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Examining an Ontological Revolution: does Heidegger's Being and Derrida's *differance* really overcome the "metaphysics of presence"?

Both Heidegger and Derrida's projects are based on the destruction of the foundations of traditional ontology, otherwise known as metaphysics¹. However, Derrida claims that his philosophy has gone beyond Heidegger's lingering attachment to the 'metaphysics of presence', that is, to a way of referring to all human experience as a form of self-presence or as being in the proximity of presence. In the introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes his investigation into the meaning of Being as one that would show up the phenomena, that would "bring to the light of day...that which shows itself in itself"². Though the phenomenological approach brings to evidence a clear break with ontology in terms of conceiving it as the search for *noema* (according to Kant's distinction), it nevertheless seems that Heidegger thinks that the meaning of Being is something that can manifest itself to us in its ontological truth³. And if meaning can show itself in its ontological truth, does that not mean that it necessarily presences? We will try to demonstrate how Heidegger's search for the meaning of Being detaches itself from an ontology of presence by comparing Heidegger's understanding of significance, as it relates

¹ By metaphysics, I mean the practice of grounding all the multifarious, shifting elements of the world we experience in a system that makes sense of them in accordance with a certain logic, or which refers them back to a primordial origin. The usual example of this is Plato's forms, though a modern form of metaphysics manifests itself in Descartes' reduction of the world to a transcendental human subject. In a way, it is difficult to think of philosophy outside of metaphysics, since philosophy has traditionally always been the practice of inquiring into the essential nature of things, of understanding them as what they really are. How Derrida and Heidegger attempt to move beyond metaphysics and yet still try to remain true to their philosophical mission of making sense of the world we live in will become clearer in the course of this essay.

² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 56

³ ontology is epistemologically understood as the study of the 'what' of things, of what things truly are 'in themselves'.

to Dasein's rapport with Being, with Derrida's, as it plays itself out in the 'concept' of *differance*. The latter is not actually a concept, as Derrida explains, but rather "the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general"⁴. It cannot be characterized in any way, not even as the source that structures Being, because it is not a 'thing', an ideality that can be represented. It is, in a sense, Derrida's anti-ontology, one that destroys Being's traditional understanding in terms of presence. In which way, however, has Heidegger already deconstructed this 'metaphysics of presence'?

Derrida himself recognizes that Heidegger has opened up philosophy for thinking about everyday existence otherwise than as a self-evident fact, (which seems to indicate as well: not necessarily as a *self-present* fact), but as a complicated question that has historically been veiled over. As Derrida's own project is based on exploring the process of existence—notably as it manifests itself all-pervasively and most evidently in our use of language—we can see that his thought has deep roots in Heidegger's. This is especially true of 'differance'. In order to understand 'differance' as the product of a Heideggerian tradition, we must turn to Heidegger's own understanding of difference as the primal ontic-ontological difference, that is, the difference between Being or beingness (existence) and beings (existing entities). The being-present of beings is what has traditionally been accepted as the only way of thinking about Being, and therefore what actually constitutes Being or presence, as the unfolding of our consciousness in its everydayness, has been ignored. Derrida's quoting of a passage from Heidegger's text, *Der Spruch des Anaximander*, in his essay *Differance* tries to capture the unseen movement that eclipses our understanding of Being, and which at the same time constitutes the core of the

⁴ Derrida, *Differance*, p. 140

difference between presence and being-present: “imperceptibly, presence becomes itself *a*⁵ present...the essence of presence, and thus the difference between presence and present is forgotten”⁶. For Derrida, this movement from the existentielle experience, Being, to the intentional ideality, the entity being-present, is precisely the movement that reveals how Being first came to be conceived by traditional ontology as present-to-hand entities⁷. Simultaneously, it reasserts the truth of Being as constituting a difference from the present-at-hand, a difference which, for Derrida, founds our commonsensical understanding of experience as the experience of something that is present. This difference is what is concealed by the phenomenon of *iterability*⁸: Being, as it is repeated over and over again in different contexts throughout time, becomes *a representation*, or an ideality as Derrida would put it, that is a ‘being-present’: “for the ideality of *the form*⁹ of presence itself implies that it be infinitely re-peatable, that its re-turn, as a return of the same, is necessary *ad infinitum* and is inscribed in presence itself.”¹⁰ From the seeming infinite repeatability of presence, metaphysics has concluded that presence “finds its provenance in a supreme (being)-present”¹¹, in a form or ideality.

An ideality or entity, therefore, is never something that is itself really *present* to our existentielle experience, though we routinely conceive of our existentielle experience in terms of the experience of entities. Every time I experience a tree, for example, I am experiencing something different from all the other times I have experienced trees, by

⁵ emphasis mine.

⁶ Heidegger, *Der Spruch des Anaximander*, quoted by Derrida in *Differance*, p.155

⁷ it may seem confusing that for Heidegger the ontic-ontological difference would correspond to the difference between the abstract entity, being-present, and the existentielle, Being. However, we must remember that for Heidegger the proper realm of ontology is existentiales.

⁸ term used by Charles Spinoza in *Iterability and Ereignis*, from Heidegger: a critical reader.

⁹ emphasis mine

¹⁰ Derrida, *Signs and the Blink of an Eye*, p. 67

¹¹ Heidegger, *Der Spruch des Anaximander*, quoted by Derrida in *Differance*, p.156

virtue of the unique context of each experience. And yet, across these different contexts, the trace of ‘a tree’ or ‘treeness’ somehow remains with me, so that, though I cannot fathom what it is that stays the same everytime I experience a new tree, I come up with the concept ‘tree’ when different trees are present in front of me. One cannot therefore say that is ‘a tree’, *my representation*, which is self-present to me. In fact, it becomes complicated or even impossible to say what it is that is self-present at all. The ‘trace’ of treeness itself cannot be qualified as ‘self-present’, since it is neither presence nor absence but a ‘middle voice’¹², a movement of *signification* that is completely elusive but that nevertheless has a reality to it. Derrida calls this interval between each different recurrence of a self-same experience ‘differance’, to mean the ‘sameness which is not identical’¹³ and, vice versa, the non-identity which infiltrates the core of our idealities. The latter means that insofar as when I experience a tree, I experience it ‘as a’ tree, in the sense that an ideality, ‘tree’, constitutes the content of my experience, my understanding of Being in terms of the *presence* of ‘a tree’ is also challenged by the interval of ‘differance’.

The fact that ‘differance’ structures our experience of the world in terms of a non-present ‘trace’ means that it also necessarily complicates our understanding of temporalization strictly in terms of the present ‘now’: “the possibility of a repetition in its most general form, that is, the constitution of a trace in the most universal sense—is a possibility which not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but must constitute it through the very movement of difference it introduces”¹⁴. The relation between signification and temporality that Derrida adopts seems very similar to Heidegger’s, though

¹² Derrida, *Differance*, p. 130

¹³ *ibid*, p. 129

¹⁴ Derrida, *Signs and the Blink of an Eye*, p.67

he approaches it in terms of the temporalization of speech, rather than in terms of Dasein's historicity. The sense of our words, according to Derrida, is not constituted in terms of an ideality or meaning that exists before it becomes embodied as a *phone* i.e. sound, rather: "even before being expressed, sense is through and through temporal."¹⁵ Derrida is not saying that the meaning of our words gets interpreted, and therefore modified through time, once we have performed an act of speech, but that we already *represent to ourselves* the significance of our words, before we can even represent it to others by means of the *phone*. Derrida refers to this phenomenon as 'auto-affection', or the movement by which the speaker is affected by his or her own speech, so that he or she only belatedly understands what he 'meant' after he has uttered words.¹⁶ In other words, the significance of our terms is not self-present to us, but is experienced only after a delay. This delay or 'differance' gives a duration or depth to the 'source-point'¹⁷ of the present in which we speak. The present is therefore revealed as 'a primordial and irreducibly non-simple, and therefore, non-primordial synthesis of traces, retentions and pro-tentions.'¹⁸ Being becomes divided with itself in the course of an inner 'dialogue'—I use this term in opposition to the inner 'monologue' that constitutes the classic image of solitary mental life—which produces signification as a process of self-interpretation. However, if meaning is not 'meant', but rises out of the non-present within consciousness, can we still speak of either the self or the present as a 'self-present'? Rather, for Derrida, the non-present, as a fundamental alterity

¹⁵ Derrida, *The Voice that Keeps Silence*, p.83

¹⁶ For Derrida, by virtue of 'differance,' it becomes actually questionable whether we can mean what we say. In *Meaning and Representation*, he criticizes Husserl for his 'voluntarist' metaphysics. The latter refers to Husserl's theory that what the subject *means* is what gets expressed in the outside world, and that therefore pure meaning is self-present to consciousness before speech is uttered. I have tried to be systematic in not using meaning, 'vouloir-dire', as a synonym of significance, whose etymological origin is more in keeping anyway with the spirit of Derrida.

¹⁷ Derrida refers in *Speech and Phenomena* to Husserl's concept of temporalization as emerging from the source-point of the present.

¹⁸ Derrida, *Differance*, p.143

within consciousness, is a condition for self-presence: “This movement of ‘differance’ is not something that happens to a transcendental subject; it produces a subject. Auto-affection is not a modality of experience that characterizes a being that would already be itself (autos). It produces sameness as self-relational within self-difference; it produces sameness as the non-identical.”¹⁹

For Heidegger, the temporalized self is similarly conceived in terms of an ambiguity between presence and non-presence. Dasein temporalizes as a future, or potentiality-for-Being, which, coming out of its historical past, or having-been, releases the present. In effect, Dasein is always the outstanding potentiality of itself—it is always existing in terms of its own possibilities: “...in Dasein there is always something *still outstanding*, which as a potentiality-for-Being for Dasein itself, has not yet become ‘actual’. It is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein that *there is constantly something still to be settled*.”²⁰ Dasein is never simply or fully ‘there’, in the sense of a present-at-hand being: it has facticity rather than factuality, which means that its presence is never a given: “Facticity is not the factuality of the *factum brutum* of something present-at-hand, but a characteristic of Dasein’s Being.”²¹ As such, Dasein is never ‘in’ the present—Dasein exists as *the trace*, to use the Derridean term, of both its having-been and its future Being. In the context of auto-affection, Derrida actually defines the self of the present as a trace²².

Dasein is never ‘self-present’ in the sense that its self is precisely what is ceaselessly eluding it—the self is never ‘finished’ or whole, because non-presence fundamentally structures it. As Being-toward-death, Dasein is either fleeing death by

¹⁹ Derrida, *The Voice that Keeps Silence*, p.82

²⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Division II, p.279.

²¹ *ibid*, p.174

²² Derrida, *The Voice that Keeps Silence*, p. 85: “The living present springs forth out of its non-identity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace.”

adopting the impersonal significance circulated by the ‘they’, or it is anticipating it by attempting to appropriate its own significance from the totality of meaning that is being circulated. Dasein, in either case, is “the null basis of a nullity”²³, insofar as its basis is projection and it is itself being projected into the world: “in the structure of thrownness, as in that of projection, there lies essentially a nullity.”²⁴ Dasein, by virtue of its involvement in the world, is thrown into the significance which others (the ‘they’) have already assigned to things, and at the same is the Being-a-basis for its own significance as Being-in-the-world and Being as care. However, authentic Dasein is seized by the anxiety of its essential nullity, which means confronting the fact that Dasein has no enduring control over significance. In effect, significance is not ‘anchored’ in anything present-at-hand; it is, in a primordial sense, non-present. In a similar way, significance escapes the Derridean self, who finds him or herself ‘thrown’ into the meaning of his or her words through the process of auto-affectation. For both Heidegger and Derrida, significance is that which never completely presences, which at its basis is non-present and manifests itself as a trace.

Here, I believe, it is important to make a distinction between everyday experiencing of significance and experiencing significance as coming to know ‘what’ something is in the ontological sense. Both Heidegger’s and Derrida’s discourse stress this distinction. When we see a tree, we experience ‘a tree’, even though we certainly do not come to know in essence what a tree is. It is the fact that we can experience meaning without grasping it (that is, without it being really self-present) that constitutes the trace. Heidegger puts a certain emphasis on our ability to experience significance not as a subject/object relationship or in terms of the intentionality of a transcendental subject²⁵, but as insight into

²³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Division II p.329

²⁴ *ibid*, p.331

²⁵ I am referring to Derrida’s critique of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*.

Being, which means seeing with particular clarity the movements of significance that structure the flow of our existence. In *The Turning*, for example, when he mentions that by projecting ourselves into an ‘insight’, we are able to witness the ‘lightning-flash’ of Being, Heidegger is not speaking in terms of a subject grasping an external, universal truth. Rather, Dasein, in a moment of attentiveness to its own historicity, can, by anchoring itself in the dwelling-place of its particular, personal situation in time, feel a sense of belonging at those crossroads of significances that have been formed by other historical existences. However, in this moment of making sense of *its* world and of itself in connection with its world, Dasein is no more experiencing a purely ‘subjective’ meaning than it is discovering an objective truth about ‘the’ world:

“we ordinarily take that which is to be whatever is in being. For the ‘is’ is asserted to be whatever is in being. But now everything has turned about. Insight does not name any discerning examination into what is in being that we conduct for ourselves; in-sight as in-flashing is the disclosing coming-to-pass of the constellation of the turning within the coming to presence of Being itself.”²⁶

Here Heidegger is pointing out again that the presencing of Being is not equivalent to presence as it is understood in terms of permanence. Being is not a ‘thing’ whose attributes can be examined. To experience the presencing of Being is rather to *sense* (and this sensing goes hand in hand with making sense of Being) a movement from concealment to unconcealment, which has nothing to do with a movement from ignorance to knowledge—this would imply a subject/object relationship between Dasein and Being. It is also more complicated than a simple bringing of the non-present into presence: “In the flashing glance and as that glance, the essence, the coming to presence of Being enters into its own emitting light. And yet that glancing, in its giving of light, simultaneously keeps safe the

²⁶ Heidegger, *The Turning*, p.46

concealed darkness of its origin as the unlighted.”²⁷ Insight is both sight into the disclosing of what discloses itself or presences, and sight into the non-disclosing nature of what is non-present, and from which presence emerges.²⁸ Patterns of significance shift according to the pattern in which Being is successively revealed and re-veiled. The insight, the ‘lighting flash of Being’ is the trace, which comes and goes, of a ‘turning’ from one kind of signification to another kind of signification.

Heidegger considers this change in significance as a chance in destining, that is, in terms of an over-arching shift in the basic patterns of meaning that structure an era of human existence. Let us consider the movement of ‘the turning’ in the light of Derrida’s movement of ‘differance’²⁹. For this we need to turn to the ‘other’ meaning of ‘differance’, which comes from its root in the verb ‘to differ’. For Derrida, ‘differance’ not only refers to the temporal ‘space’ or interval that defers our experience of significance in the sense of auto-affection, or that defers significance as self-same from context to context. It also refers to the differentiation that happens in language, to language itself as the matrix of differences and oppositions according to which every word has a relationship to every other. According to Charles Spinoza’s reading of Derrida³⁰, the different values or ‘charges’ that our cultural practice assigns to our concepts give rise to our common manner of interpreting the meaning of all intelligible contexts: “Differance is the movement by which language, or any code, any system of reference, becomes historically constituted as a

²⁷ *ibid*, p.45

²⁸ this revelation of Being is discussed more specifically as the struggle between world and earth in *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

²⁹ Derrida tell us that ‘differance’, though neither strictly passive nor active, is formed out of the present participle ‘différant’ of the verb, ‘différer’ (to differ/defer): “The ‘a’ of *differance* brings us closer to the action of ‘differing’ that is in progress” (*Differance*, p. 137). I therefore refer to ‘differance’ in terms of movement or process.

³⁰ Charles Spinoza, *Derrida and Heidegger: Iterability and Ereignis* in [Heidegger: a critical reader](#)

fabric of differences.”³¹ One can draw a parallel between these stable patterns of significant differences that structure any cultural context and Heidegger’s notion of destining, which designates the sense in which a people’s historicity (in other words, culture) is fundamentally structured by a specific way of revealing Being. Both Heidegger and Derrida, of course, understand significance in terms of the web of meaningful activities, whether in reference to language or simply to the day-to-dayness of Being-in-the-world, that constitute culture in the broadest sense. However, it would be wrong to think that Heidegger considers culture to be merely an interpretation of Being, which would then refer to a sort of permanent human condition, just as it would be wrong to think that for Derrida the cultural system of differences gets arbitrarily defined, or that it is possible to re-define it according to our whim for the reason that it is not grounded in any metaphysical certainties.

Heidegger and Derrida also both stress, though very differently, the greater role of the sign in comparison with the signified ideality in the constituting of signification. The sign is, unlike the ideality, multivalent in terms of the different meanings that it can potentially give rise to from context to context. In the course of the sign’s use its potentialities get actualized in terms of which meanings become unconcealed and which ones are covered up. For Derrida, the multivalence, or lack of ‘positivity’ of the sign has its origin in the historical play of ‘difference’, as it is understood in reference to Saussure’s language theory:

“...in language there are only differences without positive terms. Language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. The idea or phonic substance that the sign

³¹ Derrida, *Differance*, p.141

contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it.”³²

Saussure’s theory contradicts the previous understanding of signs as being simply substitutes for the ‘real’ things that they are meant to correspond to. In the spirit of Saussure, Derrida’s critique of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena* is directed to Husserl’s assertion that signs are simply indicative of expression or meaning. Signs would then only be substitutes for the ‘real’ sense that is self-present in ‘solitary mental life’. Consequently, they themselves play no role in the subject’s inner consciousness since there is no need for the subject to indicate its own meaning to itself; in solitary mental life, words are only imagined, without having any sign-ifying capacity. However, Derrida, in raising the question of auto-affection, challenges our understanding that our representation of a sign and the sign itself are clearly separable, just as he follows Saussure in challenging the notion that the sign in general is a representation of something ‘real’: “there is every reason to believe that representation and reality are not added here and there in language, for the simple reason that it is impossible in principle to rigorously distinguish them... When in fact I effectively use words I must operate (within) a structure of repetition whose basic element can only be representative.”³³ This ‘structure of repetition’ is the same movement of ‘differance’ that, in reproducing a sameness that is non-identical, gives rise to ideality across the different contexts which constitute our experience. Meaning is in any case representation—there is no difference between the meaning that is completely present to oneself (in Husserlian terms, the imagination or ideality) and meaning that is ‘copied’ in a sign (the imagined word), because both are basically already sign-ified. The fact that our idealities are themselves signs which possess the multivalent and trace-like existence that

³² *ibid*, p.140. quoted from Saussure.

³³ Derrida, *Meaning and Representation*, p.49

belongs to a system of ‘differance’ constitutes a final deconstruction of the traditional understanding of meaning both as presence in the world and as self-present to the subject. Husserl’s transcendental subject disappears with the realization that there is essentially no clear barrier between an inner consciousness and an ‘outer’, objective world: signs everywhere weave an inter-subjective network of significance over which no one has control, because significance is properly neither a product of the subject nor a property of the world: “In the pure difference (of auto-affection) is rooted the possibility of everything we think we can exclude from auto-affection: space, the outside, the world, the body. As soon as it is admitted that auto-affection is the condition for self-presence, no pure transcendental reduction is possible.”³⁴

In the course of his phenomenological analysis of everydayness, Heidegger also uncovers a primordial merging of Dasein and world within Dasein’s consciousness that is anterior to the division between subject and object. Dasein “dwells in the world” and ‘has a world’, in the sense that its existence is embedded in a totality of shared significance. From the outset, Dasein ‘is’³⁵ circumspective involvement with the world: it is thrown into a world that already means something, not because it is meaningful as such, but because meaning has been as-signed—in the sense of ‘attaching signs to’—it in the course of simple coping with one’s environment. Far from going about its everyday existence conceiving the world in terms of idealities, Dasein manipulates its environment to suit its immediate purposes, and it is this basic activity of manipulation which assigns significance to what is manipulated, in the form of a ‘toward-which’:

“Being-in-the-world amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption in references

³⁴ Derrida, *The Voice that Keeps Silence*, p.82

³⁵ I use ‘is’ because “Dasein, when understood ontologically, is care”(i.e. circumspective involvement), from Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Division I, p.84

and assignments constitutive for the readiness to hand of a totality of equipment. Any concern is already as it is, because of some familiarity with the world.”³⁶

And further:

“The relational character which these relationships of assigning possess, we take as one of signifying. In its familiarity with these relationships, Dasein signifies to itself: in a primordial manner it gives itself both its potentiality for Being as something which it has to understand with regard to its Being-in-the-world.”³⁷

To give an example of what an assignment is—on the most basic level, Dasein does not experience a tree as ‘a tree’, but as ‘what I can get firewood from’, or ‘what provides shade when it is hot’. The ‘whatness’ or significance of the tree has an essentially practical character inextricable from the particular context in which it arises. Consequently, the different significances that can be attached to an entity are in principle as varied as the contexts in which that entity is an object of concern. In this sense the equipmental potential of the world bears a similarity to the signifying potential of the sign—they are both infinite, for the simple reason that neither equipment nor the sign are positively significant in themselves, but derive their meaning from a relational network, in which every element makes sense only in relation to another element. Heidegger’s metaphor for this interdependence of all significance is the concept of worldhood as a ‘workshop’: a hammer, for example, becomes its ‘toward-which’, ‘what-hammers’, only if we are used to already associating hammers with nails, and nails as ‘what-is-hammered’. Every element in a workshop bears multivalent connections to every other, just as signs do in a system of ‘differance’, of deferring differentiation. These connections are always temporary³⁸ as well as shifting—for Derrida, these characteristics constitute the trace-like Being of the sign.

However, it would not be correct, in parallel, to interpret equipment as trace-like: “This

³⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Division I, p. 107

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.120

³⁸ which does not mean that they do not endure in the sense of constituting a cultural context.

system of relations, as something constitutive for worldhood, is so far from volatilizing the Being of the ready-to-hand within-the world, that the worldhood of the world provides the basis on which such entities can for the first time be discovered as they substantially are ‘in themselves.’”³⁹ There is a sense in which the ‘toward-which’ of equipment reveals the *truth* of the Being of equipment. The toward-which ‘what-hammers’ constitutes in a concrete way the essence of the piece of equipment ‘the hammer’ in the sense that the object that we call hammer is itself non-significant outside of the context of hammering. For Heidegger, the act of as-signing or endowing with significance establishes or reveals the hitherto concealed ‘truth’ of Beings. For Derrida, no such truth is attached to the movement of signification produced by ‘differance.’

The ‘truth’ Heidegger hits upon is assuredly a different kind of truth than the agreement of a proposition with an object, which he dubs mere ‘correctness’. If any agreement between the ‘thought’ of Dasein and an external reality is possible it is because Being already discloses itself as pre-conceptual truth to Dasein: “But truth does not exist in itself beforehand, somewhere among the stars, only subsequently to descend elsewhere among beings. This is impossible for the reason alone that it is after all the openness of beings that first affords the possibility of a somewhere and of sites filled by present beings.”⁴⁰ For example, when I see a picture on a wall, I am experiencing the truth of there being a picture on the wall; I do not actually think “this is a picture”. For Heidegger, truth is *aletheia*, un-concealment, which refers to nothing less than that we experience Being primordially as significance—it is the movement that conceals the meaningfulness of certain references in favor of disclosing the meaningfulness of others. Like ‘differance’, it

³⁹ Ibid, p. 122

⁴⁰ Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, p.186

produces the difference or ‘rift’⁴¹ between significance and non-significance that constitutes the condition for all intelligibility. And like ‘differance’, *aletheia* reveals presence as the ‘effect’⁴² of a hidden non-presence, or rather shows non-presence not in terms of an absence, which is simply the negation of presence, but as the unconscious potential from which presence can arise. In *Differance*, Derrida uses Freud’s ‘metaphysical’ concept of the unconscious as an illustration of the “certain alterity”, which “exceeds the alternative of presence or absence”, and which constitutes the “non-full, non-simple origin” that is ‘differance’⁴³. Being, whose truth is *aletheia*,⁴⁴ is similarly in excess of a simple ontology of presence: “the goddess of truth who guides Parmenides, puts two pathways before him, one of uncovering, one of hiding: but this signifies nothing less than that Dasein is already *both* in the truth and in the untruth”.⁴⁵

But why characterize the experience of the meaning of Being as truth? Beyond a reference to our everyday experience of significance as the truth of phenomena (‘that which is’), Heidegger is putting forward an ontology that is no longer strictly that of presence, but that of *aletheia*, which, *as phenomenon*, manifests itself as a movement that exists between presence and non-presence. Derrida puts great efforts not to refer to ‘differance’ in terms of Heideggerian concepts in an attempt to evade all ontological language: “differance *is not*, does not exist, and is not any sort of being-present...it is neither existence nor essence. It belongs to no category of Being, present or absent.”⁴⁶ However, as he himself admits, the

⁴¹ Term used to characterize the struggle between the world, as the clearing of un-concealment, and the earth, as the mystery of that which refuses to disclose itself, in *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

⁴² Term used in *Differance*: “What we note as *differance* will thus be the movement of the play that produces these differences, these effects of difference.”, p.141

⁴³ Derrida, *Differance*, p.141

⁴⁴ I refer to Heidegger’s quote in Division I of *Being and Time*: “Being and truth are equiprimordially.”

⁴⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Division I, p.265

⁴⁶ Derrida, *Difference*, p. 134

language he uses is “sometimes practically indiscernible” from that of “a negative theology”. How can Derrida avoid the very metaphysical structure of language, which in naming things, already establishes ‘things’ within the realm of presence? It seems that in order to remain true to ‘differance’, Derrida is required to move beyond the realm of significance. Beyond this realm, is philosophy possible? It is however difficult to see how Derrida can escape from what underwrites philosophical investigation, and which cannot be termed otherwise than as the search for a form of truth, even if that truth ‘*is not*’. Perhaps Derrida is not thinking otherwise when writes: “...we must try to think this unheard thought, this silent tracing, namely, that the history of Being, as it is itself produced across the ontological difference, is only one epoch of the *diapherein*.⁴⁷”

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⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 153

