Chapter Three

Timing the Proper: Materiality and ‘Trace’

Introduction: the Outside-Text

That something can “be”, takes for granted that something can “be proper to itself”. (Spivak 1984, 23)

In the initial two chapters a certain drift of a structure from itself is examined. It is noticed that the move away from the self is at the same time also a re-turn because the going-forth cannot escape the logic of the inside. As is discussed in the previous chapters, this move-away however goes through the step of re-presentation which further interrupts that very desire for full presence (through a return to self). Re-presentation therefore, cannot be mastered by the intention for full presence in this sense, and the excess can be figured as the work of a ‘cut’ which is both produced by the logic of inside and at the same time not fully intended by that logic. This ‘work’ of the ‘cut’ works away at the margin of the ‘structure’ incessantly cutting it both to the inside and to the outside, even if this ‘cut’ itself cannot be said to belong either to the inside or to the outside of the ‘structure’. I have tried to read and narrate this ‘cut’ in different texts, authorized by different signatures, chiefly those of Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida. If one keeps close to a post-structuralist parlance, the structure can be called ‘text’ as well. Let me attempt to put in brief, what I mean by a post-structuralist conception of the text and its distinction from what is called the ‘book’, a figure which might be identified with a structuralist notion. This, I hope gives our discussion further precision.
We have already mentioned in the previous chapter, how Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her acclaimed “Translator’s Preface” to Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, delineates the Derridian notion of the text as a weave of inscriptions, which both refers to a ‘primary cut’ and stages that origin as always already cut, divided. Elaborating on this specific notion of the text, Spivak draws on Derrida’s discussion of Hegel’s conception of the act of prefacing a ‘book’ and writes, “the preface is a necessary gesture of homage and parricide”\(^1\) for it is the book which should have come first with its claim of authority of being the original scene of inscription and therefore of intention. The body of intentionally arranged words which can have an origin and a meaning buried in it, is called the ‘book’. But appending itself surreptitiously before the book, the ‘preface’ as if stages a theatre of subversion where the son grounds the father (one is still inside a re-view of Hegelianism, and the daughter is not in view), declares his entrance, makes the clearing for his (late) coming. The book is the body which supposedly carries everything that is intended by the authorial signature, but the preface tries to unsettle that intended completeness or the structural closure. This disorder is however in order, at least in the context of Derridian deconstruction, for as Spivak reminds, “the book (the father) makes a claim of authority or origin which is both true and false” (Spivak in Derrida 1997, xi). The preface sets in motion something like a permanent revolution, the coming of the book is not only delayed but rendered impossible, for after the son decentres the father, answers the violence of the origin with another violence (‘no less necessary’ Derrida would quip), it becomes impossible for the book to appear again. The re-turn is always already becoming text. “There is in fact”, Spivak tells us, “no “book” other than this ever different repetitions: the book in other words, is always already a ‘text’, constituted by the play of identity and difference” (xii). And one must also not lose sight of the Spivakian disclaimer “as regards parricide, I speak theoretically. The preface need make no overt claim – [...] of destroying its pre-text. As a preface, it is already surrendered to that gesture” (xi). From here on there can be a series of texts only, but neither preface nor book. A post-structuralist view, specifically a deconstructive notion of the ‘text’ also expands the reach of the metaphor ‘text’ to include everything, in short even the phenomenal

---
\(^1\) Spivak, “Translator’s Preface”, in Derrida 1997, xii.
and conceptual world in a continuous weave of ‘textuality’. This weave is also a recognition of two closures, linguistic and anthropocentric, as long as textuality is a production of the basic epistemological work that a consciousness\(^2\) goes through, which cannot be thought outside the limit of being human\(^3\).

How is the text related to its outside? One can remember the much used and mostly misunderstood Derridian formulation, that there is ‘nothing outside of the text’, even if the alternative (translation), ‘there is no outside-text’ might have been less open to misreading. This formula comes up in *Of Grammatology*, where Derrida is explaining the limits of the act of ‘reading’ in exhausting and transcending the text:

> Yet if reading must not be content with doubling the text, it cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.) or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general. That is why the methodological considerations that we risk applying here to an example are closely dependent on general propositions that we have elaborated above; as regards the absence of the referent or the transcendental signified. *There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; it n'y a pas de hors-texte].* (Emphasis in original, Derrida 1997, 158)

This is a gloss on the very general post-structuralist view of a continuity between the text and the reality. Derrida does make the point that the text has no outside, but only as far as an act of reading (/conceiving/understanding) is concerned, which is as good as saying there can be no outside to the text that can be perceived to exist.

---

\(^2\)The textual can be thought in a continuity with the real through the category of the unconscious as well, see previous chapter for such a deconstructive reading the Freudian unconscious and its relation with the ‘cut’.

\(^3\)Or simply the limit of ‘man’. Derrida would show how even the Heideggerian *Dasein*, even if closest to a crossing out of the human, is still implicated within an anthropocentrism (See Derrida, “Ends of man” in Derrida 1982). Also see below.
However, this immediately raises the following question: then how does deconstruction try to read the call of the wholly or radically other in the text, or how is the trace of an outside inscribed in it? We work our way precisely to this question in the course of this chapter. Also at stake is what Derrida calls the ‘methodological considerations’: the status of theory in its distinction from the object on which theoretical reason speculates. We have already discussed this movement in relation to the Hegelian speculative reason in the previous chapter. The focus is more on the folding of the deconstructive discourse (onto itself) in this chapter. To come back to the problem of a text not having an outside, this has culminated in the commonsensical misreading that according to Derrida everything is a text and therefore there can be no reality out there or out-of-the-text experience. Derrida, in fact returns to these questions in *Dissemination* (in its opening piece “Outwork”, another name for a preface) and indicates that such a formulation is to be checked and understood against deconstruction’s proximity to and decisive critique of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*:

To allege that there is no absolute outside of the text is not to postulate some ideal immanence, the incessant reconstitution of writing’s relation to itself. What is in question is no longer an idealist or theological operation which, in a Hegelian manner, suspends and sublates what is outside discourse, logos, the concept, or the idea. The text *affirms* the outside, marks the limits of this speculative operation, deconstructs and reduces to the status of “effects” all the predicates through which speculation appropriates the outside. (Emphasis in original, Derrida 1981a, 35)

Therefore this intervention plays at the level of understanding the object ‘text’ as well as understanding the moves of reason which conceptualises the text. There is no outside to the text, therefore indicates “that the text is no longer the snug airtight inside of an inferiority or an identity-to-itself” and that this thing-in-itself also cannot preside over its outside, being “rather a different placement of the effects of opening and closing” (Derrida 1981a, 36). I propose that the key lies in the positioning and constitution of the work of ‘reading’ which both creates the text, and therefore perceives the ‘trace of the outside’, and at the same time closes any
possibility of an outside by covering over that trace in a desire to get a grip\(^4\) on some kind of a ‘meaning’. What part of ‘reading’ is already intended by the text and what part of it works in spite of that intentional inside? This double-bind, of opening and closing, of grasping and forgetting the trace constitutes the same kind of ‘work’ that we have till now recognised as the work of the ‘cut’\(^5\). In this chapter and the next, we follow this ‘work’ along with the question: who or what works, or can there be a subjectivity who can claim to ‘intend’ the work of the ‘cut’?

The other related theme that we have treated in some detail is the concept of a minimal ‘distance’ which the text needs to re-present itself as other, or as its own survival giving itself a continuity, a being in time. This distance is a key Heideggerian concept and a look at its treatment in the his scheme of things might be of importance. To illustrate this point, let me make a short digression into a relevant argument which occurs in the text most representative of the Heideggerian oeuvre, \textit{Being and Time} (\textit{Sein und Zeit}, 1926). In \textit{Being and Time}, talking about the spatiality of \textit{Dasein} as a necessary ‘existantiale’ (a characteristic which is exclusively \textit{Dasein}’s and not of any other entity either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand) of its being-in-the-world, Heidegger introduces the concept of ‘\textit{Entfernung}’ (translated as ‘de-severance’ by the translators)\(^6\). In its difference from other entities that just lie around in the world, \textit{Dasein} is ‘in’ the world and defines its place through its dealings “with entities encountered within-the-world, and does so concernfully and with familiarity” (Heidegger 1962, 138). Heidegger seems to suggest that to reach this ‘familiarity’ \textit{Dasein} must go through the performance of ‘de-severance’. In the rather complicated passage that follows he proposes that \textit{Dasein} realizes its spatiality by “putting things away” from itself and precisely through that act brings those very things closer (Heidegger, 139). De-severance thus

---

\(^4\) The chain of words I refer to is: Grip, \textit{Begreifen} (German, to grasp), \textit{Begriff} (German philosophical term for ‘concept’), see Derrida 2007, 348.

\(^5\) This is also the point where a work of deconstruction intervenes into the idea of a ‘reading’. Deconstruction tries to stay with the double-bind instead of resolving it. See Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion.

\(^6\) See Heidegger 1962, 138-139, especially the 138n2 (translators’ note) on the translation of \textit{Entfernung}. 
bundles two seemingly contradictory acts distancing and bringing-close (the translators mention ‘de-distancing’ can be used instead of ‘de-severance’). The original German term *Entfernung* has this dual connotation as well, although its common use is almost entirely to mean distance⁷, whereas the verb *entfernen* means the act of ‘distancing’. Even if normally the prefix ‘ent-’ does only intensify the sense of separation, in Heidegger’s “more private” use, the verb ‘*entfernen*’ enigmatically, at the same time, *also* means “abolishing a distance or farness” (Heidegger, 138n2). Reducing this argument drastically, we might recognize here a familiar matrix at work. The necessity of thinking an initial ‘distance’ in thinking any kind of ‘self-representation’, or self iteration of any-thing/Being. I use this fragment from Heidegger in separation from the argumentative train of *Being and Time* (where it occurs) in an act of deliberate limited reading. This limitation is prompted by the question: how do we assimilate the model of ‘deseverance’ with the deconstructive notion of the text? To address that question one is forced to add this rider to the Heideggerian proposition, that in the performance of de-severance the reader becomes part of the text as much as the text becomes part of the matrix of intentionality which is ‘the reader’. Consequently, de-severance can be seen from the other side too, it might also be a move in making the ‘other’ one’s own, or part of the self, since the positing/positioning of that other is an act of self-representation. Therefore, this strategic reading of Heidegger might also enable us to glimpse a threatening and usurping self, that authorises or de-authorises reason and existences of everything around itself in a commanding force of re-presentation. In *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles* (Derrida 1979), Derrida quotes Heidegger to indicate that the itinerary of propriation always already inflicts the trajectory of (the Heideggerian) “Being”, as it “pursue[s] what is proper to it” (Derrida, 159n17)⁸. At this point, if we turn to another text of Heidegger, we might notice that our strategic reading has not been of no avail, but on the contrary shows some parallel to Heidegger’s latter

---


⁸ Derrida is quoting from Heidegger’s *Zeit und Sein (Time and Being)*.
concept of the ‘subject’ in its reign of violating centrality. This is Derrida re-telling Heidegger’s assertion made in “The Principle of Reason”:\(^9\):

The modern dominance of the principle of reason had to go hand in hand with the interpretation of the essence of beings as objects, an object present as representation [Vorstellung], an object placed and positioned before a subject. (Derrida 1983, 10).

This authorizing subject has a decisive difference from the Dasein of Being and Time since Dasein cannot fully take a stand on its being, as the question of being is unresolved and un-certain for Dasein. Quite unlike the self-certain ‘I’, which Derrida reads as a “he” (Derrida, 10). This is a male subject “open to a nature that he is to dominate, to rape if necessary, by fixing it in front of himself, or by swooping like a bird of prey” (10). And yet, it should also be noted that Dasein does not completely escape this trajectory. It cannot be overlooked that even in Being and Time, Dasein’s project is primarily epistemological, which can easily slide into a mode of domination through the authorising force of re-presentation\(^10\).

Tina Chanter has opined that “a concept of time informs a view that depends on maintaining the conscious, rational, dominating subject at the center of its account, and envisages the world as so many objects to be organized and orchestrated into a coherent plan” (Chanter 2001, 162). She also points out that in the Heideggerian scheme, Dasein “must stand alone” by tearing itself from “the

---


\(^{10}\) This is a vast topic, but the following two quotes from Heidegger and Derrida clearly stresses Dasein’s epistemological project. 1. Heidegger (the only clear mention of Dasein in “The Principle of Reason”):

\hspace{1em} In the still cruder and more awkward language of the treatise Being and Time (1927) this means that the basic trait of Dasein, which is human being, is determined by the understanding of being. Here understanding of being never means that humans as subjects possess a subjective representation of being and that being is a mere representation. (Heidegger 1991, 86)

2. Derrida (from Of Spirit):

\hspace{1em} Dasein finds itself given the task of preparing a philosophical treatise on the question “What is man?” (see Derrida 1991, 15)
opinions of the they” (102) or loosely, from ‘others’ like it. To interrupt such a tendency, a deconstructive concept of ethics might insert here the corrective of a call of the ‘wholly other’ which is also a pull of the ‘radical outside’. We do not go into an analysis of this call of the radical outside, or the ‘wholly other’ in this chapter in detail, but if we read through its basic underpinnings, it might lead us to our central concern for this chapter: the itinerary of properness in thinking self-adequation and self-representation, and the way this self-representation tries to sublate (negate and preserve) time.

‘Subject’ and Ethics

Strangely, it is only by conceding that our grasp of the Other is a pretension to conceptual mastery, that there are limits to intelligibility, and that representation is therefore compromised and contingent, that the possibility of an ethical relation with the alterity of the other becomes possible. (Kirby 1997, 86)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has written that the “call to the ethical is, almost, the call of the ethical” (Spivak 1993, 175). The “almost” both summons and guards the abyssal threat that the “being-called-ness of Being” might very well be named the call of the ‘non-ethical’ which would “make no difference” (Spivak, 175). It therefore follows that not only the naming of the ethical as ethical puts the definition of ethical at stake but that this act of naming also covers over a certain violence which is unavoidable, or as Spivak puts it, ‘necessary’. “The necessary violence, it may be called a “mistake,”’ writes Spivak, “of thinking the ethical subject cannot be avoided” (175). This ‘violence’ resides in the inevitable logical sequence that one always starts with a notion of the ethical before setting up the double-bind or aporia of the ethical. Even in the decision to confront the double-
bind there remains a trace of intentionality which consequently reduces the *aporia* of the ethical. In other words, **it is not possible to face the ethical/non-ethical double bind in its purity**, a necessary condition that both produces and writes over the ethical, giving it a certain ontology. Therefore I agree with the Spivakian proposition at this stage of her argument only to an extent. The naming of the other’s ‘call’ as ‘ethical’ or ‘non-ethical’ would ‘make no difference’ to the extent that one is acting with a totally blank slate and no paleonymy. But since that is an impossibility (it would, for one, force one to presuppose a pure consciousness) I tend to propose that ‘naming’ *does* make a difference, even if a minimal one, it does because that trace of ontology (in the act of naming) is inexhaustible, making it impossible to situate any consciousness who hears the call (of the wholly other) before (and without the trace of) the act of naming. It might even be said that one only hears the other through the naming of the ethical and non-ethical, from within this limit set by the inscription of a choice, and therefore the other cannot *really* be heard prior to that inscription.

In support of the Spivakian proposition however, it might be said that since the choice (of naming) inaugurates an initial ‘difference’, it always runs the risk of confronting the ‘prepropriative’ even as a blink, an im-possible moment in front of which it cannot make a difference merely by naming. Is not this the reason why Spivak puts that mark of doubt: “almost” staged between two commas (in the quote above)? But is it possible to think the pre-propriative and still not put difference at stake? Can one really avoid the minimal ontologization or ‘materiality’\(^{14}\) that always comes, along with any naming? Drawing from the discussions in the previous chapters, one might say that if the structure cannot master the ‘cut of the outside’ completely, then the ‘cut’ itself can also not totally ignore the ontology of the inside, as well as the ontologization that is unavoidable in the making of any ‘theory’\(^{15}\). Spivak concurs (in a much earlier piece than the one we have just quoted from) when she opines that it is not possible to “assume that the political - or ethico-personal - narratame can adequately represent the philosopheme” (Spivak 1989, 30).

\(^{14}\) More on this in the next chapter.

\(^{15}\) A theory that tries infinitely to get rid of the ontologization is similar to the Hegelian speculative reason (see ‘Chapter Two’), the work of deconstruction can be said to accept this inevitability still trying to linger with the calculation.
One is to be attentive here and note that the reverse is also not possible, that it is likewise impossible for the ‘ethico-personal narratame’ not to represent the philosopheme. It is an ironical double bind that does not let the trace of the ‘cut’ to be totally free, as if the structure returns to have its revenge on the trace through the same cut which forbids it to master the cut.

The ‘subject of ethico-politics’ is a figure to which Spivak constantly returns, mostly to underline the short-circuit through which it comes into the being, cutting itself off from what she calls the ‘subject of ontology/epistemology’. In “Feminism and Deconstruction, Again: Negotiations” (1989) the recipe runs like this “any program which assumes continuity between the subject of epistemology/ontology and that of ethicopolitics, must actively forget that the call to/of the wholly-other, that which is the undifferentiated (radically precontinuous) ethical, is the condition of the possibility of the political, and the propriation of a subject for ontology/epistemology has already also become possible by the way of this condition” (Spivak 1993, 127). To tally this with the line of argument I have just pursued, it is imperative here to remember that if the act of ‘propriation’ is always already inflected by the abyss of the “undifferentiated”, then thinking propriation is also an obligatory move that would in turn be a condition for the thinking of any pre-propriative as such. This is not a new or radical critique which sets itself apart from the Spivakian position that I have been fleshing out, but just a look at the other end of her critique of ontology. This might yield a notion of a minimal ontologization that cannot be avoided in any staging of figures like the “undifferentiated ethical” or the “wholly-other”. How to put this unshakable (material) mark of ontology to work, would be one of the key problems before us. In the present chapter, this trace of a certain inscription or ‘materiality’ (which is not simply the obverse of ‘theoretical abstraction’ but a necessary condition of it) is examined in the two related registers of ‘propriation’ and ‘time’.

Derrida underlines the necessity of not ignoring a minimal ontologization of which thought itself cannot ever be free. Talking about the Heideggerian notion of
an originary neutrality of ‘Being’, Derrida points out that for Heidegger this neutrality is itself constitutive of a bare and yet minimal relation of the Being to itself. ‘Being’ ‘subtracts’ all “anthropological, ethical, of metaphysical predetermination [...] so as to keep nothing but a relation to itself”, which is but a “bare relation, to the being of its Being; that is, a minimal relation to itself as relation to Being” (emphasis added, Derrida in Holland and Huntington 2001, 57). The way I am trying to pose a negotiation with ethicality is very close to this reading which points at the unshakable material traces of ontology in conceptualizing any bare relation of self to self. The ‘cut’ as I have discussed till now, is mark of such a minimal materiality which is not merely quantifiable as a congealed presence (therefore not a measurable matter, nor a ‘strategic essence’), but an open-ended work in time.

Can one also not say that what makes the ‘subject of ethicopolitics’ differ from a ontological definition of ‘Being’ is precisely an ontologization of the ‘cut’ as we have narrated it? The crux of this materiality always consists in analytically separating the two sides of an aporia that the ‘cut’ stages. On one side, the unshakable trace of ontology that remains, and on the other, a strategic use of that surplus materiality which both undoes ‘matter’ (as full presence) and makes matter (as presence) sur-vive. This separation itself involves a ‘cut’ which yet again stages the same double-bind, at the level of theory this time, or at the register of the ‘narrateme’. One may only ignore this double-bind at the risk of stopping the ‘work’ and leaving the ‘cut’. On the level of ‘theory’, one might say that the work of deconstruction is ever haunted by a certain Hegelianism, which it also, paradoxically, aims at. Can one separate the inevitability of this haunting from an intentional manipulation of the haunting? This propels us to a problem similar to the one staged above, the problem of the unshakable materiality. At least the following might suffice for now: the ethico-political cannot claim a complete separation from

16 This is from the crucial Derridian reading of the Heideggerian gloss on ‘sexual difference’ as it culminates in his treatment of an originary ‘neutrality’ of Dasein (Derrida, ‘Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference” in Holland and Huntington 2001). See Spivak (in Holland 1997), Das (Das 2010, especially 109-113), and Kamuf (Kamuf 2005, 79-101) for more comments on this Derridian reading.
the ontological, and in a certain way this ensures very production and survival of the ethico-political.

What if one proposes that this survival is actually affirmed through the ‘trace’ that cuts and binds the ethical to the ontological where the ‘distance’ between the two is that very trace, precisely that spacing which does not let go of the one or the other? This ‘distance’ both re-presents the one as the other, as well as promises to re-turn each one to oneself, in an impossible act of self-adequation. How to think of this distance, this ‘cut’ that yields the trace, which is neither space nor time in their materiality, and yet cannot even be thought as pure absence as such? We step back for the time being and try to make a way through a tracing of the itinerary of such a present-absent spacing in terms of its desire for an initial distance (temporal) and self-adequation (effacing of that very distance).

Propriation and Ontology in Marx: The Spivak – Derrida Verkehr

There can be several different ways of understanding properness along with a notion of self-adequation. The work of deconstruction which undoes the proper/improper binary aims at that basic metaphysical move which poses each

---

17 Verkehr is a German term I borrow from Marx (explanation below) which generally means: traffic, circulation, intercourse. I use it to indicate the circulations of the textuality of the name ‘Marx’, and Marxian concepts between ‘Spivak’ and ‘Derrida’. Spivak has had a long engagement with Marx through Derrida. Even a quick glance would note the following trajectory: “Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida” (1980/in Spivak 1993), “Speculation on Reading Marx After Reading Derrida” (1983/Spivak 1989), “Scattered speculations on the Question of Value” (1985/see Spivak 1987), “Ghostwriting” (Spivak 1995). But maybe this intense engagement cannot be restricted into these texts only, and are scattered in many other places, for example in “Marginality in the Teaching Machine” (in Spivak 1993). In this chapter, I have only tried an in-depth reading of “Speculations”. But arguably one of the most important of the texts mentioned above is “Scattered Speculations”. I have avoided going into that text, since it threatens to take us away from our central themes. Das 2010 is the best available commentary on this exemplary exchange. One might also check a less nuanced Sanders 2006, 53-73.
determinate Being or moment as having its own exclusive properness, incomparable to any other. One might argue that this proposition of properness is only the inevitable first move in fleshing out ‘difference’ (if objects were not intrinsically unique there would be no ‘difference’ among them, there would be no need of a language with different signs, etc). Consequently, this first move (of proposing a properness of a thing/moment to itself) is indispensible so far as one tries to understand ‘difference’ as inexhaustible by any operation of comparison or to understand how any such operation involves a basic violence (of comparing the incomparable). All forms of communication (in a broader sense, Marx’s term is typically: Verkehr translated as intercourse/circulation), language being exemplary, presupposes this fiction of untranslatability which anchors it.

Reading Marx’s Capital ‘rhetorically’, Thomas Keenan shows that at the level of the use-value, “things differ irreducibly from everything else, including other uses of the “same” thing”, a move Marx makes with reference to Aristotle\(^{18}\) (Keenan 1997, 120)\(^{19}\). However, Marx also implies that the use-value itself comes into being through a certain physicality (the act of being used in a context) and that having use-value is like having a ‘body’: “Things are bodies only in use, not a priori or as some kind of essential base” (emphasis added, Keenan, 111). It is rather ‘value’, which is without this body, that is ghostly. Value “is always […] in exchange” (Keenan, 122). Therefore Marx puts ‘matter’ or ‘physicality’ in the place of the proper (and not the opposite, something akin to ‘mind’) at least at this stage. As if, in the coming of the ghostly value, what is lost is the body-proper of things, even if, and this is the crucial point where a so called deconstructive lever can be forced, exchange cannot prefigure that body at all, since exchange works on the assumption of a “radical erasure” of ‘use’:

The Gespenst that Marx calls abstraction is a substitution for nothing, which in constituting the nothing as something that could be substituted for, institutes an originary simulation of exchange between something (common, abstract) and nothing. (Keenan, 129)

---

\(^{18}\) Aristotle (384-322 BCE).

\(^{19}\) In “The Point Is To (Ex)Change It: Reading Capital, Rhetorically”, in Keenan 1997.
This leaves one with interesting possibilities. For one, it is intriguing that Marx would describe the sphere of properness as a production, as a use which is a work leaving a ‘trail’ or mark that congeals as a body. I tend to read this as an inscription, a writing: using a thing is like writing the thing-in-use. It is most crucial I think that for Marx, an object has a different use-value at each separate moment of use. This indicates that an object does not have any ‘essence’ prior to or in separation from the notion of ‘use’ and instead what is ‘singular’ is not the object in-itself but each separate instance of the use of the object. Can one loosely conjecture that the phenomenon of the object is, in this way, always already a convergence of its different moments of use, and its materiality in that sense is only to be achieved by presupposing that ‘use’ has a generality, and therefore each use is comparable with other uses. Exchange is already at play in the very conception of use therefore. Secondly, and this in a way follows from the previous point, Keenan is able to demonstrate that one can read the Marxian text against its own grain to imply that use-vale might be affected by ‘exchange’, or that there is a general force of (what Marx calls) ‘abstraction’ which prefigures both. As if everything also happens in theory, in the reasoning of an intentionality which mediates:

Abstraction leaves the ghosts as its remainder. But the abstraction is the exchange [...] Something happens in order to let exchange happen but it seems to happen in the exchange itself. (Keenan, 118)

This ‘abstraction’ which lets Marx ascribe a generality (of body-ness) to the use-vale is both the condition (exchange presupposes this generality, or there would be no exchange) and product of exchange. In Specters of Marx (1993)20, published in French in the same year21 as Keenan’s piece, Jacques Derrida, in a now well known passage suggests that use-value in Marx is ‘haunted’ by the ‘commodities’, and therefore by ‘exchange’: “The commodity thus haunts the thing, its specter is at work in use-value” (Derrida 1994a, 189). Derrida means palpably the specter of

---


21 Delivered as a conference titled “Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective” held at the University of California in 1993.
‘abstraction’ as well, in the sense of Keenan (the nearness of Keenan’s thesis to his is confirmed in a footnote\(^{22}\)). But what Keenan had only indicated, that Marx can be read ‘non-continuously’\(^{23}\), is fleshed out by Derrida in a compelling reading, or in a staging of the work of deconstruction in the Marxian text. Note how he follows the logic of Marx and records the attentive rigour of his reasoning:

The commodity is a “thing” without phenomenon, a thing in flight that surpasses the senses (it is invisible, intangible, inaudible, and odorless); but this transcendence is not altogether spiritual, it retains that bodiless body which we have recognized as making the difference between specter and spirit. What surpasses the senses still passes before us in the silhouette of the sensuous body that it nevertheless lacks or that remains inaccessible to us. Marx does not say sensuous and non-sensuous, or sensuous but non-sensuous; he says sensuous non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible.

(Emphasis in original, Derrida, 189)

Marx has not put ‘commodities’ squarely in the realm of the non-matter, it is not even a mix of both (therefore not sensuous and non-sensuous\(^{24}\)), but a precarious new objectification where the dividing line between that which can be touched and that which cannot is not to be pin-pointed\(^{25}\). This new ‘materiality’ as if, is also an

\(^{22}\) Derrida 244n36.

\(^{23}\) Spivak’s concept-term. I use it here to refer to Keenan’s conclusion that abstraction and body-ness do not work in Marx independent of each other. For more, see below.

\(^{24}\) Marx actually writes “sensuously supersensible thing” (\textit{sinnlich übersinliches Ding}), Derrida sees this almost as a quotation of the Hegelian description of time “\textit{das unsinnliche Sinnliche}” (from Hegel’s \textit{Encyclopedia}), and refers the reader to his reading of that Hegelian phrase in the \textit{Margins of Philosophy} (Derrida 1994a, 194). The English translation of \textit{Capital} misses this point (see Derrida, 241n20). I discuss Derrida’s reading of the metaphysical concept of ‘time’ in the \textit{Margins} below, but I have concentrated more on his reading of Aristotle rather than of Hegel for consideration of relevance and limitation of space.

\(^{25}\) Keenan is not very clear on this point. At the same time, it has to be said that Derrida still reads in Marx a certain separation of the physical and the non-physical, in the distinction
excess of the sensuous, in that it transcends the sensuous, and therefore Derrida’s reading of Marx’s “sensuously supersensible” (“sinnlich übersinliches Ding”, quoted in Derrida, 189) as “sensuous non-sensuous”. This is a Derridian reading of the Marxian textuality in affirmation (as far as it shows that the Marxian text itself contains openings to de-ontologization) that might also be called an interested reading. The excess of the sensuality is also an interruption of the fully present sensuality. The non-sensual clings to the sensuous as its own. The body does not vanish in the ‘step beyond’ which makes it not a pure transcendence but a quasi-transcendence, we might contend. Derrida makes a parallel of this figuration to his distinction between the spirit and the specter, confirming our assumption that “this transcendence is not altogether spiritual, it retains that bodiless body which we have recognized as making the difference between specter and spirit” (189). Therefore when Derrida makes the point that the commodity “haunts” the thing or the use-value, he also means that the commodity cannot let go of the inscription that is already presupposed in the very conception of ‘use’. Its quasi-transcendence, or “step beyond” therefore is “made sensuous in that very excess” (189). The body remains, or the work of the body, embodiment as inscription.

Now it becomes more clear how Derrida arrives at the oft-quoted moment along with Marx (and yet at a distance):

between specter and spirit (alluded to in the quotation above). But Derrida also shows Marx himself makes that distinction uncertain.

Derrida would however present a more restrictive Marx in “Marx & Sons” reiterating that Marx’s “response” to the “spectral question” remains “ontological” and “consists […] in suturing the question” that prefigures ontology and in effect “reduces or denies the abyss of the question, conjures away the threat of the question” (emphasis in original, Derrida in Sprinker 2008, 262n6).

One can connect this argument to Marx’s critique of Feuerbach (in “Theses on Feuerbach”, 1845). Marx thinks Feuerbach wants to study materiality or sensuousness merely as a fixed “form of the object or of contemplation” and not as “human sensuous activity” and therefore as inscription of a work always taking that step beyond (emphasis in original, see Marx in Tucker 1978, 143-144). This is the first thesis, but the accusation comes back in its barest in the fifth thesis as well.
One touches there on what one does not touch, one feels there where one does not feel, one even suffers there where suffering does not take place, when at least it does not take place where one suffers [...]. The commodity thus haunts the thing, its specter is at work in use-value. [...] It changes places, one no longer knows exactly where it is, it turns, it invades the stage with its *moves*: there is a step there [*il y a la un pas*] and its allure belongs only to this mutant. (Emphasis in original, Derrida, 189)

It (commodity’s sensuous-non-sensuous specter, not commodity itself) invades the ‘stages’, *both* use and exchange, proper and pre-propriative. It is not as if only the exchange haunts the use in a top down vengeance of difference, but difference itself “suffers” as much for being touched as for being not touched, by the ‘use’. Therefore the inscription of use haunts exchange as well, if we read a bit more into Derrida. That ‘exchange’ cannot entirely operate as disembodied abstraction in itself is a point to which Derrida returns in many instants of his oeuvre. But in those places, just as in here, it is not merely a top down insertion of the deconstructive lever (the parallel of ‘doing theory’ with the setting up of Marx’s exchange/use couple is obvious), but a staging of the trace already at work in a text. It therefore seems somewhat perplexing when Spivak accuses Derrida of making Marx look “silly” in the essay “Ghostwriting”28. She reiterates a plea which she already had articulated in an earlier text29, that Derrida should have read Marx without “the ideology of a unified reading” (Spivak 1989, 56) that he does in the case of Husserl. Spivak is disheartened to see that on the contrary Derrida “freezes” Marx and makes him say “only certain kind of things” (Spivak 1995, 72). I do not think this accusation is entirely justified30. At the same time, it should also be noted that Spivak’s critique covers a broader ground than one we are able to tackle here.

Anirban Das provides a persuasive reading of this debate in a recent study where he...

28 “we see a silly Marx, who thinks use is good and exchange bad, that use-value is “proper to man”” (Spivak 1995, 74).
29 “Speculation” to which we have already referred and will take up for a closer reading shortly.
30 Anirban Das, reading the same debate, has commented that “Spivak’s reading of the *Specters* is a bit hurried” (Das, 176n22).
looks at the point in contention from the side of the fetishism of commodities (which tallies with our focusing on the sensuous non-sensuous),

the fetishization of commodities in a process that Derrida calls Capitalization. “The commodity thus haunts the thing, its specter is at work in use-value”. [...] This is where Derrida comes very near to Spivak to make us speculate on the possibility of the double name Derrida/Spivak on this matter. And this is the point where they diverge unambiguously on the question of Capital. For Derrida, culture and Capitalization begins before humanity, in the spectralization inherent in iterability. For him, Capitalization implies exchange relations that imply iterability... For Spivak, Capitalization would be a specific form of iterability iterability involving surplus value. This focus on the specificity of surplus value makes her insistent on the difference between industrial capital and commercial capital. At the root of this difference is a divergent opinion regarding Marx’s notion of use-value. Derrida sees use-value as Marx’s effort to posit a ‘real’ ontology against the spectral dance of exchange relations. Spivak, on the other hand, has been for long talking about the “textuality of the chain of value” ... and the notion of use-value as a “theoretically necessary fiction”. (Das 2010, 29)

Das shows how for Spivak, use-value is not Marx’s resort to a ‘real ontology’ but instead it works as a “far more nuanced category” which she terms a “theoretically necessary fiction” (quoted in Das 2010, 29). I would not be going into a detailed discussion of the textual moment in question where Spivak chides Derrida for neglecting the fact that the ghostliness of the body is a theoretical move that is inserted at that point where labour power is turned into a commodity (and not at the coming of exchange or commodity as such) and that, “No reading that circulates with the early presentation of money as “Marx” will catch that play. For between

---

31 It comes up in “Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida” (Spivak 1993, 112). To follow Das’s reading of the itinerary of this debate which Das reads with the double signature Derrida-Spivak, with a subtle reference to the theory of ‘ideology’ and ‘fetishism’ see Das 2010, 28-32.
Contribution [A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy], and Capital, money is transformed into capital, via the Grundrisse” (Spivak 1995, 73). I would however, comment on the differing interpretation of ‘use-value’ to the extent it bears on our discussion of the making-ethical of the textuality of Marx.

In “Scattered Speculations”, Spivak has a related but different trajectory of argument about ‘value’ in its relation to what she calls the ‘materialist predication of the subject’. She writes that,

For Derrida, however, capital is generally interest-bearing commercial capital. Hence surplus-value for him is the super-adequation of capital rather than a “materialist” predication of the subject as super-adequate to itself. This restricted notion can only lead to “idealist” analogies between capital and subject, or commodity and subject. (Emphasis in original, Spivak 1987, 162-163)

This takes us beyond the scope of our present theme. But I think what Spivak calls the ‘materialist predication’ has a connection to what we have already mentioned through Keenan, that the ‘use of a thing’ is like ‘inscribing’ it in use. Examine the following on the difference between a materialist and an idealist subject predication:

“The modern “idealist” predication of the subject is consciousness. Labor-power is a “materialist” predication. Consciousness is not thought, but rather the subject's irreducible intendedness towards the object. Correspondingly, labor power is not work (labor) but rather the irreducible possibility that the subject be more than adequate – super-adequate – to itself, labor-power” (emphasis in original, Spivak, 154). Why Spivak does not say subject-formation, but subject-predication, gets clear. It is because for her, this specific way of thinking subject takes into consideration the ‘predicate’, which for the idealist subject is the “intendedness” toward any object, which is the work or the ‘labour’ (intending to work on the object) in the case of the materialist predication. Therefore this predication might have the material inscription of ‘use’ as constituting it, we can conjecture. Two things are to be noted here. One, Derrida’s text would resist such a divide between the idealist and the materialist predication and underline the irreducible transaction between the two. Two, Spivak herself is nuanced enough to take that precaution
when she posits these categories, confirming that the "‘idealist’ and the
‘materialist’ are both exclusive predications" (emphasis added, Spivak, 154).
Another theoretically necessary fiction? We cannot probe this diversion at this
current moment in our thesis.

The insertion of the ‘ethical’, which Spivak calls Marx’s showing of the limit
of "‘philosophical’ justice"\textsuperscript{32}, is marked by the conception of the forceful insertion
of labour power into the circuit of capital as a commodity. For Marx, it is this
violence which begs for a politics or intervention, and not the violence inherent in
any act of exchange. But this specific Marxian intervention itself steps into an
itinerary of the proper, giving (human) labour-power a certain precedence over all
other things, making it as if, a proper whose exchange marks a radical violence.
This, for Spivak, is a necessary step, but it is not clear on which side of the
‘ontological’/‘ethico-political’ divide she places it. If it is placed in the latter (ethico-
political) then it can negotiate with Derrida’s reading which is untiring in its
insistence that the ontological cannot be fully left behind. Spivak calls this
intervention the making ‘literary’ or making ‘practicable’ of a text through a
“deconstruction of “philosophical” justice” (Spivak 1989, 57). Derrida would
however opine, I believe, that philosophical ‘justice’ cannot be interrupted without
indulging in some form of ontologization (which is the case here with human labour
power). I come back to this point shortly, but before that we might ask, does the
Marxian notion of ‘use value’ also mark one such moment of the deconstruction of
philosophical justice for Spivak?

Unlike Spivak, Derrida does not consider use-value a ‘necessary fiction’. He
cannot limit the reach of the work of theory (as well as of the spectrality of the
exchange, likewise of the risk of ontologization, in short, of deconstruction) and put
use-value outside the textuality produced by the ‘work’ of deconstruction. Whereas
for Spivak that stepping out is the coming of the ethical or of the literary. For
Derrida, there cannot be such a ‘making-literary’ or ‘making practicable’ of the
text\textsuperscript{33} because the ‘literary’ itself consists in staying with the ‘work’ at the margins

\textsuperscript{32} See Spivak 1989, 57, and also see: “Ghostwriting”, in Spivak 1995, 78.
\textsuperscript{33} See below.
of the philosophical in a gesture of avowal-denial, and does not imply any radical break from the philosopheme. Consequently for Derrida there would not be any outside to the ontological in the Spivakian sense, even in the name of a ‘necessary fiction’\(^{34}\), so staunchly is the Derridian grain anti-essential. Not even in the realm of ‘theory’, since theory itself is folded onto its object and complicit with it. This difference between Derrida and Spivak makes possible two moments of deconstruction authorized by two signatures (‘Spivak’ and ‘Derrida’). This ‘unambiguous divergence’ as Das puts it, can be glimpsed in the following formulation with which Spivak concludes her earlier essay “Speculation on Reading Marx After Reading Derrida”:

> To make ‘literary’ in this sense, then, is to ‘make practicable’. Not, that is to say, to expose the irreducible self-constitution of the text as self-deconstruction; but to show that the moment of the deconstruction of “philosophical” justice is the minute foothold of practice. (Spivak 1989, 57)\(^{35}\)

I contend that for Derrida, deconstruction of the ‘philosophical’ can never congeal into any “foothold of practice”, not even “minute”. This is a key difference between these two formidable readings. Consequently, Spivak also draws our attention to certain parts where the text of Marx doubts its own “methodology” and: “yet the grounds of a practice based on the [very] methodology are endorsed” (51). Based on this reading she argues that Marx deserves a more non-continuous reading along the lines of the Derridian reading of Husserl\(^{36}\). But this also does not rule out points of convergence between these two very nuanced engagements with Marx. Interestingly enough, in this piece (“Speculation on Reading Marx”\(^{37}\)) written just before Derrida’s *Specters* and some twelve years before her own “Ghostwriting” (Spivak 1995) Spivak does open up Marx’s ‘itinerary of the proper’ in a way similar to Derrida:

\(^{34}\) Spivak’s term, see above.

\(^{35}\) Spivak 1989, first published version dates back to 1983.

\(^{36}\) More on this in ‘Chapter Five’.

The opposition between use-value and exchange-value can be deconstructed, and both can be shown to share the mark of impropriety. The category of use-value is emptied of its archeo-teleological pathos when it is used to describe the relationship between capital and labour-power. The capitalisation of living labour is the realisation of the use-value of labour seen as a commodity by capital. (stress in original, Spivak 1989, 54-55)

I am inclined to propose that ‘Spivak’ and ‘Derrida’ (as readers of Marx) can be read together as long as both try to deal with the proper/improper binary at work in Marx. Yet, is it not the very work of a deconstruction that both put to use to achieve two very different ends? One might need to start off from a proposition of ‘properness’ only to think the possibility of exchange and to read that textuality of the abstraction at work in any act of exchange or comparison. But an essentialization seems almost inevitable here, that of the very first proposition of a proper. It might also be said that without this essentialization (even if minimal) it would be impossible to get a foothold into a study of abstraction. A post-deconstructive reasoning, however, has learned to think ‘exchange’ without stopping the calculation, getting a grip on things through the inadequate naming of the sensual nonsensual trace as ‘différance’. For Spivak, the ‘literary’ consists in thinking a ‘fictional’ outside to the chain of the ontological (itinerary of the proper), taking responsibility for this inauguration of the political. Spivak is able to re-read the staging of the ‘proper’ in Marx only as a fictional staging of the pre-propriative. But this reading is enabled by a post-deconstructive reasoning. For Derrida, however, this way of staging the fictional would only ontologize ‘différance’, nullifying the very deconstructive move it relies on, and precisely in this sense there cannot be an ‘outside’ to the text opened up and closed down by ‘différance’. There is, to reiterate, no outside-text that can be mastered by the inside, and likewise, no fictional outside that can control the inside in reverse. Spivak remains non-continuous with the signature, ‘Derrida’, at least at this point of the Verkehr38.

---

38 A more detailed consideration of the Spivak-Derrida exchange apropos Marx would be outside the purview of this dissertation. This extraordinary exchange began with Spivak’s
In her later texts, Spivak complicates matters further, precisely through what I have called a post-deconstructive move. For example when she reads ‘use-value’ as the “outside of the circuit of political economy, as the not necessarily or historically prior product of an originary difference existing in a different temporality from the duration [Zeitdauer] that is the measure of value-magnitude” (Spivak, 1993, 112). At this point it becomes clear that from such a post-deconstructive register of thought, one is able to theorize a non-originary difference even without having to resort to an outside-text. Use-value itself is expressible in terms of exchange, or ‘value as such’ is constituted in ‘use’, because: “Use makes “value” vanish, yet without the moment of consumption of the commodity as use-value the value would not be “real”-ized” (112). The question to be asked from the side of Derrida at this point would be, if one is able to think ‘use’ through the abstraction of différance that is also called ‘value’ (‘use’ being both erasure and creator of it), which is moreover a deconstructive move of thinking the non-originary trace, then why one still needs the supplement of a pre-propriative even as a necessary fiction, especially when deconstruction is able to do without it? I think Spivak’s answer would be this: the proposition of deconstructive différance itself is

comments on Marx (after ‘reading’ Derrida) made at a famous conference on Derrida’s works in 1980, later published as “Limits and Openings” (see Spivak 1993, 303n1). Then followed a number of texts I have mentioned above (see note 17). Derrida’s first detailed engagement with Marx is well known in the ‘Specters’ (1993, Derrida 1994a), but he has been giving seminars on Marx at least from the 1970’s. Spvak’s review of ‘Specters’ is available in “Ghostwriting” to which Derrida’s rather caustic reply is to be found in “Marx and Sons” (in Sprinkler 2008), where Derrida quotes Spivak’s own statement that she might feel “proprietary” about Marx, as working like a quasi confession. This long exchange has rather an enigmatic end when at an event marking Derrida’s 70th birthday, Spivak remembers her translating of Derrida and the trajectory opened up by the “touch” of Deconstruction (“Touched by Deconstruction” in Spivak 2005). In a note added to this text after the death of Derrida, Spivak tells of an encounter (during the birthday-conference?) where She confesses to Derrida in person that she “hadn’t read his criticism […] regarding Marx for fear of being hurt” (Spivak 2005, 95). To which Derrida’s reply as recorded by Spivak is, “‘Gayatri, what to do with you? I publish a critique and you don’t read it.’” (95). This then, refers one to another text where one cannot go.
yet another recourse to ‘necessary fiction’ logically. Derrida would agree as long as by ‘fiction’ she means affirmation of an unshakable ontology, even if I do not think she exactly does. The Verkehr is not yet over.

It is quite a separate thing however, that Derrida also shows that in Marx, an effort to keep ontologization at bay is already at work, as long as the ‘sensuous non-sensuous’ haunts both exchange and use, as I have already ventured to show. I am not sure if this only further proves a more non-continuous Marx that Spivak vies for, but what interests us is the fact the Marx notices a certain trace of the ‘sensuous non-sensuous’ as lingering in ‘use’ as well as in ‘exchange’. For our purpose we are asking the question from the side of the sensuous or ‘touched’ in so far as it is a necessity that always already affects and tames the ‘cut’. It denies the ‘cut’ to freely float in the outside and give in fully to the call of the ‘wholly other’. The questions we set for the Marxian text are the following, how the self-adequation of ‘capital’ deals with such trail of a physicality, which ‘exchange’ cannot fully get rid of? How the survival of capital is produced and limited by this trace of the ‘physical’? Can a study of that problematic show another instance where one can see the work at work39 in the oeuvre of Marx? It is to these questions that we turn next. May be in articulating the problem thus, we are only looking at the other side of the ‘cut’, ‘cut’ which we have so far described only as radical, liberating, vanishing. But it is also a tamed cut, a concept-metaphor named as such and any naming always retains a threat of ontologization.

39 ‘The work is at work” (a l'oeuvre dans l'oeuvre) or “it works” (cela oeuvre), is the typical Derridian statement which places neither the text nor the reader at the position of full agency in a work of deconstruction (see Derrida 2002, xxiii, 151). ‘Work’ might mean in French oeuvre, as well as the work of the critique, even if in French there is a separate word for the other kind of work (of art mainly):’travail’ (See Peggy Kamuf, “Introduction” in Derrida 2002). Therefore in English translation Derrida’s enigmatic “the work works” retains an ambiguity that I am inclined to keep (Kamuf seems more attentive to the fact that the translation misses the polyvalence of the French). Also see ‘conclusion’, previous chapter.
Capital’s Time: Speculations after Spivak

In “Speculation on Reading Marx After Reading Derrida” Spivak’s main objective is to “force” a deconstructive reading of the Marxian textuality of ‘value’. Several intricate moves are made here (including the one about use-exchange relations mentioned above), of which the one concerned with the temporality of capitalist circulation interests us most. This reading is ‘forced’ into the Marxian texture because for Spivak, deconstruction involves a definite ethical decision by the ‘reader’ who reads a text in a certain way, albeit staying with the traces which can be read in the text, and therefore the “result is not altogether a consistency” (Spivak 1989, 56). I present below a brief reading of capital’s time as is tracked by Spivak in the Marxian textuality of value. It is as much a deconstructive reading as it is a plea for one that she thinks Marx thoroughly deserves.

Marx’s text is open to a deconstructive critique of a desire for the ‘proper’. For Derrida, the “longing for transcendence” makes one “posit a proper situation of self-proximity or self-possession” which is exemplified by the tension between speech and writing in the “early Derrida”, Spivak tells us (Spivak 1989, 32). It is possible to trace such a longing in Marx, for example in his analysis of the “irreducible impropriety” of money and how that critique is tied up with the “impropriety of private property” (Spivak, 32) but the “itinerary of the improper in Marx does not stop” (52) there, and can be traced to the very conception of the central category of ‘capital’. That moment comes up in Marx’s Grundrisse when capital is described as trying to “reduce circulation time to an impossible zero” so that it might “realise” itself in no time. In this move, capital’s going forth from itself and return as if coincides onto a single instant (55). Spivak quotes from the Marxian text focusing especially on the German expression ‘mit Gedankenschnelle’ (at the speed of thought):

40 This is a spin on the title of the Spivak piece, “Speculation on Reading Marx After Reading Derrida”.
41 Spivak 1989, 43.
The continuity of production presupposes that circulation time has been sublated [aufgehoben]. The nature of capital presupposes that it travels through the different phases of circulation not as it does in the idea-representation [Vorstellung] where one concept turns into the other at the speed of thought [mit Gedankenschnelle], in no time, but rather as situations which are separated in terms of time. (Marx quoted in Spivak, 55)

Spivak makes an aside at this point which interests us greatly. She makes a parallel of the making of “theory” propelled by the desire of achieving an abstraction that is capable of full self-transparency with the nature of capital’s desire in question (Spivak, 56). This is a theme we have been constantly referring to as well, only that I would like to put the more specific ‘speculative reason’ in the place of ‘theory’ (Spivak is also talking about a certain Hegelianism in Marx here). To return to Spivak’s reading of the capital’s time in Marx, She reads Marx as implying here that capital wishes a self-presence not hindered by temporal distance of circulation. But this would be denied to capital since for the Marx still tied to the “trace of idealism”, mind is a preserve where the impropriety of capital, ever tied to the “physical process” of circulation, “cannot go” (56). This idealist mind-body division pervades the Marxian text interrupting its consistency, and yet, asks Spivak, might one not still find in Marx “the wherewithal to undermine its own traces of traditional metaphysics” (56)? This question in the context of this specific theme of capital’s desire for (an impossible) ‘no-time’ is left by Spivak in suspense with this indication that for such a reading one can turn to Derrida’s treatment of Husserl’s “im selben Augenblick argument” (56). I will try to follow this clue in brief.

The Derridian encounter with Husserl in question occurs in Speech and Phenomena (Derrida 1973) where Derrida demonstrates how Husserl produces a self-presence of internal speech through the certainty of an “undivided presence”, or, as Husserl calls it, ‘the source point’ where the “sign” loses its extension and shrinks

---

42 Other than this cryptic comment, “Can one, only half fancifully, presume that Marx, beset with creditors, knew that the idiomatic expression “in no time” meant, not in no time, but in the briefest possible time?” (Spivak, 57). Spivak takes up the issue of capital’s time again in “Scattered Speculations” to which we do not turn (see Spivak 1987).
as if into a singular “now”, into an “Augenblick” (blink of the eye, Derrida 1973, 62). But at the same time through a scintillating reading of Husserl’s notion of “internal time consciousness” Derrida is also able to show that Husserl’s text might be said to have staged the impossible ‘Augenblick’ only to contain the threat of a limitless proliferation of the sign, which also ends up in a pure dispersion, making even the trace of meaning impossible. Husserl, therefore, might be read as only exhausting the ‘ideality of sign’, and by staging the impossibility of such an ideality (pure meaninglessness/dispersion) only placing the ‘sign’ in the realm of representation. Therefore this Derridian reading both deconstructs and affirms Husserl. Spivak pleads for such a treatment of the Marxian text. Is that possible? In the following, I will read the relevant portion from Marx’s Grundrisse and argue that such a ‘deconstruction’ is already at work in the very place where Spivak reads a ‘trace of idealism’.

We pick up the thread in Grundrisse a bit before the moment quoted by Spivak where the expression ‘mit Gedankenschnelle’ occurs. This is the ‘Chapter on Capital’ where Marx is examining how circulation “proceeds in space and time” (Marx 1973, 535). It is noticed at this point that the duration during which the commodity remains commodity without making the transition into money is the time of “pure loss” that capital tries to minimize (Marx, 535). ‘Time’ becomes key because it determines how often capital can renew (and therefore re-find) itself. Now, the circulation has a temporal extension. It has to traverse distance that are both manifestly spatial (chiefly, “market’s distance in space”) and temporal (necessary labour time and surplus labour time). But the crux is that “even the spatial distance reduces itself to time” (538) (and not the other way round, this is a critical Marxian argument) and it all becomes a question of crunching time. Might this ‘translation’ which Marx (in the English translation) calls a “reduction” (of the distance into time) pave way for the ‘speed-of-the-mind argument’ which Marx

---

44 Spivak would reiterate this plea, and accuse Derrida of not according to Marx what he could give Husserl, a ‘deconstructive reading’ in “Ghostwriting”, see above.
45 See Marx 1973, 535, 538.
46 Marx, 538.
makes giving into what Spivak identifies as a ‘trace of idealism’? A careful reading shows something rather different. Immediately after the point about the ‘translation’/reduction, Marx confirms that even if the ‘circulation time’ (meaning just the temporalization of the spatial part of it, distance of the market from the point of production) becomes an impossible zero the circulation process would still contain the irreducible physicality of the “necessary labour time” (538). Marx writes that, “if the circulation time of capital were = 0, if the various stages of its transformation proceeded as rapidly in reality as in the mind” then that would restrict the “repetition of the production process” only to “the amount of time which elapses during the transformation of raw material into product” (emphasis in original, 538-39). This is precisely why for Marx, “Circulation time is [...] not a positive value creating element” (emphasis in original, 539) unlike the necessary labour time. May be the use of the expression “circulation time” to mean only a part of the “circulation process” is the root of the confusion.

Let me lay out the whole scheme in brief. Even if the entire “circulation process” is expressed in the temporal register, Marx, in some cases, uses “circulation time” only for the part which is space-translated-into-time (i.e. time required for the commodity to traverse the spatial distance from point of production to the market). We can extract the following formula therefore, which is intended by the Marxian text:

(a) ‘circulation time’ (spatial distance translated into time) + (b) labour time (necessary and surplus) = (c) ‘circulation process’ (also expressed in time).

Now Marx never claims that ‘c’ can be zero, even if that is the impossibility capital desires through a full self-presence or re-presentation without loss. Even if Spivak’s argument seems to take ‘a’ for ‘c’, mistaking what is Marx’s critique of the itinerary of the proper (capital’s desire) for his adherence to a ‘trace of idealism’47.

47 Marx does however leave room for confusion also by calling the spatial circulation, “real” circulation, but even then he always specifies that it is only the ‘translated’ part:

The reduction of the costs of this real circulation (in space) belongs to the development of the forces of production by capital, the reduction of the costs of its realization. (Marx, 534)
Let us continue further from the point where Marx affirms that circulation time in the sense of time taken by the product to reach the market is not a positive value creating element of circulation. The ‘positive value creation’ lies with surplus labour time and necessary labour time. Therefore even if circulation time is zero, that necessary temporal distance would always remain. Nevertheless, if this temporal distance of labour also becomes zero then something truly im-possible happens: “if either surplus labour time or necessary labour time = 0, i.e. if necessary labour time absorbed all time, or if production could proceed altogether without labour [an impossibility] then neither value, nor capital, nor value-creation would exist” (539). A few pages on, the point about ‘circulation time’ is driven home most forcefully:

Thus if circulation caused no delay at all, if its velocity were absolute and its duration = 0, i.e. if it were accomplished in no time, then this would only be the same as if capital had been able to begin its production process anew directly it was finished; i.e. circulation would not have existed as a limiting barrier for production, and the repetition of the production process in a given period of time would be absolutely dependent on, identical with, the duration of the production process. (Emphasis added, Marx, 545).

And again:

Circulation time in itself is not a productive force of capital, but a barrier to its productive force arising from its nature as exchange value. The passage through the various phases of circulation here appears as a barrier to production, a barrier posited by the specific nature of capital itself.
(Emphasis in original, Marx, 545)

Therefore capital could never really decrease necessary labour time or surplus labour time to the impossibility of ‘no time’ or zero time, because the abstraction of ‘exchange’ is in its very ‘nature’ (that is proper to it, one might speculate)\textsuperscript{48}. It

\textsuperscript{48} One might consider that Grundrisse is written in a mode of thought-experiment.
however, can strive to rub off that part where it has already transformed space with
time, i.e. the time to take the product to the market. This process however has little
to do with a full self-adequation of capital. Full self-presence would be denied to
capital not because it cannot invade the ‘proper’ of the mind within an idealist
framework but since it sur-vives in and through representation. Capital needs this
temporal distance from itself, to exist as such, Marx tells, that without it “neither
value, nor capital, nor value-creation would exist” (emphasis added, quote above).
This is also Marx’s central thesis precisely because for him capital cannot create
value on its own. ‘Exchange’ is the crux. Exchange which works like a
representation (i.e. the Gespenst) needing a distance, cannot be rubbed off. The
temporality of the necessary and surplus labour time therefore cannot be wiped off, a
temporal distance also expressible simply as a force of abstraction that exchange of
labour power as commodity inaugurates. One remembers here the ‘sensuous non-
sensuous’ or ‘super-sensuous’ thing that Derrida notices in reading Marx’s Capital.
This thing that one can and cannot touch lingers as (what I have called), a ‘threat’ of

with the velocity of circulation other than lessen the obstacles to reproduction posited by
capital itself are on the wrong track. (Even madder, of course, are those circulation-artists
who imagine that credit institutes and inventions which abolish the lag of circulation time
will not only do away with the delays and interruptions in production caused by the
transformation of the finished product into capital, but will also make the capital, with
which productive capital exchanges, itself superfluous; i.e. they want to produce on the
basis of exchange value but to remove at the same time, by some witchcraft, the necessary
conditions of production on this basis)” (Marx, 545).

49 It is a point of infinite importance here that Marx says, “if either surplus labour time or
necessary labour time = 0” Capital would cease to exist” (emphasis added, Marx, 545). Why
the conditional clause (“if”) separating the surplus from the necessary labour time? Quite
clearly under industrial capitalism both needs to be zero for capital to achieve that im-
possible self annulment, but Marx leaves the door open to another interpretation, that
Capital might also cease to exist in its other historical forms, forms where extraction of
surplus labour doesn’t occur, and in those cases only making the “necessary labour time”
null would be enough for capital to efface itself. But even that is an impossibility which
only underlines capital’s being-in-representation further. This also tallies with the Spivakian
insistence that capital itself is not good or evil in the Marxian scheme, and the Marxian
intervention only tries to focus on a making-literary of the textuality of Capital.
ontology not leaving the ‘cut’ of exchange/representation alone. What Marx calls abstraction, is not devoid of this other trace.

The above discussion has interesting consequences for a theory of representation. If in the preceding chapters we have underlined the ‘cut’ which makes the structure tarry away from itself, it is the other side of it, it’s being (also) inside of the structure that seems to be of immense importance now. Along with it, the central notion of the ‘cut’ as neither of the thing nor of its other, but something like an abstract and therefore body-less entity is challenged. As we have seen, even the being-temporal of a thing does not necessarily mean non-physicality. And therefore it might be said that the cut always carries a risk of getting ontologized, what’s more, it is incapable of its work without keeping that trace of ontology. In this sense, re-presentation needs this distance which is also physical, which is like an inscription or a writing. In the next section I take a closer look at the temporal constitution of this ‘distance’. To provisionally close off the present discussion, I propose the following formula. ‘Re-presentation’ as a name for the ‘work of the cut’ has two sides to it (it works like a double-bind): one, it survives the thing it re-presents, and two, it makes the thing ‘survive’ and therefore carries its trace. If the thing does not have this temporal distance, then it falls over itself and everything is concentrated into a ever-present ‘now’, a macabre vision of full presence. On another but related register: at the level of theory, ‘thought’ tries to meditate on itself trying to find a space from where it may subject its past to its own scrutiny. But the past catches up with it, and thus ‘thought’ cannot be totally free either. At this stage of our discussion it can be said provisionally that a certain deconstruction does not try to claim this separation of reason from its immediate past as Rohstoff but instead giving into the work of re-presentation it tries to let the ‘work work’, even if it is not

\footnote{I assume re-presentation can also be taken as synonymous with the ‘work of the cut’. If re-presentation (i.e. presenting oneself at a different time and place, or othering of the self) is a fundamental opening of the ‘self’ to the ‘other’, then at the same time it is also about a perpetuation of self, only at a different time and space. These two moves: 1) opening to the other, and 2) perpetuation of self, together, presume a persistent cut, from the self on the one hand (in opening to the other), and also from the other or outside at the same instant (in perpetuating the self). This double bind is also of the ‘work of the cut’ as explained till now.}
clear who or what works at the ‘last instance’\textsuperscript{51}. Derrida seem to side with the formulation that there cannot be a ‘last instance’, and that might even be a trap of full presence. For Althusser, having posed this problem in a very different way, the last instance consists in a class-politics, even if logically his text could be shown to hesitate before staging the political so unambiguously\textsuperscript{52}. Spivak is of the opinion that this ‘last instance’ can be produced as the ethical moment, albeit with extreme caution. The subtle difference between Derrida and Spivak (within the limits of our discussion in this chapter so far) is this: whereas Derrida does not stop the ‘calculation’ and subsequently the enigmatic ‘work’ of the cut between the subject and the object, knowing full well that it cannot break free of a certain ontology, that awareness only helps Spivak to ‘claim’ the unshakable moment of the ontological for a politics. But at the same time, this ‘claiming’ of the trace instituting a subject arrests the ‘work’ (which Derrida would not like). Spivak points out that if one tries to stay with the calculation, one only shifts to the realm of ‘theory’ and the meditating intentionality, which opens up the realm of politics even before the stalling of calculation. Why not shift the desire to calculate to that realm then? Therefore Spivak’s argument would be that she is not giving up calculation but only shifting it to a different (might one say ‘ontic’?\textsuperscript{53}) level of the ethico-political, ‘using’ that lingering trace of the ‘sensuous non-sensuous’ to shift grounds. This

\textsuperscript{51} A phrase from Althusser mainly, for example: “I will take the (personal) risk of putting it this way: the reason is that philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in the field of theory” (emphasis in original, Althusser 1976, 37). Also see ‘Chapter One’.

\textsuperscript{52} Laclau and Mouffe recognize precisely this, reading Althusser from a post-deconstructive position when they write: “If the concept of overdetermination was unable to produce the totality of its deconstructive effects within Marxist discourse, this was because, from the very beginning, an attempt was made to render it compatible with another central moment in Althusserian discourse that is, strictly speaking, incompatible with the first namely, determination in the last instance by the economy” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 98). In my example the last instance is taken over by class-analytic, which shows Laclau and Mouffe are not entirely correct in putting economy at the privileged position in the Althusserian argument.

\textsuperscript{53} Das arrives at a similar reading even if by the way of a discussion much more focused on notions of embodiment, see Das 2010, 14. Also see the note below.
other ground, for her, would be prefigured by a feminist intentionality. The logic here, if I may again articulate it in the light of our discussion, would be, if there is always already a ‘body’ (sensuous non-sensuous) then why not claim it, for it also exists irreducibly in the everydayness of the public. This might prefigure a more nuanced notion of the body, also in its understanding through discursive-material complexes. Judith Butler makes the excellent point that “always already exceeding one another, language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different” (Butler 1993, 69). One might “claim”, that “what persists [...] is the “materiality” of the body”, and at the same time, one might also “claim that what persists here is a demand in and for language” (Butler, 67). What is to be noted is the verb she uses in both cases, ‘to persist’, referring to the persistence of “that which” claims attention. It therefore is a matter of persisting, lingering in time, a ‘work’ on whose trail our discussion has been persisting in turn. But how to think of the ‘being’ of a thing which never stops representing itself? Is it possible to repeat a thing ‘fully’ but in a different time? If the cut is all that works, and there is no ‘now’ when one can really pin-point the ‘thing’, then is cut the only thing one can touch at the present moment (at the ‘now’)? This puts us face to face with the curious possibility that it is the ‘cut’ which ex-ists, it is the cut which is all the writing, all materiality there can be.

54 A similar ring can be heard in some parts of Judith Butler’s work. For example consider: “Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine” (Butler 2006, 26). For a not entirely similar, but related notion of body and embodiment see Das, 2010. Especially where he argues that “Spivak, [...] reads Foucault’s notion of Power in the register of the Heideggerian ontic, while implicitly relating to the Deleuzean fold of subjectivity” (emphasis in original, Das 2010, 14).

55 Even if it is usual to think that Butler ultimately sides with the ‘discursive’ in thinking ‘matter’. Maybe reading a text is not always about anchoring in (what is apparently) any ‘ultimate point’ made.

56 See next section for the discussion of the ‘now’.
Timing and Spacing

Commenting on the longest footnote in *Being and Time*, Derrida peels his way into the Heideggerian notion of ‘time’, in “*Ousia and Grammē: Note on a Note from Being and Time*” (in Derrida 1982). For Heidegger, the “entire history of philosophy” is “authorized” by an extraordinary and sole emphasis on the “present” (Derrida 1982, 38). The project Heidegger sets for himself is not merely of proposing something else in the place of ‘time’, but instead (since thought itself is inflected by time), of thinking otherwise, or finding something otherwise than thought:

An other centre would be an other now; on the contrary, this *displacement* would not envisage an *absence*, that is an other presence: it would *replace* nothing. (Emphasis in original, Derrida, 38)

This is an effort upstream from what Heidegger calls the “vulgar notion of time” limited by a notion of the ‘present’ as “past-retained-uplifted in the [rhythm of the Hegelian] *Aufhebung*, where it yields its truth” (Derrida, 38). Heidegger tries to aim at something other than what might be called a truth-machine, and therefore an “entirely other” in the sense of being neither ‘truth’ nor ‘presence’, Derrida contends (38). What is interesting in this reading is Derrida’s recognition of the ‘other’ of time as not simply an outside to thought or to presence but what he calls “a certain difference, a certain trembling, a certain positioning that is not the position of an other centre” (38) in Heidegger. This other nevertheless is “already requisite within the very structure that it solicits” (133), where ‘to solicit’ etymologically also means “to make the whole move” (Derrida, 133n38).

Letting the Heideggerian project wait, Derrida establishes “contact” with the main protagonist of the ‘vulgar concept of time’, Aristotle, for whom the “now” (*nun* in Greek) is the barest possible unit of time (39). Derrida recognizes a possible setting up of an *aporia* in Aristotle. Time, in a certain sense, can never “depart”

---

57 This would go with the Heideggerian insistence that *Dasein* is given the question of the question, but not any epistemological project as such because it still is unsure of its ontology (unlike the subject), even if *Dasein* cannot really escape that matrix (see below).
from the “nun”, remaining tied to the nowness (39). And yet the ‘nun’ can never come to pass since it is “that which bears within it a certain no-thing, that which accommodates nonbeingness, cannot participate in presence, in substance, in beingness itself (ousia)” (emphasis in original, 39-40). Such is the aporia that “time is divisible into parts, and yet none of its parts, no now, is in the present” (emphasis in original, 40), which forces one to conclude with the apparently impossible suggestion that “time is composed of non-beings” (40). One is to be attentive to the enormous import of this move for a theory of representation. If one had left the argument at this point then the work of representation would have been reduced to a teleological labour to reach that vanishing point where only non-being remains. Or, in other words, representation would have seemed only a step that is null and void, totally abstract and devoid of ‘thingness’, just placing itself in the service of two presences (originary presence and final presence where the origin is reappropriated58). Subsequently, full presence would (logically) remain untouched by and would not need the ‘step of representation’. But let us continue our reading and try to go upstream from such an idea. The aporia that the divisibility of time stages is only the “first phase of the aporia” Derrida assures (40). The next phase involves what he calls an “inverse hypothesis” envisaged by Aristotle, “the now is not a part, time is not composed of nun” (40). This is a formidable problem, especially if one reads these two stages of the aporia together, and Derrida does. According to the second hypothesis, the ‘nun’ cannot be a part of ‘time’ (as flux) since the moment it places itself in that flow, it is “affected” with “no-thing” of representation (40). This premise therefore not only guards a certain thingness of the ‘nun’, it also protects ‘beingness itself’ or ousia. But ousia almost always runs the risk of stepping into time and losing itself. The irony is, it must step into time, to come to pass, to be. To be, it must be affected by non-being, such is its double-bind. It ‘must’, since to ‘sur-vive’ it cannot be fixed at one point, instead, it has to linger in time. Except it is precisely that ‘time as flow’ which does not seem to hold any

58 As we have already made the point in ‘Chapter Two’ quoting Derrida: ‘Philosophy, as if, lingers “between [the myth of] an original presence and [a desire for] its circular re-appropriation in a final presence” (see Derrida 1982, 71), tarrying in this passage that it thinks for itself.
thingness. How to get over this double-bind? Aristotle’s one approach seems to lay
in a conception of the ‘now’ and the being temporal of time in parallel to a point and
a line in space, where the point, with a twist of argument, is described as also a line,
only a line closed upon itself, like the figure of an indefinitely minute circle. But
does that neutralise the aporia in question? Having discussed the same figure (of
the circle) as the Hegelian metaphor for ‘true infinity’ which is also representative of
full presence, it makes sense to overhear Derrida in what reads as his dramatic
soliloquy:

Is it still to be asked? Is it still to be asked how time appears on the basis of
this genesis of space? In a certain way it is always too late to ask the question
of time. The latter has already appeared. The Being-no-longer and the Being-
still which related the line to the point, and the plane to the line – this
negativity in the structure of the Aufhebung already was time. At each stage
of the negation, each time that the Aufhebung produced the truth of the
previous determination, time was requisite. The negation at work in space or
as space, the spatial negation of space, time is the truth of space. To the
extent that it is, that is, to the extent that it becomes and is produced, that it
manifests itself in its essence, that it spaces itself, in itself relating to itself,
that is, in negating itself, space is time. [...] Time is spacing. (Emphasis in
original, Derrida, 42-43)

The Aufhebung at its basic goes through a rhythm of exchange. It is like a machine
that transforms space and time into each other, and time becomes spacing, as space
becomes temporal. Within this scheme therefore, without the other, one cannot
mediate on itself . Time is the “relation of space to itself, its for-itself” (43) and vice-
versa. This is interesting as far as unlike any other ‘thing’ that might follow the
trajectory of Aufhebung to desire an (impossible) self-adequation, ‘space’ or ‘time’
each alone cannot do that, but the space-time interchanging couple can. And since
they are not pure negations of each other (not a happy couple), this exemplary
couple might provide one with an opening to deconstruct that very movement of
self-adequation. Might one propose here that the impossibility of the work of

59 See ‘Chapter Two’.
deconstruction lies in the way it tries to articulate a minimal friction between space and time (friction produced out of this exchange between the two incomparable entities), a difference which remains in-between ‘spacing’ and ‘timing’, one that ‘thought’ cannot pin down? To further complicate matters in the spirit of our previous discussion, Différance might be an inadequate name for that abstraction which works neither as time nor as space but between the two. It simply is not possible to imagine a thought which is without time and space, and there lies the inadequacy of a name (like Différance). But the name still tries to stage the exchange that goes on between the two. Can this get out of the Heideggerian allegation that within the history of metaphysics, ‘time’ has never been represented for-itself, but always as space? One again confronts here the question of a speculating reason. At the level of theory, deconstruction plays very close to the ‘metaphysical closure’, but still at a distance. It does not merely work with a time that is dependent on space (or the opposite), but instead with the very act of representation of one by the other. And yet, deconstruction also would not claim to be able to totally leave behind either time or space in their inscriptive nature. I want to indicate here a parallel with Marx’s notion of ‘use’ as an inscription that I have tried to conjecture on in the last section.

Derrida argues that if Aristotle does try to represent time without space, or without gramme which is “a linear inscription in space” (54), at the same breath he also denies it: “Aristotle affirms opposites, or rather defines time as a dialectic of opposites, and as the solution of the contradictions that arise in terms of space” (54). These oppositions come to congeal for Aristotle in the key term hama (togetherness); Derrida calls it “the small key that both opens and closes the history of metaphysics in terms of what it puts at stake, the clavicle on which the conceptual decision of Aristotle bears down and is articulated” (56). The intricate bind of hama fleshes out the core of the Aristotelian concept of time.

Togetherness (hama) of (all) time (in one instant) is impossible in the following possible ways, as Derrida shows reading Aristotle. First possibility: if the successive ‘nows’ keep destroying the immediately preceding ones then all the ‘time’ would coincide at the same point and there would be “no time” (56), therefore, impossibility. Second possibility: if on the contrary they do not destroy
each other or do not do so in an “immediately consecutive way”, then all the nows would be simultaneous, “at the same time” (56) which would also mean there would be no time, therefore another impossibility. The resemblance of this logic with Marx’s insistence on the capital’s inability to both be itself and realize a degree-zero of no temporal distance from itself starts to dawn. Marx was also setting up an aporia of representation, making the point that capital’s desire for such a self-presence is in effect, comic, or absurd. In the case of the Aristotelian aporia, one glimpses such a theatre of absurdity. “It is this absurdity, denounced in the self-evidence of the “at the same time,”” Derrida tells us, “that constitutes the aporia as aporia” (emphasis added, 56). But how can the ‘now’ be both with and without movement? Derrida, through this reading, again encounters the aporia previously mentioned. An aporia staged and also covered over by metaphysics by the metaphor of the self-enclosed circle. But this time with a difference:

The point can cease to immobilize movement, can cease to be both beginning and end, only if the extremities touch, and only if the finite movement of the circle regenerates itself indefinitely, the end reproducing itself indefinitely in the beginning and beginning in the end. In this sense the circle removes the limit of the point only by developing its potentiality. The gramm is comprehended by metaphysics between the point and the circle, between potentiality and act (presence) [...] Time, then, would be but the name of the limits within which the gramm is thus comprehended, and, along with gramm the possibility of trace in general. (Emphasis in original, 60)

Evidently, this figure of the circle, at least as Derrida stages it in his reading, is not a neat figure of full presence. The two sides of the circle do not close off, instead there goes on a play of indefinite production at both the ends, beginning and end. This trembling at the very door of full presence leaves an opening where one might read a coming of the deconstructive ‘différance’. Let me attempt to delineate how. I mention below two such openings (both appear in the quote above) to différance inserted into Derrida’s reading of Aristotle, which might be separated to recognize them distinctly as the plea of the trace of différance. We are separating here, in a
quasi-analytic method of reading which is only provisional, the places where that
voice of deconstruction sounds most distinct in the Derridian text:

I. “The *gramme is comprehended* [...] between potentiality and act (presence)”.

II. “Time, then, would be but the name of the limits within which the *gramme* is thus
comprehended, and, along with *gramme* the possibility of trace in general”.

Something remains between the “potentiality” and the “act”. One can also read this
as the gap between potentiality and event (act as presence) or the coming of that
‘act’ which closes the gap between a fractured presence or, more accurately a
potentiality ‘to be’ and full presence as the impossible event. This potentiality to be,
stays even before the fractured presence but never without it, a prepropriative which
is not to be thought without recourse to some minimal presence and yet which is
only an abstract affinity toward presence or ‘being’. Let me call this ‘presencibility’.
This is rather a neologism which is very close to what in Heideggerian parlance
would be ‘presencing’ (*das An-wesen*). It is not really a category we want to work
with in setting our argument, but I introduce it to ‘name’ this move by Derrida
which I read as one of thinking a potentiality which stays even before what
Heidegger calls ‘presencing’.

To recapitulate, ‘presencing’ is, for Heidegger, a key category in that it
describes the always already incomplete nature of Being, “presencing itself
unnoticeably becomes something present” (Heidegger quoted in Derrida, 23).60 But
Derrida is thinking provisionally of a prepropriative when presencing has not yet
come to be, but only threatens as a potentiality. It is somewhat in this sense that Tina
Chanter has read Immanuel Levinas where he tries to “rehabilitate a notion of the
present that does not simply falls prey to the idea of mastery that caused Heidegger

---

60 Heidegger writes, “Although the two parties to the distinction, what is present and
presencing (*das Anwesende und das An-wesen*), reveal themselves, they do not do so as
distinguished. Rather, even the early trace (*die fruhe Spur*) of the distinction is obliterated
when presencing appears as something present (*das Anwesen wie em Anwesendes
erscheint*) and finds itself in the position of being the highest being present (*in einem
höchsten Anwesenden*)” (Heidegger from *Early Greek Thinking*, quoted in Derrida 1982,
66).
to question the privilege of the present” (Chanter 2001, 42). Chanter shows that Levinas stresses instead the “ambiguity of the present” and consequently “wants to retain the complexity of the presencing of the present” (42). For Levinas then, the ‘present’ is “both a pure event that must be expressed by a verb” and something which is “already a something” (Levinas quoted in Chanter, 42). This then is an enigmatic stage which trembles between full absence and a potentiality to ‘presencing’, the always already ‘becoming trace’ of presence. This is a theoretical remembering as well, an anamnesis, having something akin to Spivak’s ‘necessary fiction’. On the other side of presencibility looms the act as presence, which, in a blow, can close all gaps and cease presence as one knows it (because presence within the possible is only fractured presence, full presence is something impossible). This gap therefore, between presencibility and ‘(full) presence’ is embodied in the Aristotelian scheme (and therefore in the metaphysical scheme in general) as gramme, Derrida tells us. This conceptualisation of the gramme fails to stage the aporia since it is thought as something that can actually bridge presencibility and presence, as if it can fill-in the aporia. Fills and also “falls”, “fällt” (63), the verb that Hegel uses (fallen, befallen also means ‘to come over’) to mean existence falls into time, comes to flesh, and Derrida is meticulous to record “In affirming that history – that is, spirit, which alone has a history – falls into time [...] is not Hegel thinking in terms of the vulgar concept of time?” (35). Therefore the ‘gramme’ thought as the filler closing off the gap between potentiality to presence and full presence cannot be the deconstructive ‘trace’, but still deconstruction cannot simply transcend the ‘vulgar concept of time’. ‘Trace’ therefore would be that im-possible spacing which keeps the gap open rather than claiming to fill it in, and yet it would be restricted to a specific naming (‘trace’) and a specific mode of reasoning which would force it to work very close to the concept of gramme.

---

61 Chanter is talking specifically about the ‘materiality’ and embodiment of ‘time’ (chiefly in Levinas) here, for the entire argument see “Ontological Difference, Sexual Difference, and Time” in Chanter 2001.

62 One cannot ignore the resemblances between Spivak’s ‘necessary fiction’ and Derrida’s notion of ‘anamnesis’, yet they are not similar (see Derrida 1998, 60). See previous chapter.
Gramme comes to imply more if we now read the second fragment we have quoted above. It stages the trace apropos space and time. ‘Time’ is the ‘name’ it states, “of the limits within which the gramme is thus comprehended” (60). Each act of naming refers also to that ‘act’ which threatens to close the aporia, and therefore ‘time’ works here as a limiting condition to space as well as a reminder of the limit of naming as such. These limits not only restrict the notion of ‘gramme’, they also open up a possibility to think the trace, which is similar and yet crucially different from gramme in that it is a touched untouched thing. One needs to be attentive, for here is stated again the very crux of deconstructive différance. Let us re-read. The trace comes into view within the same limit of a certain concept of time (and that is all to it, there can be no other time in thought) which also stages the gramme that desires full presence, trying to close off the aporia that the trace tries to guard and maintain. Unlike the gramme, trace sides with a vanishing presence, a sensuous nonsensuous. But trace would always be a quasi-trace, not the real thing, and that is all one might think of it, as an always already displaced trace, working within the logic of a conditional ‘as if’: as if it can dare to think without full presence, without the limit of time.

Full presence annuls time for it cannot prefigure time as both being and non-being. At the limit of both time and space, a certain ‘cut’ always keeps full presence at bay. That ‘cut’ might be the cut-off point that both produces and follows the ‘now’, stages its aporia. If I may already anticipate the next chapters, the cut of time likewise both produces the event and commits it to its survival, to the production of a machine-like repetition. Both these possibilities can be glimpsed in the text of metaphysics:

63 See previous section.
64 The structure of ‘as if’ or of the ‘quasi’ is important for Derrida. For example see, “Provocation” by Jacques Derrida in Derrida 2002. Also see Peggy Kamuf’s introduction to the same volume. A scintillating short note on ‘as if’ is to be found in “The University Without Condition” also to be found in the same volume (Derrida 2002, especially 209-215). The other two pieces in the volume, “‘Le Parjure,’ Perhaps: Storytelling and Lying” and “Typewriter Ribbon Limited Ink (2)”, profusely use the logic of ‘as if’. A discussion of the latter would be taken up in the next chapter.
More simply, every text of metaphysics carries within itself, for example, both the so-called “vulgar” concept of time and the resources that will be borrowed from the system of metaphysics in order to criticize that concept. And these resources are mandatory from the moment when the sign “time” – the unity of the word and the concept, of the signifier and signified “time” in general, whether or not it is limited by metaphysical “vulgarity” – begins to function in a discourse. (Emphasis in original, 60-61)

But this does not necessarily mean that the thought of the trace (or the cut) already remains buried inside the text of metaphysics just waiting to be retrieved. It does not lay hidden, it ‘works’ (and precisely because it works it cannot be pinned down by the inside of the text) at the margins:

It is on the basis of this formal necessity that one must reflect upon the conditions for a discourse exceeding metaphysics, supposing that such a discourse is possible, or that it announces itself in the filigree of some margin. (61)

One finds oneself on the tracks of a ‘work’ here which is both in and outside of the texts of metaphysics, and of the text as such. Does deconstruction consist in implanting something foreign into the text to unsettle it? This takes one to question of the subject or the impossibility of it within deconstruction, and this has already been articulated via Althusser in the first chapter (‘who works?’). There can be a likely setting up of this question within the very notion of textuality itself. Examine the following remark by Derrida:

The relationship between the two texts, between presence in general (Anwesenheit) and that which exceeds it before of beyond Greece – such a relationship can never offer itself in order to be read in the form of presence, supposing that anything can ever offer itself in order to be read in such a form. And yet that which gives us to think beyond the closure cannot be simply absent. (65)

How can something not offer itself to reading and yet be recognized within the closure of the text, if reading constitutes the text? Following these problems I try to
append below a brief note on the deconstructive notion of the ‘trace’ in the context of the ensuing discussion.

A Note on the Concept-metaphor: ‘Trace’

The trace which lets one go beyond the text (of metaphysics) cannot ‘show’ itself as the text ‘shows’ itself and yet, Derrida tells us, it can also not be simply absent either. I again refer to Marx’s recognition of a force of abstraction working in the textuality of capital, an abstraction inherent in exchange which does not apparently refer to the ‘use’ of things and yet which cannot simply be absent from the text precisely because it cannot totally get rid of the inscription of use-value which lingers in exchange. We must get used to this idea of the ‘cut’ which escapes and grounds both use and exchange, for it will recur in the course of our argument, I suspect. The call of the outside is inscribed in the scene of thought, that also ties it (the inscription of thought) to ontology, such is the irony of the aporia. Inscription, through physicality grounds the ‘cut’, and in this grounding is also inscribed the call of the other which resists any ground. If we now read Derrida commenting on the ‘text of metaphysics’, things get palpable:

It is necessary that a trace be inscribed within the text of metaphysics, a trace that continues to signal not in the direction of another presence or another form of presence, but in the direction of an entirely other text. (65)

But this trace cannot be thought “more metaphysico”65, in the form of any excess metaphysics, Derrida warns. Is it not as much as saying, it cannot be thought? And thus one returns (and it is important that one does, Derrida seem to indicate) to the question of agency, the question: ‘who’ inscribes the trace into the text? Derrida simply writes, it is “[to] be inscribed” (65), which surprisingly reads almost like a prescriptive statement. But read another way, it might also mean, it’s coming into being (“to be”) only remains as a potentiality within the thought of the text (it is also in this sense, that there can be no outside to the text). Is the ‘trace’ then also an inscription of reading, the mark of the reader or a matrix of intentionality of the

65 emphasis in original, Derrida, 60.
‘who’ that reads the text? I am inclined here to refer to a very phenomenological concept of a literary text that Derrida refers to, in an interview\(^{66}\), where the inscription as text is said to come into being in the very act of reading. Taking from that argument we might add here that the sensuous nonsensuous inscription which both ontologizes and indicates a radical de-ontologization is like an “intentional layer” (Derrida 1992a, 44), like a membrane which is touched every time one tries to touch a text. This layer is not of the text, not of the object so to say and not even of the subject, but comes \textit{in-between} in the act of conceiving the object/in the act of reading\(^{67}\). It is like an “implicit consciousness” of ‘rules’, of the “conventional” and the “institutional” – indeed of the “social” (Derrida, 44). We have here a quick glimpse of an extension of our field, the ‘social’ enters the scene. But we cannot be too quick in entering that realm yet, and keep that in suspense for the time being. Might this have a resemblance with what Spivak calls the ‘making literary’ or ‘making practicable’ of the text? There might not be any direct connection, but this is a thread worth pursuing, since Derrida is talking specifically of ‘literature’ here.

For our present discussion we retain the part about the act of reading being an ‘intentional layer’, a layer that is not of the subject but carries an intentionality. Trace trembles between the subject and the object. But this volatility can only work within a concept of time which in its turn can only be thought as extension, i.e. spatially. The trace lets the text continue, or sur-vive. What is at stake here therefore is a representation of the trace. I go on to the concluding section proposing the

\(^{66}\) See “‘This Strange Institution Called Literature’ An Interview with Jacques Derrida” in Derrida 1992a. This is much more recent than “\textit{Ousia and Grammē}”.

\(^{67}\) A similar moment is found in Karen Barad’s recent work. Talking from the side of feminist science studies, Barad writes about what she calls an “\textit{agential cut} between “subject” and “object”” (emphasis in original, Barad 2007, 140). In Barad’s description, this ‘cut’ comes in, as if in the very ‘act’ of measuring or observing. The cut therefore is a contingent one, even ‘ambiguous’ and still, it is also an ‘agential cut’, as she calls it. It is not inherent, and therefore it comes into being with the “enactment” of the observing “practice” (155). And yet, the cut is not fully produced by the observing agency either, it falls somewhere in-between the object and the observing practices. In this dissertation however, I am cautious about using the term, ‘subject’ and have used ‘intention’ mostly in its stead.
following theses about the notion of the deconstructive trace as it has shaped up in our discussion:

I. The ‘textual’ is like an anamnesis which any act of reading must presuppose to be possible itself, and vice versa (the text must presuppose the act of reading as an anamnesis, or quasi-memory).

II. Therefore the textual comes into being by becoming reading, and reading’s being lies in the ‘being textual’ of it, something akin to the transaction that takes place between ‘spacing’ and ‘timing’. It materializes between the ‘object’ and the ‘subject’ (or ‘agent’), being a definite production of neither, and yet affecting both.

III. If there is one term which (insufficiently) names the im-possibilities of both these ‘exchanges’, records the friction and excess resulting in comparing the incomparable, then that term is ‘trace’. As long as the trace both reserves an extra blow to the inside and also is tied to the inside, we call the work of it, the ‘cut’. It is this cut that makes the anamnesis possible, and therefore cannot itself be totally impossible. Unlike in the last chapters, we propose here that the cut is also grounded, that it cannot escape ontologization. ‘Cut’ in this sense would be both a term similar to ‘trace’, and also a specific staging of the violent erasure of it68.

Conclusion: Representation and ‘Trace’

Let me lay down some implications of our discussion so far, in the context of the conceptual frame of re-presentation.

I. Any concept of representation presupposes a basic distance between the thing and its re-presentation. This distance also ensures a certain survival of the thing beyond its ‘origin’. This repetition already presupposes a machine-like working.

II. A deconstructive reading conceptualizes the origin of the thing as always already divided and concerns itself with the gap, the in-between of repetition. The step of the thing outside itself but repeating itself.

III. In thinking this distance, an *aporia* of space-time is staged. Such an *aporia* indicates a difference-deferral of the sign, named as *différance*. Without this *différance* or the work of the ‘trace’ (again, an inadequate naming which also foregrounds that act and cannot be full *différance*) representation and therefore Being would not take place, would not be ‘given’.

IV. By this logic, presence is also impossible without re-presentation since if presence were full and never differed-deferred then all time and space would have been ‘together’ and there would be no time, space or any-thing. Therefore ironically, presence can come about only as ‘withdrawn’ (refer to chapter two), represented in an indefinite chain of displacements.

V. The work of deconstruction reserves yet another blow for presence (and for itself) by asking, does the trace come as a persistent intrusion fracturing presence in a rhythmic beat or is it itself ‘cut’ at the origin too? Or does it have no origin as long as the origin is a memory produced by a ‘cut’ itself? In other words, if Being is impossible without the staging of the trace then can there be any other materiality than the materiality of the ‘cut’ named as trace?

VI. If the trace itself is also a representation, then are we not plunged into an infinite regression, because then one has to imagine an originary trace, or trace in itself which is represented by the trace at work. Would that not make something akin to a thing-in-itself out of trace and in effect leave no room for naming the trace as something other than ‘thing’ or ‘Being’? Derrida cautions:

> There is no trace *itself*, no *proper* trace. [...] The trace of the trace which *(is)* difference above all could not appear or be named *as such*, that is, in its presence. (Emphasis in original, Derrida, 66)

---

69 In the sense in which Heidegger expounds on the formula, ‘*es gibt Sein*’ (literally, it ‘gives’ being’).
This is a crucial step in the de-ontologization of trace, which tells us that the trace is not something akin to an unit of existence, which really is. Instead, the trace remains at a critical distance from ontology in representing the textuality of ontology in thought. Therefore it would be a fallacy to think of the world as a matrix or architecture made of trace akin to a force-field. And yet, thought cannot totally leave behind the ontological, and so far as it carries the phenomenal, trace might also act as a structure. This trace-structure would then carry the abstraction, or the work of thought into the phenomenal, represent thought to the world in re-presenting the world, as is always the case.70

VII. Is trace different from a sign, or does it refer back to some originary trace?
Derrida seems to say that nothing like an originary trace can be recorded since trace is always already erased, it is that violence of erasure which comes to be as “trace of the trace” of an erasure. Trace is not a thing also because it cannot have an in-itself or ‘proper’ to it. That erasure is recalled each time ‘presencibility’ gives into presencing, as Heidegger might say, ‘unknowingly’. Trace is also a mark of that irreversible loss of a certain memory which is produced only through remembering its erasure. This is the crux of representation as trace.

VII. Trace, and therefore representation is also anthropocentric. That is why one can ‘certainly’, “go further toward naming it in our language” (67). In our language, i.e. human language, or any other language thinkable by the human. Trace, therefore also works inside an anthropocentric closure (other than the closure of metaphysics). But at the same time, as we have been repeating, it would also be a “writing exceeding everything that the history of metaphysics has comprehended” (67). ‘Writing’, therefore becomes exemplary of such a trace, or representation. Anthropocentric thought would always retain this desire to represent itself beyond itself, it is a trace of the anthropos.

70 One may connect this to the Derridian notion of ‘experience’ as trace of an auto-affection. Can that also not be the auto-affection of the trace? Through our discussion we can recognize this auto-affection as an inscription that both ties trace to the phenomenal and makes the phenomenal possible (as structure of experience, which might be taken as a possible trace-structure). See Derrida 1997, 165-166.
VIII. I read the move of making ‘writing’, a graphic inscription, exemplary of trace as Derrida’s insistence in making trace and *différance* always already inflicted by the threat of ontologization. I have looked into this point through a reading of Marx’s ‘sensuous nonsensuous’ as it comes up in Derrida’s reading, and also in Thomas Keenan’s (even if Keenan only thinks of it as a physicality haunted by a force of abstraction, not the reverse). The trace cannot be pure nothingness, radically free of ontology. This deconstructs trace and *différance* and puts deconstruction itself inside the metaphysical closure but without it there will be no closure, or meaning. Meaning would not exist without re-presentation in this sense.

If trace is the vanishing point of presence, then it also is a mark of the event as singularity. It is through trace that the ‘event’ both survives, and never comes to be. This survival is not through matter but through an inscription of materiality. It therefore is both a tendency toward absence, and the most basic manifestation of presence and being. Because of this double nature, trace cannot be generalised as a ‘name’ for an ‘unit’ (or a measure) of either matter or presence. If it is ‘spacing’ then it is not clear if it is a regular spacing, if it is ‘timing’ then it is different from the mechanical rhythm of the clock-time. I think we may follow Derrida to suggest that the regularity of naming the trace as such is also an erasure of an irregularity which always threatens to come, and haunts the ‘name’. In this sense too, trace is not easily generalisable (the generality of its name fails to signify it fully).

In a recent work Anirban Das focuses on ‘singularity’ in its intersection with generality from an evidently deconstructive point of view. Das is specifically thinking of the “infinite array of differences” that not only produce the “sexed bodies” but also interrupt such a mattering through “counter ideological moments” (Das 2010, 105). These moments, both staging and covering the body are the singularities that do not give into the generality of the ‘body’ (or body-particle) and yet bodies come into view only through the generalizing violence performed on them (on singularities), Das argues. It is at this point that the following observation comes about:

Singularities [...] bear a certain relationship akin to family resemblance with generalities. The singularities need the generalities for their enunciations yet
are not reducible to the generalities. One cannot enunciate the singularities without referring to the general. Yet the generality does not exhaust the import of the singular. This is different from the relationship between the universal and the particulars where the latter are instantiations, and as such are assimilable into the universal. (Das, 105-6)

Trace works in such a matrix, where it would indeed be difficult to think of a generality based on the singular trace since there would always be an initial gap. But this gap is also always already filled in by the very naming of the trace as such, as I have mentioned, trace itself is the becoming general of the singular. In this sense the singular cannot even be named, because naming is that erasure which arrests the singular in the form of generality. Theory as such follows the same movement when it produces a name by erasing ... what? A concept? A thing? A singularity? Possibility of articulating an answer to these questions, to echo Derrida, is both opened and closed by language. Das, following the argument quoted above, goes on to examine the Derridian reading of Khora, that space of non-space, or, that (non) space of the name, which is also close to a certain thought of the Geschlecht as a “space of non-discrimination” (Das, 113). We return to a similar search in Chapter Five. For now, it suffices to say that our argument about the trace (together with a concept of re-presentation) is akin to Das’s nuanced understanding of singularity.

In the next chapter I discuss further the ‘trace’, not as a singularity in itself but as a mark of an erasure of singularity, along with the possibility of its return and repetition. A certain quasi-machine like logic comes into play in thinking the singular (the event) and sur-vival (re-presentation) together. Can a repeating machine also make us think about the event? Does the machine act like a structure of intentionality capable of producing a decision, also known as the ‘subject’, or does decision remain always already furrowed by an impossibility of full execution? Is the subject of resistance to be thought as an event or a sur-vival of a signature? Or is it the act that fills the ‘gap’, annulling the aporia? These are the knotty problems to be taken up in the next chapter.