

Presentation Notes

Kir Kuiken

My presentation today focuses on the question of Derrida's relation to the question of translation in Heidegger, specifically, Heidegger's translation of Greek *physis* with "Walten." As we see in seminar 2, Heidegger's displacement of the traditional translation of *physis* by nature, or by growth or "emergence", acts as a kind of focal point through which Derrida stages the problematic of the relation between the beast and the sovereign- the threshold that separates the animal, who has a relation to the world, but not to the world as a whole, to the "as such" of the world that characterizes *Dasein's* being-in-the-world. For Derrida, this entire problematic passes through Heidegger's conception of translation- his restoration of *physis* to its "original" sense as that which reigns *as whole*- the whole of what is. What interests Derrida is what Heidegger's translation authorizes and how it is authorized- later in the text he will call it Heidegger's "force" or decision- a force that cuts the circularity that characterizes the hermeneutic circle and the question of the "path" Heidegger wants to take into the undisclosed essence of meta-physics.

- So- why is the translation of "Walten" so significant? Because, as Derrida puts it on p. 32, what interests him is how the translation of this single word, making Walten a synonym of *physis* (on p.43, Derrida uses the terms *synonyme* "physis and Walten sont synonymes du tout"), in turn inflects Heidegger's entire project: "ma question porte ici sur ce que Heidegger y imprime justement de façon insistante et insolite, mais évidemment explicite et délibérée, au début de séminaire." Derrida's

question- what does Heidegger “imprint” upon the translation of physis by Walten, amounts to asking what authorizes Heidegger’s translation of physis? According to what logic or logos does Heidegger “imprint” physis with the force of a translation, of that which prevails or reigns as autonomous, auto-archic force? The path that Derrida follows in Heidegger- Heidegger’s path- is the path of the closest- “la plus proche.” This proximity or closeness is precisely what justifies Heidegger’s translation: physis as Walten (as reigning or prevailing power) is “closer” to the originary meaning of the word, a claim that Derrida later calls Heidegger’s “coup de force” or “coup de theatre.” Heidegger’s translation, according to Derrida, becomes a theatrics of sovereignty- a self-authorizing gesture that, as Derrida demonstrates throughout the seminar, *must* take place- in order to ground its self-authorization through a prior withdrawal of an originary sense. But this theatrics or coup de force is not grounded on any determined sense. Instead it opens up a relationality- a direction-towards something that does not present itself, but that nonetheless reigns/ prevails etc. and that determines, among other things, the difference which governs the distinction between Dasein and animal in their relation to the world “as such”. Since physis, translated as Walten, is PRIOR to all the distinctions that have gone on to qualify it differently (as nature over and against techne, for example), it will be re-introduced after its translation as the very origin of distinction itself, and relationality itself. It is a pre-opposition that goes beyond biological life, old age, death, history and so on- it is an absolute sovereignty that is neither human nor theological.

-We have seen Derrida comment on this gesture of “bidding up” on sovereignty, on Walten as a kind of super-sovereignty that is nonetheless pre-political in a certain way in his reading of Celan’s Meridian address (in the essay “Majesties”). Celan invokes a poetic majesty, and a certain political sovereignty in Buchner’s Danton’s death, where Lucile’s “long live the king” is taken out of its explicitly political code, and made to mean something else, to gesture towards a sovereignty that attempts to change the very sense or meaning of sovereignty or majesty. There is the majesty of the king, or political power, and there is something otherwise majestic, call it “poetic sovereignty”, for lack of a better term- what Celan calls the majesty of the absurd. In both Heidegger and Celan, then, according to Derrida, there is something that exceeds classical sovereignty, mastery, the appropriation of exceptionality and so on, but that still locates the strangeness of this hyperbolic or pre-political sovereignty “in the same place” as it were, as its classical sense- in the same figure or concept. As Derrida suggests, there is a machine of sovereignty at work- a bidding up that *must* take place since it is part of the very structure of the ipseity of sovereignty itself. The word that Derrida focuses on in his reading of Celan is “gegen-wort” or turning word (which hollows out the gegenwart, the present), but which points once again to the problem of relationality- a turning towards something that resists logical or narrative reconstitution, and becomes a kind of linguistic hinge between two registers, two forms of sovereignty that *share the same space*. Political sovereignty already points beyond itself- which is why Derrida will spend so long discussing the hermenutic circle (and later in seminar 4 the wheel), which involves a return to, and displacement of, the same in

its return. Both Heidegger and Derrida try to think the same in its difference- but their difference between each other turns precisely on the problem of translation.

How does one translate the return to the same AS different?

- Everything has to do with Heidegger's gambit- his decision to turn towards the "proche"- the motif of closeness- his insistence that physis is closer to Walten than Wachsende (closer to prevailing than to growth). This makes it a hinge indeed- one that demonstrates the way in which Heidegger's attempt to translate physis as the dissimulation *proper* to sovereignty, as the "as such" of sovereign violence, ends up re-introducing the very distinctions that Walten is supposed to be "prior" to-- at its very heart. Heidegger repeats a sovereign gesture of decision that, by attempting to liberate Walten from its dissimulation, loses it in the "as such." In other words, if Heidegger's gesture is to go back "behind" the theological-political, to arrest it before its set-up and to prepare for Dasein to be "gripped" in the hold of a pre-political non-theological sovereignty, then Derrida seems to ask- can the translation of physis as Walten remain *itself* in its dissimulation or withdrawal? In his discussion of Heidegger's definition of logos, he focuses on logos as a subtraction of the retreat or withdrawal of Walten- see p. 42/ 46. Logos is that which "amenant le Walten à la parole (le dire puissant, on dirait le performatif auto-authorized qui ici soustrait le Walten à ce qui le cache, à son retrait, à sa Verborgenheit), le libère, ce Walten et cette physis, cette physis comme Walten, de sa Verborgenheit, de son être caché, dissimulé, tu... Dans le logos, la physis, donc, le Walten apparaît comme tel, il se manifeste." The "comme tel" of its self-manifestation is what repeats the entire

crypto-humanism that Derrida unfolds in Heidegger's interpretation of the animal as having no access to the "as such", and therefore as being *weltarm*, poor in world.

-Heidegger's *Walten*, according to Derrida, is an insistence on the closest path, which simultaneously opens up a relation towards an a priori that is inflected by the hyperbolic of *ent-fernung*, (the closer it is, the further, and vice versa). The "comme tel" of this closeness/ proximity and distance or withdrawal characterizes the very being of *Da-sein*, the "there" of its "being-there" or "being-in-the-world."

Derrida at once calls this sovereign decision of Heidegger's translation "unjustifiable", but nonetheless necessary, impossibly necessary, and therefore already improper— already opening itself to errance, and to a repetition of a metaphysical motif par excellence that defines the proper of Man.

- It is at this moment that Derrida opens the question of a subtle "indecision" in the translation by Heidegger, in his sovereign translation of *physis* by *Walten*. Like the *gegenwort* of his reading of Celan, *Walten* acts as a hinge in Derrida's reading as well- the "as such" at once names the "bidding up" of sovereignty- the other-than-classical-sovereignty that we spoke of earlier. But *Walten* also opens itself immediately to a kind of secondary dissimulation. It repeats the sovereign gesture (through translation) of a *Walten* that "as such" names the very re-introduction of its concealment, because *physis* names not just that which reigns or prevails, but that which reigns or prevails AS SUCH: p.43/ 47: *physis ne designe pas seulement ce qui regne ou domine (das Waltende), mais ce qui regne en tant que tel, en tant qu'il regne.*" This NOT JUST, BUT ALSO form of undecidability redoubles the *Walten*, precisely in its moment of being AS SUCH. It is as though, at the moment

when it presents itself “as such”, it loses itself- it loses the border or threshold that separates that which reigns or prevails from that which reigns or prevails AS SUCH. This undecidability (Unentschiedenheit)- Derrida insists, “resembles” the ontological difference- it repeats it, in a certain way, while displacing it.

-This “ambiguity” (Heidegger calls it *Doppeldeutigkeit*, Derrida “l’indécidable”- two different registers), however, is not something that could be resolved. Walten, and Heidegger’s translation, *is* the decision of an undecidable. It is a bidding up on sovereignty that immediately opens itself up to its repetition in a return of the same, but in a return whose “meaning” remains strictly undecidable: *either* a repetition of the same, *or* its displacement, *or both* a repetition of the same, *and* its displacement. One might be able to translate an ambiguity, but how does one translate an undecidability? It is precisely such a question that Derrida poses of Heidegger.

-The seminar is therefore linking together Heidegger’s translation of Walten and the question of sovereign decision. Heidegger’s unjustifiable coup de theatre reconfirms the privilege of the question of the meaning of Being for Dasein as a unique relation to the “a such” of the ontological difference. Heidegger’s translation of physis by Walten, then, is an attempt to name more closely, “plus proche”, that which dissimulates the undecidability of the ontological difference- between Being and being, sovereignty and the bidding up on sovereignty that is part of its ipseity. When Derrida’s turns to the question of translation in Heidegger it is not merely to suggest that he mistranslates, or tries to restore an original meaning that does not exist, but that the particular form of his gesture of translation, his attempt to

translate the “as such” of a difference prior to classical sovereignty, can only do so by imitating a sovereign decision, an unjustifiable decision on the undecidable, that has its condition in a force (Walten) that grips him in advance, but that remains irreducible to that decision, that does not fundamentally orient him “as such.”

- This is perhaps why Derrida goes on to focus on the untranslatable phrase “on en sait trop rien” (we don’t know too much –nothing— about it). He returns us back to the hermeneutic circle prior to Heidegger’s decision in order to revisit once again the question of decision itself, of a relation to the return to the same as the return to ontological difference. He returns back to a Walten that remains undecidable- but that already chooses other paths, ones that will perhaps call into question the “as such” itself, (or as such). If Walten is not a being- does the “as such” belong to its structure? How does one translate this non “as such”? Can it be translated except through the imitation of a sovereign decision? What does this decision imply not just for translation, but for the question of sovereignty? If Derrida throughout the seminar shows us multiple and multiplying archi-originary violences that bisect and traverse Heidegger’s translation of pre-political sovereignty, does his own gesture repeat and displace that translation? I end with these questions.