

# The Fourth International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities

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**OVERALL THEME Global and Local Dialogues in the Humanities**

**CONFERENCE PAPER PRESENTATION: (TRANSCRIPT)**

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## **DISTANCING ONESELF**

PAPER PRESENTATION – DR MARK JACKSON

### **Introduction**

In § 23 of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, "The Spatiality of Being-in-the-World," Heidegger asks a marginal question. These marginal notes first appeared in the 1953 publication of *Being and Time* and were occasioned by Heidegger's re-reading of his 1927 publication. In § 23 we find:

By de-distancing as a kind of being of *Da Sein* with regard to its being-in-the-world, we do not understand anything like remoteness (nearness) or even being at a distance. We use the expression de-distancing in an active and transitive sense. It means a constitution of being of *Da Sein* of which de-distancing something, putting it away, is only a definite, factual mode. De-distancing means making distance disappear, bringing it near. *Da Sein* is essentially de-distancing. (Heidegger, 1996: 97)

The marginal note appears after the words "De-distancing means making distance disappear," and it is a curious question: "Where does the distance come from that is de-distanced?" I do not think, for example, that this question is resolved in *Being and Time* and, in part, its difficulty is complicit in Heidegger finding it necessary in his late essay, *Time and Being*, to retract § 73 of *Being and Time* where he attempts to derive primordial spatiality from temporality. But, what does it mean to make distance disappear, to de-distance, or to near, to bring near? It seems as if distance is given, and it is given for its taking. The essence of *Da Sein*, its Being, is de-distancing: "As the being that it is, it lets beings be encountered in nearness." Nearing, de-distancing, is appropriating. But our question, along with Heidegger, is: what gives distance such that it is nothing, it is non-appearance, is in truth what cannot appear as such? In the encounter of the appearance of beings,

in their nearing, distance is the encounter of non-appearance as such. In giving, it gives for. It gives, and in giving dissimulates itself.

### **The New Humanities**

Is this an appropriate question, theme or enquiry for a humanities conference whose own theme is concerned with “new directions” along with a concern with “local and global dialogues in the Humanities”. That is to say, is this paper a somewhat esoteric excavation of a small philosophical matter concerning Heidegger studies, or might it locate itself in a more pressing way with the grounds of the question of the new, the local and the global in humanities? To what extent is there a fundamental address to distance and the distantiating of distance in any question of the “new” and in any encounter with a hermeneutics or understanding of the pairing of “global” and “local”? The Fourth International Conference on the Humanities poses its core theme or problematic precisely in terms of a concern with distance, with what it infers as disciplinary distances between techno-science and the humanities and between economy, commerce and the humanities, emphasizing somewhat genealogically, and via classical motifs a common ground or originary moment of the *techne* of making and of the *oikos* of economy embedded in an essential questioning of the human. The conference is orchestrated around dialogue that would address the “nature” of being human, the disciplines of the humanities, the imperatives of being humane, in relation to contemporary crises in the marginalization or distancing of the humanities from relations of power productive of our dominant forms of knowing and agency for action constitutive of techno-scientific and economic practices. Again, we may ask, is a Heideggerian approach to the being of human being precisely as an ontological engagement with distance something pertinent to or even fundamental to the most pressing contemporary concern for “new directions” in the humanities.

To continue with some orientating questions concerning the “directions” taken in this paper, it is not the first time we can encounter a conference on new directions in the humanities, or stage an event on how we might yet again ask what it is to be human, or probe how humanism might now be thought, or establish some analytics or bearings on the multiple confrontations to human rights as a daily local and global crisis. I want to briefly make reference to another conference on the humanities and on humanism, held in New York in 1968 and which occasioned the paper by the philosopher, Jacques Derrida, titled “The Ends of Man”, a paper that probed the reception of Heidegger in France, and the humanistic reading of Heidegger that held its ground, even in the face of objections by Heidegger himself (Derrida, 1982). Derrida engages with a double reading of “ends” as with whether it is possible or not to engage with a finality or telos for humanity, a finality inscribed in or founding enlightenment approaches to human rights, as well as the framing of a certainty that there is a proper to being human. That other reading would in some ways be more Heideggerian, in as much

as all of the naturalized precepts of humanism would be questioned, radically, such that we might here be witnessing the end of “man” as modernity might have thought it. This would coincide, for Heidegger, with an end to metaphysics, a closure to the securing ground subtended by Platonism in its many variations, that has defined western thinking to the present. And it would implicate the philosopher, Nietzsche, as that culmination of metaphysics in the overturning of Platonism.

### **Recovering Ground**

But are these concerns of Derrida’s for a conference on humanism held some thirty years ago relevant for us in the context of a conference on new directions in the humanities? I would suggest, firstly, that the “New Directions” conference does not make a break with metaphysics; moreover, it poses a range of concerns, political, pedagogical and hermeneutic that are crucial precisely to the degree that they are able to evade a question of metaphysics, or their relation to a radical engagement with the question of the proper to being human. In “The Ends of Man” Derrida poses what he terms as a series of “strategic bets” with respect to the very question of the “new” that Heideggerian ontology of *Da Sein* poses to humanism’s metaphysical legacy. In a sense he suggests there is something undecidable concerning these strategic orientations, that Heidegger at times followed one or another and that deconstruction is caught between them. One recourse is to recognise that metaphysics subtends the very ground or framework of the question, that its language and structure pose the limits to our questioning as such, that the metaphors of inside and outside themselves are foundational to metaphysics. Hence, one only has recourse to renovate metaphysics within its own housing, and there is no recourse to an outside. Opposed to this strategic bet, is an abandonment of humanism, a radical disjuncture or separation, an invocation to a wholly other understanding of the proper of being human. Derrida suggests that such a radical dislocation invariably necessitates a return to what it has left, if only to demarcate its distance, and thereby returns precisely to what it wanted to escape. Derrida locates Heidegger between these two bets, and a certain recourse that may engage deconstruction. He also invokes a third approach, that he names Nietzschean, and that he opposes to Heidegger, which concerns an active forgetting of Being, and an approach to the question of truth as a question of dissimulation and style, in short an engagement that will not differentiate between truth and appearance.

This paper is fundamentally concerned with the antagonism I have just alluded to between Heidegger and Nietzsche, that we may initially open with Heidegger’s understanding of the proper of being human, *Da Sein*, as essentially de-distancing. This question of “distance” becomes for Derrida the key theme in his small book on Nietzsche, which I am suggesting is equally a pivotal engagement with Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche on the question of truth and appearance.

Everything hinges on a forgetting, active or not, intentional or overlooked, concerning the question of “woman.”

### **Becoming Woman and the Distance of Truth**

Hence, these series of concerns over the question of distance were explored by Jacques Derrida in his short text, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, though he does not explicitly reference the marginal note in *Being and Time*. Rather, in a circumlocution he engages in an interlacing account of Nietzsche and Heidegger, commencing with an engagement with Nietzsche's references to truth, woman and distance. For example, he quotes Nietzsche:

But still! But still! My noble enthusiast, there is also in the most beautiful sailing ship so much noise and bustle and alas, so much petty, pitiable bustling! The enchantment and most powerful effect of woman is to use the language of philosophers, an effect at a distance, there belongs thereto, however, primarily and above all — distance! (Derrida, 1979: 47)

Derrida emphasizes a doubling of distance crucial to Nietzsche. While woman seduces from a distance, one must also keep one's distance. A distance *from* distance must be maintained. But this doubling is also a complex operation. It is not “woman” who is at a distance, but rather the “*action in distans*,” the effect at a distance, is “woman,” the “feminine operation.” She is not a determinable identity. One neither retreats from nor approaches “her.” Derrida suggests:

Perhaps woman is not some thing which announces itself from a distance, at a distance from some other thing. In that case it would not be a matter of retreat and approach. Perhaps woman — a non-identity, a non-figure, a simulacrum — is distance's very chasm, the out-distancing of distance, the interval's cadence, distance itself, if we could still say such a thing. (Derrida, 1979: 49)

As it never goes without saying, I am aware of the scandalous reception of Derrida's text by particular feminist critics and philosophers and the polemics and side-taking that ensued around the betrayal of feminism by Derrida and deconstruction, as well as arguments that finally feminism might approach an ontology of its engagement with respect to sexual difference. The misogyny of Nietzsche is well engrained in feminist critical writings, and perhaps Derrida does not so much set out to “rescue” the Nietzschean corpus, via the planting of an oppositional truth to philosophy. Rather, Derrida enables a Nietzschean style to dissimulate the truth to gender that would be the possibility itself for this or that position. And what is said here for “gender” would hold as well for humanism, and the “new” in directing the humanities.

At this point in his text, Derrida appeals to a certain Heideggerian language “Entfernung”: distance and the distantiation of distance, deferment of the distant, — Ent (annihilation) constituting the distance itself, “the veiled enigma of proximation.” (Derrida, 1979: 49-50)

### **Platonism, Truth and Appearance**

The spur of Derrida’s text arrives late, at the moment he approaches Heidegger’s Nietzsche, which is also Heidegger’s two volumes of lectures titled *Nietzsche* (Heidegger, 1991). Over a four year period in the late 1930s Heidegger presented lecture courses on Nietzsche, now published in English in four “volumes.” In *Spurs*, Derrida cites explicitly § 24 of volume one: “Nietzsche’s Overturning of Platonism” in *The Will to Power as Art* (Heidegger, 1991: 200-210). § 24 concerns Heidegger in a close reading of a short passage from Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols*: “How the ‘True World’ at Last Became a Fable” (Nietzsche, 1968: 40-41). I want to briefly give some account of the text and Heidegger’s orientation to it, before commencing on how Derrida mobilizes these texts in the context of truth, distance and woman.

Subtitled “History of an Error,” “How the ‘True World’ at Last Became a Fable” provides in six brief stages or episodes a history of metaphysics or western philosophy from Plato to Nietzsche, which is to say, from Plato to Platonism (which is not the same thing) to the overturning of Platonism in Nietzsche. It is also a history of distantiations, of distance’s structure and deconstruction.

(i) The true world attainable: “I, Plato, *am* the truth.” The true world is the world of Ideas; the sensuous world is repudiated by the virtuous: “Oldest form if the Idea: relatively sensible, simple, convincing.”

(ii) The true world is unattainable for the moment — promised to the wise, pious, virtuous: “Progress of the idea: it grows more refined, more enticing, more incomprehensible — *it becomes woman*, it becomes Christian .... Platonism. The supersensuous (Idea) breaks with the sensuous world of appearances. “Idea” is that which is beyond this world. Heidegger suggests here:

The supersensuous is no longer present within the scope of human existence, present for it and its sensuous nature. Rather, the whole of human existence becomes this-worldly to the extent that the supersensuous is interpreted as the “beyond”. In that way the true world now becomes even truer, by being displaced even farther beyond and away from this world; it grows even stronger in being, the more it becomes what is promised and the more zealously it is embraced, that is, believed in, as what is promised. (Heidegger, 1991: 205)

The “true world” at a distance and by that distance seduces us — we zealously embrace it for its promise, for what it says it gives and gives for. It is a phantom: the inauguration of Platonism in the becoming woman of the idea.

(iii) “The true world, unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromisable but even as thought, a consolation, an obligation, an imperative”, what Nietzsche, in short hand, named Kantianism.

(iv) “The true world — unattainable? In any case unattained, unknown: consequently not consolation, redemptive, obliging”: in short hand, positivism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

(v) “True World”: an idea which is of use for nothing, a refuted idea. Let’s abolish it! A short hand for nihilism, the “true world” is in quotation marks. Heidegger comments:

Platonism is overcome in as much as the supersensuous world, as the true world, is abolished; but by way of compensation the sensuous world remains, and positivism occupies it. ... In spite of the fact that the supersensuous world as the true world has been cast aside, the vacant niche of the higher world remains, and so does the blueprint of an “above and below” which is to say, so does Platonism. The inquiry must go one step further. (Heidegger, 1991: 207)

We can see with Heidegger’s comment a double problematic of distancing: the above and below, the niche of the idea and the niche of the world of appearances, truth and beauty, in the overturning of their distance, cannot simply be inverted; the very structuring hierarchy as such has to be affected. Distancing itself needs to disappear. But would this dis-appearance be in the name of truth, belonging, nearing of *Da Sein* to its proper being, the Being? Or would it be in the name of appearance, apparent truth, dissimulation of truth?

(vi) “The true world is abolished: which world is left? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *along with the true world we have also abolished the apparent one!*” Is this for Nietzsche nihilism in the grand style? Abolition of the true and apparent worlds — being collapsing into nothing? Heidegger emphasizes the obverse: Nietzsche’s affirmation of the sensuous and the supersensuous, of appearance and truth, a twisting free of the hierarchy implicit in Platonism: “A new hierarchy and a new valuation mean that the ordering structure must be changed.”

### **Giving and Giving For**

It is this section of Heidegger’s *Nietzsche* that Derrida engages with closely in *Spurs*. In particular, he emphasizes that Heidegger, in the thoroughness of his reading of Nietzsche’s “History of an Error,” fails to make the slightest reference

to Nietzsche's "it becomes woman" in discussing the second stage, the inauguration of Platonism, or metaphysics. How does this elision of sexual difference from a history of metaphysics itself open a possible engagement with or reading of Heidegger? And how does Nietzsche's allusion to "woman" open an engagement with thinking the question of "ordering structure" that would be other than metaphysics? To put this question more succinctly, how does Heidegger's distancing from "woman" precisely become Derrida's reading of de-distancing as Heideggerian annihilation, which, in turn, opens the possibility of thinking truth as appearance, truth as dissimulation, metaphor or style. It is perhaps significant that Heidegger is able to appeal directly to Nietzsche's style only when discussing the sixth of his steps essentially concerned with truth as appearance:

We sense directly from the animation of the style and manner of composition — how the clarity of this step conducts him for the first time into the brilliance of full daylight, where all shadows dwindle. (Heidegger, 1991: 208)

But then, what is the proper that Heidegger finds given in Nietzsche? The proper meaning of Being, the proper as such? What would be this other structure as Platonism's overturning in the suspension of a structure of inversion? And how would that guarantee the proper, how would it be differentiated from, distanced from, a hierarchy of the true and apparent, the proper and improper? Is *that* distance abolished, or is that *distance* as distance unveiled, revealed as appearance as such? Derrida suggests towards the end of *Spurs*, under the title "Le Coup de Dons", undecidedly the giving and taking, the gift and the poison of the gift, that "Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche has been idling offshore ever since it missed the woman in truth's fabulous plotting" (Derrida, 1979: 109). If Nietzsche's woman is dissimulating on the question of the gift, on "giving herself" and "giving herself for," the "for" offers into the bargain an undecidability as to whether it is deception of appearance or whether it actually introduces some destination, finality or return. The thinking of structure in the overturning of Platonism's hierarchy is precisely activated by the confounding here of the opposition of give and take, possess and possessed. Hence Derrida: "Should the opposition give and take, possess and possessed, be nothing more than a transcendental snare which is produced by the hymen's graphic, it would then escape not only dialectics, but also any ontological decidability" (Derrida, 1979: 111).

### **Priority of Sexual Difference**

But, we can precisely encounter this "contamination" by the hymen's graphic in the most difficult passages in Heidegger that emphasise a moment of ontological undecidability, for example, where Heidegger resorts to a shrill escalation of language defying translation, where property and propiation are that which is

proper to no-one and nothing, where the “it gives Being” and “it gives Time” is appropriation itself, neither within ontology or temporality. As Derrida says:

Truth, unveiling, illumination are no longer decided in the appropriating of the truth of being, but are cast into its bottomless abyss as non-truth, veiling and dissimulation. The history of Being becomes a history in which no being, nothing, happens except appropriation’s (Ereignis’) unfathomable process ... what Nietzsche is calling the style’s form and the no-where of woman. (Derrida, 1979: 119-121)

If Heidegger fails to mention Nietzsche’s woman, his own twisting out of Platonism will not escape the *actio in distans* that is Nietzsche’s “feminine operation.” If, for Nietzsche, woman’s gift is the undecidable play of give and give for, give and take, let take and appropriate, these will become for Heidegger the dissimulation of appropriation as the proper nearing of Being that is *Da Sein*.

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## *References*

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