Nothing could be more symbolic in the Lacanian sense, maintaining as it does the whole set of *binary* relationships between the real and the virtual. The point is that for *The Matrix* in general, and for chapter nine in particular, the symbolic is presented as the privileged operation and preeminent register. Indeed, the symbolic becomes so important that the distinctions between the real and the imaginary collapse into the symbolic register, just as the distance between Neo and the mirror collapses.

My contention here is that these two movements are related, with the latter operation making possible the general shift of the former; in other words, with the ascendancy of the symbolic engendered by the mutation of the mirror and the concomitant collapse of distance between the *imago* and the subject, the real and the imaginary implode into each other. They can no longer be distinguished because they are no longer conceivable apart from the symbolic. The visual conceit of "bullet time" provides a case in point: only occurring within the Matrix, bullet time marks a moment of extreme slow motion and camera rotation that allows viewers to see the slow progression of bullets through the air. While the technological advances required for such a depiction are noteworthy, what is so remarkable about bullet time is that it converts the Lacanian real (which cannot be represented by the symbolic) into the imaginary; audiences *see* the concentric waves of force produced by the bullet's path through the air. The situation would be analogous to visually presenting the wavelengths that comprise the color red before they converge and produce an image of the color red.   Invisible lines of force have been converted

into visible images; the real becomes imaginary, and all thanks to the ascendancy of the symbolic code in/as the Matrix.

Concluding Reflections: Internalizing the Interface

Understanding the concepts of the mirror, the *imago*, and the mirror stage in the wake of *The Matrix* means understanding and revising their Lacanian instantiation, a task undertaken in large part by the two preceding sections. But what of the metaphysics of presence found within the mirror stage as posited by Lacan? Can these same metaphysical subtleties be found in a theoretical articulation of the mirror predicated not on presence and absence but rather on pattern and randomness? I believe so, albeit in a slightly different form. The mirror of *The Matrix* never relinquishes its hold on the concept of lack—it simply upgrades it. Now lack is a function of the symbolic code itself, of a desiring machine—humans forced to live their lives in bondage, unknowingly or otherwise—rather than a product of the imaginary *mediation* of the objects after the mirror stage. Further, that lack—the struggle against the machines—can be abated, in large part if not in whole, by the almost supernatural realization that the code is of malicious and arbitrary design—a remedy unavailable to the analysand of Lacan. Before one's initial release from bondage, one cannot leap tall buildings or be faster than a speeding bullet within the Matrix. By sublimating lack to the symbolic code and by contemplating its amelioration through some sort of cognitive awakening, *The Matrix* reformulates agency by borrowing from Lacan the same quirky essence that ultimately animates his *imago*. Only now that *imago* has been internalized, reflecting a shift in the attending media ecology. Rather than being the fixed marker that makes the symbolic subject possible, the hidden *imago* within the extant symbolic subject makes an extra-symbolic subject thinkable. This formulation is dramatically different than

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arguing that agency consists of the capacity to recognize and thus resist one's interpellation within the symbolic order. Rather than the prospect of mere resistance, Neo's awakening offers the possibility of transcendence. The reactions of Trinity and Morpheus reveal Neo's encounter with the mirror to be unique, reflecting the special gift—the internalization of the *imago*—that makes Neo capable of overcoming his symbolic insufficiency (rather than Lacan's organic insufficiency). He is, as we are told repeatedly, the one.

I would like to suggest that the subtle metaphysics of presence operating within Lacan's mirror stage are displaced by a new *metaphysics of pattern* within *The Matrix*. What makes this displacement possible, and what makes the messianic rise of Neo thinkable, is that presence and absence no longer matter. Indeed, *matter* no longer matters, or more precisely, matter is no longer substantial in a Burkean sense. Neo is always doubled: corporate programmer/hacker, Thomas Anderson/Neo, human battery/resistance fighter, not the one/the one, dead/alive—the list could go on. He and his double are neither fully present nor fully absent, never entirely here *or* there. And while a certain Cartesian discourse splits the mind and body within the logic of the film, that split cannot be understood as a question of presence or absence precisely because of the constant doubling of its components. The difference between the real and virtual worlds resides not in any dynamic of presence but in the importance of the symbolic codes that comprise the Matrix, those patterns that manufacture the consensual hallucination that is the world of 1999. This hallucination is made possible by the patterns of green glyphs that comprise the symbolic order of the Matrix, and the eventual reworking of that order produces unimaginable speed and strength and converts the invisible operations of *physus* into images for consumption. The film's dénouement, in which Neo sees the world of the Matrix as three-dimensional green code, provides the final testimony: recognize the symbolic by its pattern and you can control it.

The trick of *The Matrix* is that the material dynamic of presence/absence vanishes because the distance between the subject and its image has vanished. The mirror is no longer an interface—something between—but an intraface or innerface—an internal reflection of the same mysterious essence hidden within Lacan's *imago*. Neo no longer needs mouse, keyboards, or touch; he directly jacks into the Matrix and his digital essence can work its wonders. As a consequence he can see the Matrix for what it really is—the simulation of a complicated but now knowable and thus controllable code, and an allegory for the simulation of the present articulation of the social. Tap into the before of the imaginary—free your mind—and you can transcend and master the symbolic realm. Moreover, you can use the symbolic architecture against itself: sensing its patterns, responding accordingly, and rewriting the symbolic code at whim.

In this articulation of the subject, the abject plays a pivotal role in transferring the *imago* from the outside to the within of the subject it births. To be sure, the metaphysics of pattern freely acknowledges that the abject—represented as it is by a mercurial slime —can never be fully distinguished from the subject. In part, this is because the abject always already marks the border between presence and absence, between the principle of identity and its other. The metaphysics of presence has always had difficulty dealing with this in-between,[238] but when the primacy of presence over absence becomes secondary to the constitution of pattern, the abject can become transformed. No longer a problem to be expunged, the abject can instead be internalized as a source from which new articulations of subjectivity can emerge. To effect this transformation requires an explicit technological mutation: the abject must be refigured through a technological interface. The abject of slime, Neo's scream, and the metallic screech of a modem handshake: from this noise a newly patterned Neo is constituted. The mimetic fantasy undergoes

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a significant alteration here. Lacan's external duplication (the combination of repetition before the mirror and imitation by the mirror-image) produces a subject through lack, but Neo, who internalizes the death of mediation (seen in the collapse of the distance between self and mirror), is given the keys to deciphering the process of mimesis itself. All one needs is a bit of the supernatural, the thinking of the future as destiny, and the right technology. As Lacoue-Labarthe notes, this idea of a "first and constitutive mimesis" produces a subject awakened by "'Another stage' of which the stage itself, of the world or of the theater, would never... be anything other than an external lining and the effectively secondary repercussion, probably linked to the illusion... of a possible mastery of desire and of access to some originality or singularity."[239] The *telos* of this fantasy of control is thus not all that different from that pursued by Plato's *Phaedrus*, even if its mechanics are radically different: the myth of Neo reconfirms the desire to determine the extent and possibilities of mimesis, and with that, to control the meaning and possibilities of representation itself. This strategy of *sublimation* operates by burying the originary, spiritual essence of the human subject somewhere within the mimetic process itself, only to let that essence eventually overwhelm and master the process that founds it.

There are serious political dangers in this formulation and we should begin to consider them. Jean Baudrillard has noted that: "Our image in the mirror is not innocent… Behind every reflection, every resemblance, every representation, a defeated enemy lies concealed."[240] What is concealed by the celebration of the super-natural, super-symbolic powers awarded to Neo? What are the implications if we take seriously the possible emergence of a metaphysics of pattern? The subjects produced by the mirrors in this essay hint at some possible answers. Both formulate a lack that demands redress, a formulation wedded to the premise of an essence that somehow precedes the subject that bears it. For Lacan, the distant *imago* emerges from and determines the

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subject and the whole of the psychic existence that follows; the imaginary becomes tied to an ill-defined and unacknowledged originary essence, even if that essence cannot be accessed. This formulation changes with *The Matrix*. Now the *imago* is no longer seen as distant and distinct, no longer present or absent, but as submerged within the symbolic constitution of the subject. With the right technology and the proper know-how, the dream of *The Matrix* is that we could plug in and use this hidden essence in order to master and transcend the symbolic. This remains a facile and dangerous depiction of subjectivity, even if it reflects in a spectacular way the shifts in thinking the subject's relation to technology. The release from the bondage of the Matrix—a virtual reality that substitutes metonymically for social norms, technological determinism, material constraints, etc.—is the same dream at work in many of those who seek immortality through uploading their minds to computers or by adding cybernetic enhancements to their fragile, "all too human" frames, and even those who believe themselves freed of all restraints by the anonymity offered by the Internet. What remains concealed behind the mirror, enemy or not, is an escapist and utopian technophilia, a vision of the subject that taps an unlikely, mysterious human essence through technology. Such transcendence may be possible for Neo, wrapped in leather cape and launched in flight at the film's close, but its prospects are decidedly less likely for the rest of us.

Chapter 7

An Afterword:

The Political in the Time of Technics

There are two ways to interpret the title of this final section. The two interpretations are not in competition – if anything they compliment each other – but they do require different emphases. **First**, one can see in the title a discussion of the concept, meaning, and horizon of "the political" here and now, when it seems that the question of technics has finally come to the fore. The time of technics is the present time, right now, when the thinking of originary technics is starting to open up space for thinking about mediation, subjectivity, and the constitution of the world.

None of the discourses discussed in this dissertation have the "right" conception of technics. Plato's purging of technics from knowledge, Heidegger's search for the essence of technology, Lacan's discovery of human essence in the technics of the mirror, even Derrida and Stiegler's originary technicity—none of these are correct or true. Neither are any of them are "false" or "wrong," since these negative descriptions would imply that a different conception, as yet unexplored, offers the true, correct, and final solution to the question concerning technics and the death of mediation. The issue here is not, ultimately, the question of true or false, real or artificial, or correct or incorrect. The issue is instead one of the *political*, that is, of costs and benefits: what does each way of responding to technics get us? What do we lose and what do we gain? What gets opened up for thinking and what gets closed off from thought? In each of the preceding chapters, I have attempted to sketch answers to these questions. I have attempted to

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outline the political stakes in each negotiation of technics, but I have left a basic parameter of those stakes unpacked. Here, in the brief space of this afterword, I want to give the *political* a fighting chance.

What does the "political" signify here, or anywhere for that matter? This is a tough question, since the battle over the process and possibility of signification may itself be part of the political. It may be easier to answer the question by circling around it and differentiating the political from the much more common and more familiar concept of "politics." *First*, I am not trying to read the question of technics into the conventional politics of representative democracy, the form of political governance so common to the West. This formation signifies one potential example of politics, if by "politics" we understand one actualization of how one thinks the political. This actualization involves a selection of particular values, a deflection of alternate representational practices, and the inheritance of any number of discrete and interanimating ideological narratives. The political cannot be reduced to politics, a fact taught by a number of rhetorical gambits, not the least of which is feminism's affirmation of the personal as political. More pessimistically, we might say that politics is the hasty generalization of what is to be done, while the political asks the more originary question what is to be thought.

Second, the political is a rhetorical and/or philosophical concept in that it provides the inventional resources for the process of value and policy selection that produces particular politics. As an example: while I have not written anything that specifically addresses the question of electronic voting in the forthcoming Presidential election, I am have tried to open up the thinking of technics in a manner that might be productive. Any marginally aware liberal can question the relationship between the companies that make e-ballot machines and the Republic party. Any humanist can shudder at the thought of black boxes without a paper trail, and the

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uncertainty that will accompany election results as a consequence. These are valuable and important objections to electronic ballots, to be sure. But taking technicity seriously, especially originary technicity and especially within the context of the political, would require careful attention to the structure of voting in general, the technics of counting (whether analog or digital), the structure of political representation that ties the vote to individual agents rather than policies, etc. Paying careful attention to these things does not revolutionize the election process, nor does it help to necessarily resolve the dangers of electronic balloting this November, but it does force us to reexamine the question of the political in a time determined by the new rhythms of technics.

On the *one hand*, this means that one must begin to think about the ebb and flow of media time, and that critics and theorists that want to intervene in the current political climate need to learn to negotiate these different rhythms, rhythms markedly different from the rhythm of learning and academic thought, which is still today governed by the time of the printed word, or even more specifically the printed book. Media are everywhere, and, if we approach that the technics of these media as originary (rather than ancillary, as in Plato; debased as in Heidegger; or a mystical, foundational essence as in Lacan and *The Matrix*), the task is not to reject or sublimate these media, but to negotiate them. Sylviane Agacinski agrees: "We cannot abstractly define the information techniques or public space naturally appropriate to democracy; we can only define the ways of making democracy vital using those means proper to each epoch."[241]

On the *other hand*, which rather than being opposition, goes hand-in-hand with learning to negotiate with media, critics and thinkers must begin to assess the limitations and consequences of different ways of attempting to negotiate—an assessment that I have tied consistently to the delimitation of the spectral. How one theorizes the spectrality mediation

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carries with it profound political and ideological implications. At an obvious level, these theories, if actualized, tell us how to respond to these media, how to behave and navigate the terrain they have cleared for us. These behaviors have political consequences, to be sure. Should Neil Postman or Jerry Mander succeed in persuading readers or audience members to avoid the evil auguries of television, to expel or exorcise it, that success will (presumptively) lessen the force of the news cycle, the pervasiveness of sitcom culture, the diminution of brain wave activity produced by the cathode ray tube, and so on. This success will be hard pressed to be repeated with everyone – there will always be the specter of media to deal with – but even if limited to a few solitary individuals, it nevertheless carries with it effects both personal and political. The problem is that these effects may not always be beneficial. For on a less obvious level, these successes reinforce notions of human essence, an essence that continues to divide, despite technological advances and philosophical research that call such divisions into question, human from animal, cultured from uncultured, and knowledge from information. If Postman offers a means of negotiating technics, a means I found to be analogous to Heidegger, his particular negotiations may nevertheless cost us more in the long run then we are willing to bear.

Responding to these costs may not be a matter of choice or of permission. Like it or not, engage them or not, we nevertheless inherit them as our history. Like the norms of writing or the norms of the preface, these negotiations structure the thinking of technics that follows thereafter. What is needed is a critical approach to inheritance, one that no longer presumes that the historical and philosophical thinking of technics can be approached passively, but that instead recognizes that all inheritance, chosen or not, "is an active affirmation, it answers an injunction, but it also presupposes initiative, it presupposes the signature or countersignature of a critical selection. When one inherits, one sorts, one sifts, one reclaims, one reactivates."[242] Submitting

these past postures to rhetorical critique, a critique that thinks both conditions of emergence and possibility as I have endeavored to do here, offers a different response, or at least, outlines the beginnings of such a response.

New media are here to stay, and more technologies, more mediation, and newer media are just around the corner. The philosophical legacies that run from Plato through Heidegger, or that get gleefully reversed in those like Lacan, are not going anywhere. Such is the nature of our inheritance. As always, it is a question of costs, and here the stakes are enormous. Maintaining a thinking of technicity as non-originary may cost us the political itself. The "issue is not one today of deploring the perverse effects of the media, but of rethinking and especially of revitalizing democracy in the era of its mediatization. An external struggle 'against' the media is not possible because there is no longer any exterior..."[243] If subjectivity is intimately connected to and fashioned by our interaction with media technologies, then the thinking of technics demands a different set of political practices, and more importantly, a different thinking of what constitutes the political. The implications are far ranging, touching on issues as diverse as the war on drugs, the right to privacy, the promulgation of terrorism, the contours of citizenship, the right to choose, and the social standing of the disabled. The increasingly obvious integration with technology matters. Why should one respond to those with disability when the disability can be addressed with the latest surgeries or cybernetic enhancements? What happens to feminism when advances in prenatal surgery and genetics extend the viability of a fetus far beyond what was natural at the time of Roe v. Wade? How do politicians alter their talking points to account for the range of online news sources available to would-be voters? The failure to take technics seriously cedes the political arena; in effect, it makes technological determinism

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more likely. To think about the political in the time of technics would mean, consequently, thinking about the consequences of originary technicity for political thought.

The second interpretation of this afterword's title alters the emphasis. Instead of emphasizing the political possibilities of the present moment, the second interpretation emphasizes the thinking of time, both the time of politics and the time of technics. In this reading, "the political in the time of technics" means thinking the impact that the differential rhythms of mediation, which is to say the technics of time, have upon the possibilities of political praxis. In this interpretation the question is not what to do now; nor is it what to think now. Rather, the questions reverse the formulation, asking: how is something like a 'now' even thinkable, what are the politics of that now, what is our orientation to its thinking, and, how have technics contributed to a syntax and a grammar and a practice of thinking that can claim to think its own timing? This is where the rhetorical criticisms that comprise the bulk of this dissertation come most openly into play. And so, by way of a conclusion – not that there is really anything to conclude – I wish to review and tweak the politics noted in each case study, since the studies presented in chapters two, three, and four illustrate how we can begin to think about the political in its relationship to the rhythms, times, and timings of technics, and each does so by highlighting a *concern* that haunts the current political scene. I call them *concerns* rather than questions or problems because the issues raised therein both raise concerns and require concern, which is to say, following its etymology, that they require sifting (the Latin *cernere*) and the possibility of a decision (the Indo-European *krei-*).

First, with Plato and souljacking: the uber-humanist privilege of this strategy of *appropriation* is not that technologies are dangerous and should be rejected, but rather that these technologies will never be threatening to our sense of who we are, where we belong, or what we

should do, just so long as we understand the technics of these technologies in the manner pre-scribed, which is to say, or as Plato might parse it, treat technics non-seriously. This structure grounds the authoritarian impulse, since it rests upon and requires a figure capable of discerning what counts as serious and non-serious, technical and non-technical, permanent and ephemeral, and then imposing those separations upon a presumably less enlightened public. In addition, as Plato's own recourse to writing makes clear, it does so without fundamentally challenging the dominance of those media it purports to disdain.

The corresponding concern is that of the *figure*. Who is it that controls the process of representation and how is the "who" or the "what" of mimesis given form? As my reading of Plato demonstrates, mediation is inextricably bound to the figure (this should come as no surprise: mimesis operates by means of all sorts of rhetorical figures, and the specter, with its phantasmatic logic, represents the figure *par excellence*). For Plato, the act of writing entails the invention and representation (the two may be indistinguishable) of a veritable army of figures: Lysias, Phaedrus, and of course, the venerable Socrates himself. The writing of the political today, which takes place on the space of the screen, operates through a similar effect. Derrida explains: "The same media power accuses, produces, and amplifies *at the same time* this incompetence of traditional politicians: on the one hand, it takes aways from them the legitimate power they held in their former political space (party, parliament, and so forth), but, on the other hand, it obliges them to become mere silhouettes, if not marionettes, on the stage of televisual rhetoric."[244] But with Plato's strategy of appropriation, where the excess of the spectral is controlled in order to elevate one figure over the other, and done so through a logic infused with spectrality – the grotesque – the figure becomes a means of control, diversion, and manipulation. In Plato's case, the figure has been so effective in its strategies that rhetoric suffers from the

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words of Plato's Socratic figurine over two millennia later. In the most extreme case, that of the figure of the Aryan, the figure of the Nazi, the effectiveness of the figure in authorizing representation has revealed its most horrific excess: "The fascist haunting is, *de facto*, the haunting of figuration, of *Gestaltung*. It is a matter of simultaneously erecting a figure and of producing, on the basis of this model, not a type of man, but the type of humanity – or an absolutely typical humanity."[245]

What *figures* mark the space and potential of the political today? Think of all those mobilized at the start of the second Iraq war: the citizen-soldier, the heroic protester, the conscientious seeker of just war, etc. Global protests against the war were underway before the war even began, and global coalitions were built, and shocks and awes were planned before any embed lent their voice to the carefully staged event. Should we be surprised that the protests failed, and that they did so despite every historical indication that the protesters were right and the advocates of the war wrong? Should we be surprised at the openness with which George Jr. is packaged as a leader, even in the admitted absence of "real" leadership? Should we be surprised at the potency of politicians like Le Pen in France or Berlusconi in Italy, both of who m exhibit a particular televisual savvy?[246] Of course not. What we should instead find surprising is how often the critiques of the war, or the critiques of these politicians depend on the outmoded "reality" of policies and leadership. In the media rhythm of real time, political critique cannot remain limited to the terrain of the real.

Second, with Heidegger and nostalgia: the strategy of *expropriation* corresponds to a much more dangerous totalization of technics, since even a proper (i. e. appropriative) framing of *tekhnē* fails to save us from its dangerous effects. The reason for this failure should be relatively obvious at this point – the danger of modern technology is the twin specters of the technological

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and the new, and neither specter will ever be banished by the call for a reflection that gives the past its due, especially since any past – any inheritance – is a selection of a particular past and a particular legacy.

Martin provides the case-in-point. Heidegger believed that the danger posed by modernity was not that human beings would lose their home, but rather they would lose their sense of not being at home. Home, for Heidegger, could be found in the spiritual *poēisis* of language—the house of Being. The same could not be said of more recent media like the radio. And so we can reread Heidegger's concerns with modernity: the sense of not being at home is equally a nostalgia for an originary language free of the pollution of modern technics. If modern humanity risks losing that nostalgia, Heidegger nevertheless sheltered it, in the spiritual guise of the German *Volk* and later, after the horrific outcome of the Nazi experiment, in the spiritual guises of the German tongue and German poetry (the very technics that produced the *Volk* in the first place). The irony is that the danger Heidegger identified never really manifest. The longing for home remains today, even with (and perhaps because of) all the talk of a global village. But the irony ends there, and a different danger – a political danger – emerges: this longing for home can be shaped, its nostalgia can easily return to solidify the specters of identity politics, ethnic conflict, and compulsive patriotism. We have to ask: What were the costs of Heidegger's particular response to the "dangers" of technics? Does this response continue today? And if so, what costs will we continue to incur?

The obvious corresponding concern is the specter of *community*, perhaps even the figuration of that specter. If communication as classically conceived is linked, at least etymologically, to the production of community, the new telecommunication technologies that define the borders of the contemporary media ecology certainly package themselves as fitting that

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bill. From McLuhan's early pronouncements regarding the global village to the uniting power of

the global Internet and satellite radio, the dream of community (which is also, as Peters notes, the

dream of interpersonal communion) seems alive and well in the discourses of media today. It

seems that way, and surely Heidegger would argue that the difference between the seeming of

these technics and the essence of these technics makes all the difference in the world. But if, as

Peters informs us, the dream of communion can and will never be fulfilled, there is a radical

political difference between the joyous affirmation of that failure and the condemnation of that

failure as it relates to the dangers of modern media, especially when those danger are tied

explicitly to media's power to dissolve space and time. Where media offer up globalization, the

strategy of expropriation necessarily diminishes the prospects of hospitality, of encountering the

other as an *arrivant* rather than an irritant, a guest rather than a danger. Derrida sees this

particular inheritance at work with a frequency all too *common*:

> [T]he global and dominant effect of television, the telephone, the fax machine, satellites,
>
> the accelerated circulation of images, discourse, etc., is that the *here-and-now* becomes
>
> uncertain, without guarantee: anchoredness, rootedness, the *at-home* are radically
>
> contested. Dislodged. This is nothing new. It has always been this way. The *at-home*
>
> has always been tormented by the other, by the guest, by the threat of expropriation. It is
>
> constituted only in this threat. But today, we are witnessing such a radical expropriation,
>
> deterritorialization, delocalization, dissociation of the political and the local, of the
>
> national, of the nation-state and the local, that the response, or rather the reaction,
>
> becomes 'I want to be *at home*, I want finally to be at home, with my own, close to my
>
> friends and family.'[247]

Expropriation recreates the global village in the image of *Survivor*. Heidegger allied himself with the German Geist, today we see other alliances played out against the backdrop of media, intense affirmations of ethnicity and nationalisms under the guise of responding to the dangers of globalization. The task of the political today is to discern means of responding to globalization that do not require voting people off the island.

Third, with Lacan, *The Matrix*, and transcendence: the strategy of *sublimation* reverses the privilege of appropriation, arguing instead that human beings, or at least human subjectivity, comes into being through a technological process. In this way, sublimation begins in a manner similar to originary technicity. But the trick, and the spectral privilege that it affords, emerges in the particular details of this technical interaction. If the subject comes into being through its interaction with technology, the kernel of the subject, its hidden, predestined, and mystic essence, is what makes subjectivity possible from the beginning, even if technology is necessary to actualize it. In Lacan, wedded as he is to a more static conception of the ecology of the mirror, this mystic essence produces a subject mired in lack. In *The Matrix*, which supercharges this mystic essence by associating it with the fluid, hyperactive ecology of cyberspace, feeds the myth of technological mastery and transcendence. This is the difference between what the deconstructive opening of the messianic and the religious eschatology of the Messianic. In the cinematic trilogy, all is well that ends well, assuming you don't object to killing any of the "duped" humans who get in your way. In the so-called real world, as I intimated in chapter one when alluding to the Extropian movement, the fantasy of sublimation pursues a similarly dangerous path.

The concern here is the *future*. Sublimation works by assigning a destiny to the subject, either as forever searching and yearning for the obviation of lack, or the literal and all too

personal actualization of Messianism. By contrast, the messianic, the absolute waiting for a future to-come, would take as its task the opening up of thought to this messianic possibility. The "shall we say, categorical imperative, the unconditional duty of all negotiation, would be to let the future have a future, to let or make it come, or, in any case, to leave the possibility of the future open. And to this end, to negotiate the rhythms so that, at least, this opening will not be saturated."[248]

Derrida believes that any future worthy of the name demands to be able to-come. This is a radical and difficult request. If the future is really to come as a future to-come, if in other words, the future is not to be anticipated as a particular future, since doing so will reduce and overdetermine the future, then the future must be a surprise. It must arrive unexpectedly, without warning, and without a series of established procedures by which to respond to its coming. This is why Derrida stresses that the messianic future cannot be messianic unless it always remains to-come; if it ever arrives its form and the response that articulates that form will reduce it to something irremediably common. So what is one to do in order to prepare for this future? This is where following Derrida becomes even more difficult. What if, in the zeal for a future to-come, we ignore those technics and those forces that are already at work determining the shape of that future? What if we fail to anticipate these twin pressures shaping the future to-come precisely because we refuse to overdetermine the future by anticipating it?

These questions require an attempt to calculate the incalculable. One must negotiate... constantly. There is no easy prescription, no set of solutions that would help us, *en masse*, to respond to the demands of mediation and the thinking of technics. As Derrida notes, "perhaps it is necessary to fight today, *not against* teletechnologies, television, radio, e-mail, or the Internet

but, on the contrary, so that the development of these media will make more room for the norms that a number of citizens would be well within their rights to propose..."[249]

Endnotes

1 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972/1981), 7.

2 John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into the Air* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

3 Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples, "From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the 'Violence' of Seattle," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19, no. 2 (2002): 125-151.

4 Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography: The Image of 'Accidental Napalm,'" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20, no 1 (2003): 35-66; "Performing Civic Identity: The Iconic Photograph of the Flag-Raising on Iwo Jima," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 263-292; and "Dissent and Emotional Management in a Liberal-Democratic Society: The Kent State Iconic Photograph," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31 (2001): 5-31.

5 Sarah Stein, "Legitimating TV Journalism in *60 Minutes:* The Ramifications of Subordinating the Visual to the Primacy of the Word," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 3 (2001): 249-269.

6 Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, "Hiding Homoeroticism in Plain View: The *Fight Club* DVD as Digital Closet," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19, no. 1 (2002): 21-43.

7 Christine Harold, "Pranking Rhetoric: 'Culture Jamming' as Media Activism," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, forthcoming.

8 Thomas S. Frentz and Janice Hocker Rushing, "'Mother Isn't Quite Herself Today:' Myth and Spectacle in *The Matrix*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19, no.1 (2002): 64-86.

9 Of the list, Christine Harold and Thomas Frentz and Janice Hocker Rushing provide the two exceptions to classical conceptions of representation, albeit for radically different reasons.

10 See specifically Maurice Blanchot, *The Sirens' Song: Selected Essays of Maurice Blanchot* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982) and Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1977/1987).

11 See also Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1978/2001),36-76.

12 The shift in Donna Haraway's discourse, where cyborg metaphors have given away to animal and biological tropes is telling in this regard. One could no doubt author an entire dissertation that traced the transformation in Haraway in order to show, rather than abandoning her cyborg metaphors in order to speak a more animal tongue, that her animalist discourses are in actuality indebted to her antecedent, technological tropes.

13 This quote is attributed to *Wired* editor Kevin Kelley in the "Preface" of Vernor Vinge, '*True Names' and the Opening of the Cyberspace Frontier* (New York: Tor Books, 2001).

14 What we now call the Internet began, like so many things, as a military experiment. Concerned that nuclear attack would cripple the communication networks upon which a counter-strike (and hence the credibility of the Mutually Assured Destruction posture) would rely, U.S. military planners sought a form of information transfer that could deal with the disruption of specific, linear communication pathways. When the 1957 launch of *Sputnik* stoked the fears of a technological gap between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., the Department of Defense established the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) in an effort to maintain

technological mastery. Almost immediately, ARPA was assigned the task of solving the

communication vulnerability, and spent the early 60s developing a system of "packet

switching" that would serve as the antecedent for today's network infrastructure. Files would

be broken up into manageable groupings of data and compressed into transmittable packets,

with each packet containing information about its placement in the original file as well as

information as to its point of origin and its point of destination. The packets could then be

sent by modem to another computer, which would serve as a switch, forwarding the packet

onto another computer, and then another, and then another, until all the information had

arrived at its destination and the file could be rebuilt by reassembling the data packets in the

correct and pre-assigned order. The genius of the system emerges from the organic design of

the switches; rather than have a predetermined route between machines, each switching

machine could determine which path would best be suited to continuing the transfer of

information. Should one pathway be disrupted, a sufficiently connected network would

"automagically" reroute the packets and still have them arrive at their destination.

Expanded significantly during the 1970s to serve academic interests unassociated with the

military and even to supplement recreational activities like casual communication (via

functions like email, usenet, ntalk, and eventually IRC) and gaming, the ARPANET network

became seen as a prospective communication medium like radio or television, rather than

simply a redundant military communications system. Since ARPANET could use existing

phone lines and data cables already connected to computers, simply providing the computer

with the proper protocols for transmitting data made expansion and technological progression

of the network relatively easy to accomplish. On January 1, 1983, ARPANET formally
switched from the NCP protocol to the now well-known TCP/IP protocol, effectively giving
birth to the modern Internet (for details, see RFC 801, 842-876).

15 David B. Whittle, *Cyberspace: the Human Dimension* (New York: W. H. Freeman &
Company, 1996), 5.

16 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (London: Grafton Books, 1984), 67.

17 Interestingly, and in an ironic twist, Gibson's epiphany as to the contours of cyberspace came
about not because of his own experience with computers (in fact he wrote *Neuromancer* on a
word processor/typewriter, not a computer) but with watching children play video games in a
video arcade. The children responded physically to events on the screen, leaning to the left
while dodging to the left, and so on. The idea that the interaction with the screen would
produce real physiological and mental effects led Gibson to believe that the children believed,
at least unconsciously, that the game consisted of more than pixel patterns; instead they
believed that there was some there there with which they were interacting.

18 Bruce Sterling, *The Hacker Crackdown: Law and Disorder on the Electronic Frontier*
(London: Viking, 1992), xi-xii.

19 J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

20 Miller, 2.

21 Miller, 6.

22 Miller, 13.

23 Miller, 15.

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24 Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994), 228.

25 Birkerts, 6.

26 Miller, 14.

27 Miller, 21.

28 Miller, 22.

29 Incidentally, literature is not the only thing Miller dreses in the tropes of modern technology. On page 25, Miller writes that excerpts from his favorite literature are "stored, so to speak, in separate partitions within that strange organic hard-drive, my memory." (25)

30 Miller, 81.

31 Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 70.

32 Miller makes this appreciation explicit first on page 36, and then subsequently in his reading of various strategies of writing on pages 46-80.

33 See Michael Hyde, *The Call of Concience: Heidegger and Levinas, Rhetoric and the Euthanasia Debate* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001) and Philip Wander, "The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory, " *Communication Studies* 33 (1984): 197-216.

34 Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Form Technics Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 56.

35 Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Standford University Press, 1999), 15.

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36 Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of Disaster* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 145.

37 See "Style Guide," http://www.gradsch.uga.edu/Forms/theses_and_dissertations.pdf, 10-12.

38 Example by excerpt: "Perhaps you started leafing through the book already in the shop. Or were you unable to, because it was wrapped in its cocoon of cellophane? Now you are on the bus, standing in the crowd, hanging from a strap by your arm, and you begin undoing the package with your free hand, making movements something like a monkey, a monkey who wants to peel a banana and at the same time cling to the bough. Watch out, you're elbowing your neighbors; apologize, at least." From Italo Calvino, *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1981), 7.

39 I should be clear about my choice of the authorial possessive in describing these two works. One can try to be particularly sensitive to one's use of language. One cannot pretend as if one owns that use of language. Many of the choices in these essays imposed themselves upon me in the act of writing, and if I approved them in the wake of their appearance, their manifestation was never a question of choice, any more than it was a question of origin.

40 Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

41 D. Diane Davis, *Breaking Up [at] Totality: A Rhetoric of Laughter* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

42 Both Ronell and Davis are responding, at least in part, to the work of Martin Heidegger, the man Samuel Weber credits with problematizing representational thought. This shared

encounter and inheritance should not be surprising, since Ronell and Davis's attempt to play

with the presentation of the text are also necessarily attempts to play with the re-presentation

of language.

43 You will be able to compare, I suspect, differences in citational formats. I will leave the

details of that comparison to you.

44 Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999),

xl.

45 Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (*Oxford*: Oxford University Press, 1991),

37.

46 Aristotle, 254.

47 See also Aristotle, 36-7, fn 34.

48 Herbert A. Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," in A. M. Drummon, ed., *Studies in*

Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winans (New York: The Century Co.,

1925).

49 Ernest J. Wrage, "Public Address: A Study in Social and Intellectual History," *Quarterly*

Journal of Speech, 33 (1947): 451-457.

50 Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (Madison: University of Wisconsin

Press, 1978).

51 See Kenneth Rufo and Kevin Michael Deluca, "The Mechanical Handmaiden: Rhetoric After

Marshall McLuhan," *Explorations in Media Ecology*, forthcoming.

52 Kennedy opens the door to this return in the notes attending his translation in Aristotle, 37.

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53 Simon Critchley, *Ethics Politics Subjectivity* (New York: Verso, 1999), 174.

54 For a hyperbolic but obvious example, one need only look at Christian Science.

55 Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991).

56 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

57 Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994/1998), 1-14.

58 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967/1974), 6-26.

59 That originary technicity would see the separation between technics and its others as a ruse to be deconstructed is not so much a claim to the transhistorical Truth of technicity, but rather a way of understanding technics made possible by the particular contingencies of the current media ecology. Plato's failures regarding technics stem not from some universal truth of originary technicity but rather those failures become apparent in light of the recent turn in thinking technicity as original.

60 Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 68.

61 Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954).

62 D. Diane Davis, *Breaking Up [at] Totality: A Rhetoric of Laughter* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 14.

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63 Stiegler, 13.

64 See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (Viking Press, 1986) for an example of these arguments.

65 Walter Benjamin keyed on this extremely early on, noting how slow motion film effects transformed the footage into a supernatural experience.

66 A sustained treatment of each of these "haunted media" can be found in Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

67 N. Katherine Hayles, "The Condition of Virtuality," in Peter Lunenfield's *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 73.

68 Hayles, 75.

69 Marvin Minsky, *The Society of Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

70 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (London: Grafton Books, 1984).

71 John Perry Barlow,"The Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" at the *Barlow Home (stead)* (http://www.eff.org/~barlow).

72 Michael Heim, "The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace," in Michael Benedikt's *Cyberspace: First Steps* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 61

73 Nicole Stenger, "Mind is a Leaking Rainbow," in Michael Benedikt's *Cyberspace: First Steps* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 57.

74 Margaret Wertheim, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet* (New York: Norton and Company), 265.

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75 Joshua Hammerman, *thelordismyshepard.com* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Simcha Press, 2000), 9.

76 David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 4.

77 Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 5.

78 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 12.

79 See Kevin Michael DeLuca, *Image Politics* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999); Barbera Biesecker, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of Différance," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 22 (1989): 110-130; and John Durham Peters, "The Gaps of Which Communication Is Made," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 11 (1994): 117-140.

80 Kehre is the term used to mark the so-called "turn" in Heidegger's work, away from the call of conscience and the historiality of Dasein towards the more primordial call and historiality of Being.

81 Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001).

82 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

83 Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2002), 117.

84 Derrida and Stiegler, 54.

85 John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington:

Indiana University Press, 1997), 125.

86 John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into the Air* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

87 Derrida and Stiegler, 56.

88 Derrida and Stiegler, 38.

89 Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980/1987).

90 All etymologies were researched using Ernest Klein, *Klein's Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1971).

91 Derrida and Stiegler, 7.

92 Michael J. Hyde, 2001, *The Call of Conscience: Heidegger and Levinas, Rhetoric and the Euthanasia Debate*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press), 42-45.

93 Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 80.

94 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1964), 145.

95 For more on this subject, see Sanford Kwinter, *Architectures of Time* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001); and Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969/1972).

96 See Charles E. Scott, *The Time of Memory* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).

97 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and the Avant-Garde* (New York: Verso, 1995), 200.

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98 Fred I. Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1999).

99 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xx.

100 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 176.

101 See also Derrida, *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Caputo, *Prayers and Tears;*
and Derrida and Vattimo*, Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

102 Derrida and Stiegler, 26.

103 The tendency to pronounce the difficulty of definitions is not something to be avoided. We
are talking about very nuanced uses of language here, not in the sense that nuance locks down
particular details, but rather that nuance implies an attentiveness to the wide variety and play
of those details in constituting the objects and instruments of this project.

104 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society* (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1992), 1.

105 Gebauer and Wulf, 3.

106 Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 117.

107 Susan C. Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale:
Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

108 Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* (New York: Cornell University Press,
1982).

109 William Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 177.

110 Georgia A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1994), 26-7 and 41-42

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111Thomas Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 1.

112John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 13.

113For an example, see Victor J. Vitanza, "'Some More' Notes, Towards a 'Third' Sophistic," *Argumentation* 5 (1991): 117-139.

114Calvin O. Schrag, "Rhetoric Resituated at the End of Philosophy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (1985): 169.

115See Brian Vickers, "Territorial Disputes: Philosophy *versus* Rhetoric," in *Rhetoric Revalued* (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1982).

116Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1963).

117Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 80.

118Havelock, 200. This seems like a somewhat provocative paradox: Plato will reject the written fairly explicitly in a number of different places, and for a number of different reasons, yet Havelock finds the the thought-processes engendered by literacy/writing to be the only explanation for the details of Platonic thought. Of course, the paradox remains such only if we presuppose that the subject "Plato" has mastry over his thought processes, and that his own thinking is transparent regarding its own development. Jacques Derrida provides the most famous critique of Plato from this perspective with his "Plato's Pharmacy." It seems unlikely that Plato would be sufficiently reflective to determine the role of mediation in his own

cognitive pathways, especially when we didn't really become interested in media ecology *per se* until the advent of teletechnologies in the 19th century.

119Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth* (New York: Continuum Books, 1988/2002).

120Arguably, Heidegger never escapes the very trap he will identify in the Platonic reworking of truth. Later in his career, from *Beitrage* onward, Heidegger will identify the problem of philosophy and the task of thinking as being inextricably bound to his question concerning technology. In other words, for him the possibility of thinking is bound up with a critical interrogation of technics from a position in which thought is somehow distinct from the technology it questions. In other words, with this reading, Heidegger fails because of he maintains a distinction between technics and epistēme, a classification that never really falls before his "destruction" (*Abbau*) of metaphysics. I will have more to say on this in the next chapter. But for now, it is worth noting Bernard Stiegler's insightful and nuanced remark, in *Technics and Time, 1* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994/1998), 4: "The theme of forgetting dominates Heidegger's thinking of being. Being is historial, and the history of being is nothing but its inscription in technicity. If truth is itself thought in terms of this originary forgetting, it is insofar as the determination of the meaning of aletheia still echoes the Platonic structure of reminiscience such as it is determined in opposition to hypomnesic memory, while this memory constitutes the destiny of being as the forgetting of being."

121Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972/1981), 67.

122All Phaedrus citations come from Plato, *The Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1914/2001).

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123John Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues* (Bloomington: Indiana University Pres, 1975), 104-110.

124Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 200.

125G.W.F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's* Phaedrus, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3. [Ferrari here helps emphasize the singularity of the Phaedrus's concern with emplacement; my argument is not that place is unimportant or ignored in other dialogues, but rather that the extent and duration of the attention awarded to place here in the Phaedrus is unique, as is the manner (direct, spoken exchange) in which that attention manifests.]

126Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1959), 59-60.

127Ted Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 22

128Charles L. Griswold, Jr., *Self-Knowledge in Plato's* Phaedrus, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 108.

129Note the *I* in "I am a poor seer..."

130Ferrari, 116.

131Griswold, 71.

132See Derrida, 97. Plato elsewhere seems to loathe the mantic (i.e. Prophecy), even if he identifies himself as a seer in this passage. This makes it odd that Derrida would miss the chance to parse the nuances at work here, but his minor omission will have to be my moderate

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gain.

133 Josef Pieper, *Enthusiasm & Divine Madness: On the Platonic Dialogue* Phaedrus, (South

    Bend: St. Augustine Press), 77.

134 For more on this, see the first chapter of Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities* (Stanford: Stanford

    University Press, 1999).

135 Derrida, 123.

136 Griswold, 70-71.

137 Ferrari, 173.

138 Of the different spins and reactions that one might have to this lapse in memory, Ferrari takes

    the cake. Ferrari is so immensely beholden to towing the line that separates *tekhnē* from

    epistēme that he asserts that Socrates' "misrememberings" are not in fact limitations, but are

    instead strategic demonstration of how his "spirit" has changed through the preceding

    philosophical journey. In a gesture so extreme that it sounds like parody, See Ferrari, 61.

139 Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from*

    Antiquity to the Present (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

140 This is essentially Derrida's argument in "Plato's Pharmacy."

141 An alternative epitomized by his belief that poets should be exiled from the ideal city-state.

142 Previously cited.

143 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (Free Press, 1979), 63.

144 Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

145 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford: Standford University Press, 1990),

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265.

146 By way of example, one might wonder at the conservative axiology behind the bulk of those

considered to comprise the basic readings for the nascent field of media ecology. The Media

Ecology Association's list of "fundamental reading" seems to offer at least two different

conservative paths: first with thinkers like Neil Postman and Jacques Ellul, both of whom are

relentless in their negative assessment of technology, and second with thinkers like Eric

Havelock, Camille Paglia, Harold Innis and Daniel Boorstin who remain theoretically

embedded within Platonic, Cartesian, or Hegelian philosophy. McLuhan's amoral stance

toward media, which resulted in a political optimism for which he was consistently chastised,

seems one of the most theoretically and politically progressive options on a thirty-three item

list. Thinkers like Michael Heim, Nicholas Negroponte, Katherine Hayles, or Janet Murray—

all of whom offer radical revisions of at least one of these conservative paths—are not given a

place within the list of fundamental reading. For the full list, see http://www.media-

ecology.org/.

147 This does not mean that the simultaneous, multiple meanings of a medium negate these

negative critiques, only that these critiques fall short methodologically.

148 Discussing or translating aletheia as truth is a shorthand, and it is one laden with a number of

problems. For Heidegger, truth is already inflected with the question of representation and

one cannot simply displace that inflection even if one pursues a more "original" or "essential"

notion of truth understood in the "opening of self-concealing" at work in Heidegger's aletheia.

I will attempt to negotiate this difficulty first by acknowledging it here and second by keeping

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aletheia doggedly in parenthetical pursuit of every instance of truth to which I would like to attach its meaning. See also Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 68-72.

149 Rudyard Kipling, "Wireless," *Traffics and Discoveries* (Garden City: Doubleday Press). Subsequent citations from this story will be made within the text.

150 I am not alone in mentioning the importance of this story for understanding contemporary media. John Peters gives the story short but important mention in his *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and Jeffrey Sconce also gives the story some consideration, albeit far too briefly, in his *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Duke University Press, 2000).

151 Keats writes the Eve of St. Agnes in 1819, 84 years before publication of "Wireless."

152 P. T. McGrath, "A Very Loud Electromagnetic Voice," in Richard Rhodes, *Visions of Technology: From Marconi, Wright and Ford to the Thinkers and Creators of Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 32.

153 McGrath, "A Very Loud Electromagnetic Voice," 33.

154 See Peters, *Speaking Into the Air*.

155 John Keats, "To George and Tom Keats," in H. E. Rollins (ed.), *The Letters of John Keats* (1958).

156 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 12.

157 For good investigations of this history, see Peters, 1999 and Sconce, 2000.

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158 Note that Kipling's narrator refers explicitly to the "subconscious common to all mankind" when theorizing Shaynor's induction of Keats, a belief that served as a fundamental precondition to Chardin's work.

159 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Morning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), xx.

160 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 10.

161 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 169.

162 John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 125.

163 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xviii.

164 Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987/1989).

165 Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1971), 63.

166 Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 134.

167 Heidegger, *On the Way to* Language,66.

168 Heidegger, *On the Way to* Language, 112.

169 Heidegger, *On the Way to* Language, 71.

170 Heidegger, *On the Way to* Language, 75.

171 Heidegger, 91.

172 See Heidegger, *Parmenides* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1942-43/1992).

173 See Michael Heim, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

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1993).

174 Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 311.

175 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 312.

176 Heidegger, *Basic Writings,* 311.

177 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 319.

178 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 322.

179 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 337.

180 Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc.), 133-4.

181 For the connection between the Heideggerian "Showing" and the "showing forth" inherent in the epideictic function of language (*epideixis*), see Michael J. Hyde, *The Call of Conscience: Heidegger and Levinas, Rhetoric and the Euthanasia Debate* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).

182 Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 58.

183 Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 132.

184 Heidegger, "Hebel – Friend of the House," in *Contemporary German Philosophy* 3 (1957/1983): 100.

185 See Allen S. Weiss, *Phantasmatic Radio* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 78-82.

186 Weiss, 32.

187 Heidegger, "Hebel – Friend of the House," 90.

188 Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)* (Bloomington: Indiana University

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Press, 1989/1999), 289.

189 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 71.

190 Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 32.

191 Heidegger, "Hebel – Friend of the House, " 100.

192 Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other* Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1938/1977), 135.

193 Heidegger, *Holderlin's Hymn 'The Ister'* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 44.

194 Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 163.

195 Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Faults of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994/1998), 14.

196 Peters, 139.

197 Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us," in T. Sheehan, *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker* (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, Inc., 1966/1981), 57.

198 I want to be clear that I am not reducing Heidegger's thinking of technics to nostalgia. Rather I am arguing that it remains, despite whatever protestations, animated by a technological nostalgia, a comfort and longing for previous instantiations of tekhnē. The longing I am identifying here operates consistently, even when Heidegger cautions against more reactionary forms of nostalgia. Take for example, this passage from the concluding page of "The Age of the World Picture," 136: "The flight into tradition, out of a combination of

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humility and presumption, can bring about nothing in itself other than self-deception and blindness in relation to the historical moment." Heidegger apparently does not recognize his own technological traditionalism, since this flight is, of course, exactly what Heidegger proceeds to do, ending his essay with a poem from Hölderlin that supports the uncanniness of reflective thought by speaking of a "soul" that "throbs in longing/Over its own time..."

199 Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 16-18.

200 Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, 107-111.

201 Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 156.

202 Douglas Rushkoff, media activist and Postman friend, took this argument further in a post-panel discussion at NCA a few years ago. For him, the *technostalgia* I am describing – in which the spiritual is banished from the "new" medium only to be grafted back onto the old – goes a long way to explaining why Postman insisted not just on using a typewriter in lieu of a word processor, but insisted on using one specific make and model of typewriter. Apparently, Postman had such an affinity for a particular model and make of typewriter that he insisted on replacing or repairing it exactly as it was if and when his machine broke down. The strength of the strange and singular "spiritual" bond with this particular machine made it possible, or at least easier, for him to dismiss the possibility of any such bonding with other, newer media technologies.

203 This link is also highlighted in Thomas Frentz and Janice Hocker Rushing, "'Mother Isn't

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Quite Herself Today:' Myth and Spectacle in *The Matrix*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (2002): 64-86.

204 Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 150.

205 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 124.

206 McLuhan, *Gutenberg*, 112.

207 Lacan all but abandons the mirror stage by the time he develops the topography of the Borromean knot in the early and mid seventies. One might wonder what benefit exists in examining the foundational address of a concept that no longer exists? First, Lacan's abandonment of the mirror stage did not mean that those who were and are influenced by him followed. Tamise Van Pelt, *The Other Side of Desire: Lacan's Theory of the Registers* (New York: SUNY Press, 2000), 33, makes clear that "No single Lacanian essay…is cited in the secondary literature as frequently." Second, part of my contention is that the mirror stage provided the rhetorical conceit that made the differentiation of the registers possible. Abandoning the mirror stage while maintaining to use terms made possible by its original use does not mean that the mirror stage has been vanquished but rather that it has vanished, and simply operates unseen. Further, while Lacan may have felt comfortable employing the registers at a later date, he announced their importance way back in 1954, when the mirror's importance was alive and kicking: "those three grand terms…the imaginary, the symbolic and the real…without these three systems to guide ourselves by, it would be impossible to

understand anything of the Freudian technique and experience." *The Seminar of Jacques*

Lacan, book I: Freud's Papers on Technique (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975/1988), p. 73.

208See Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, book III: The Psychoses* (New York: W.W. Norton,

1981/1997).

209Lacan, *Seminar I,* 80.

210See Roustang, *The Lacanian Delusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Weber,

Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1991); Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge:

The MIT Press, 1994); Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); and Stockholder, "Lacan versus Freud:

Subverting the Enlightenment." *American Imago*, 55 (1998): 361-422.

211Lacan, *Ecrits: A selection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 1. All "Mirror Stage" cites

come from this source. As per the gendered language, it is intentional. Lacan never

abandoned his emphasis on the sex determination of the subject: only men could be subjects,

since only men were fully introduced into the symbolic. Throughout the chapter, I will

employ conventionally female gender pronouns when referring to the subject within my own

thoughts and conventionally male gender pronouns when referring to the subject as

understood or articulated by Lacan.

212 Here this essay is both hampered and buttressed by translation. On the one hand, the

translation provided by Alan Sheridan will be the one with which most readers of this essay

will be familiar, and it is certainly the version most likely to have been encountered by the

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film's predominantly American audience. To that extent, and to the extent that no one, including Lacan, necessarily spoke the same *lingua Franca*, it makes a good deal of sense to focus upon this translation's rhetorical force. On the other hand, it is important to consider whatever translation effect might be at work and to consider what the act of translation reveals. The original French expression is "*arrêté notre méditation*," or "fixed our thinking." *Méditation* can be translated as reflection, and the more active reduction of the expression to "reflect" flows a bit more easily in English. Nevertheless, two implications can be drawn. The first concerns a translation, purposeful or not, that seeks to see in the context of the address a sense of thinking as reflection. This slippage within the symbolic register that marks translation does little to detract from the reading of the mirror stage at hand, but rather supports a way of seeing that links thought and reflection. The second conclusion, with less hermeneutic charity and centered upon Lacan himself, would note Lacan's avoidance of this slippage at the very moment that I highlight an anxiety about it. While this may seem problematic for the analysis in question, it actually encourages my sense of anxiety, as Lacan has no problems using the term "*réflexions*" in paragraph 13. Given my claim that the potential for slippage between reflection (*imago*) and reflection (thought) is staved off by the rhetorical fixing and holding of the mirror image in the intervening paragraphs, the later use of reflection indicates that, at least after the initial depiction of the mirror, Lacan feels little difficulty in using a term with such an easy symbolic overlap. Beyond this initial address, Lacan is comfortable enough with the word choice to pun: "As a witty poet remarks so rightly, the mirror would do well to reflect a little more before returning our image to us."

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213Lacan, *Ecrits, 2.*

214Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 94.

215Lacan, *Ecrits, 3.*

216Lacan, *Ecrits, 4.*

217 There is some discussion of the *imago* in Lacan's "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis" (in *Ecrits*, 1977), though the theoretical development of the term remains limited. The term is used in that address to demarcate those images that determine aggressive behaviors, and centers upon standard anxieties like castration, devouring, evisceration, etc. Interestingly (given the arguments below), the two addresses both share the phrase "the ancient term of *imago*."

218Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 209.

219Lacan, *5.*

220Lacan, *6.*

221Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1964).

222See Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

223Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1963).

224McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 41.

225McLuhan, 42.

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226One need only examine Lacan's work from the early to late fifties to see that he

conceptualizes the mirror stage in terms of technology, without ever explicitly conceptualizing

the mirror as a technology itself.   Seminar I is dominated by explanations predicated on the

science of optics, while Seminar II displays a shift towards cybernetic illustrations.

227Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 92.

228Lacan, *Seminar I*, 141.

229Those who are familiar with Lacan's corpus will note my lack of attention paid to the

subsequent development of the mirror stage after the initial 1936/1949 presentations. Tracing

the development of the mirror stage seemed beyond the scope of the present project, but a

focus on a few brief moments in its development does seem warranted, since I believe that

focus strengthens, rather than detracts, from the argument in this paper. On February 24th,

1954, Lacan declares in *Seminar I*, 74: "the mirror stage is not simply a moment of

development. It also has an exemplary function, because it reveals some of the subject's

relations to his image." Here, nearly two decades after the initial formulation, the mirror has

taken on a secondary, heuristic role, one that explains the *general* relation between a subject

and his image, even if, as in the initially proposed developmental stage, it is the image that

makes possible the symbolic's entry and subsequent production of the subject. On December

8 of that year, Lacan's formulation changes again slightly, this in *Seminar II*, 50: "The entire

dialectic which I have given you as an example under the name of the *mirror stage* is based on

the relation between, on the one hand, a level of tendencies which are experienced – let us say,

for the moment, at a certain point in life – as disconnected, discordant, in pieces – and there's

always something of that that remains – and on the other hand, a unity with which it is merged and paired. It is in this unity that the subject for the first time knows himself as a unity, but as an alienated, virtual unity." Whereas the previous shift introduced the heuristic component of the mirror stage, here the developmental notion loses some of the assurance (the stage occurs along a much vaguer timeline). Despite the ambiguity about the "certain point" in life, the mirror stage remains, as does its ongoing struggle to differentiate the fragmentary imaginary and the incompleteness of the symbolic. On Feb 2, 1955, Lacan notes on 102: "The mirror stage isn't a magic word. It's already a bit dated. Since I put it out in 1936, it's about twenty years old. It's beginning to be in need of a bit of renovation…" Unrelated to the lecture topic of the day, readers may find the comment almost out of place, especially given Lacan's lack of explicit recognition of the comment in subsequent discussions of the mirror stage. Instead, the next shift in the mirror stage is both more subtle and more pronounced, occurring just over a month later on March 16th on 166:

What did I try to get across with the mirror stage? That whatever in man is loosened up, fragmented, anarchic, establishes its relation to his perception on a plane with a completely original tension. The image of his body is the principle of every unity he perceives in objects. Now, he only perceives the unity of this specific image from the outside, and in an anticipated manner. Because of this double relation he has with himself, all the objects of his world have a fundamentally anthropomorphic character, even egomorphic we could say. Man's ideal unity, which is never attained as such and escapes him at every moment, is evoked at every moment in this perception. The object is never for him definitively the final object, except in

exceptional experiences. But it thus appears in the guise of an object from which man is irremediably separated, and which shows him the very figure of his dehiscence within the world – object which by essence destroys him, anxiety, which he cannot recapture, in which we will never truly be able to find reconciliation, his adhesion to the world, his perfect complementarity on the level of desire. It is in the nature of desire to be radically torn. The very image of man brings in here a mediation which is always imaginary, always problematic, and which is therefore never completely fulfilled. It is maintained by a succession of momentary experiences, and this experience either alienates man from himself, or else ends in a destruction, a negation of the object.

Here the developmental stage is omitted altogether, yet the mirror stage continues to function in its heuristic incarnation in a manner identical to its developmental antecedent, from the regulation of the symbolic-imaginary border to the production of alienation and lack. Desire forces either alienation or the object's destruction, except, of course, from the imaginary object (*imago*) of the mirror stage, who maintains its gatekeeping and regulating functions even after the advent of desire and the symbolic. This shift from developmental to heuristic dominates the theoretical promulgation of the mirror stage up until its abandonment in the early 1970s. But what is interesting for the purposes of this discussion is that changes in the mirror stage, even the increased and increasingly complicated role that language plays in the symbolic, do not change its strange exemption from the incompleteness of the symbolic order. Heuristic and metaphorical it is, but not in the sense of either the symbolic or the imaginary. The mirror thus retains its peculiar status as the in-between of these two realms, even as its

particular articulation changes. What remains fascinating about this strange continuation is the never altered fact of its inheritance; not only does Lacan not formally break ties with the developmental stage, but the heuristic benefit of the mirror stage only exists if one carries through in its formulation the originary split between the symbolic and the imaginary made possible by the mirror's operation at the developmental stage.

230Lacan, Seminar II, 49.

231Nobus, *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Other Press, 1990), 120.

232Ong, 123-132.

233N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 27.

234Even early on, Lacan emphasizes that the goal of analysis—the truth of the analysand—is defined as "full speech," which is to say a discourse qualified by a fullness of presence that reveals the true afflictions of the subject and makes them aware of the psychological devices that the subject is using to deal with them. This emphasis on presence recurs with greater force with Lacan's development of the floating signifier, which defines presence in language through its absence. Hence the return to the primordial mystery and power of the *imago*, which somehow remains free of the burdens of the symbolic.

235See Frentz and Rushing, 72.

236William Egginton, "Reality Is Bleeding: A Brief History of Film from the 16th Century," *Configurations*, 9 (2001): 207-230.

237Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington:

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Indiana University Press, 1982).

238See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

239Lacoue-Labarthe, 112-113.

240Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime* (London: Verso, 1996), 149.

241Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* (New York: Columbia

University Press, 2003), 168.

242Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television* (Oxford: Polity Press,

2002), 25.

243Agacinski, 142.

244Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New

International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 80.

245Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political* (New York:

Routledge, 1997), 151.

246Not surprisingly, Berlusconi, who started as a media tycoon, has been the more successful.

247Derrida and Stiegler, 79.

248Derrida and Stiegler, 85.

249Derrida and Stiegler, 33.