

FOOTNOTES

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Abstract

This essay takes the form of footnotes to a non-existent text and limps through a number of questions of feet and legs and shoes and paths and routes, in relation to the work of Jacques Derrida and Martin Heidegger. Predictably enough it stumbles over Heidegger's engagement with Van Gogh's peasant shoes, Meyer Schapiro's critique of that engagement and Derrida's polylogue, 'Restitutions' on the encounter between Heidegger and Schapiro. In the end it comes down to Heidegger's errancy and his own failure or stumbling in relation to the other.

Keywords: Derrida, Heidegger, Van Gogh, Shoes, Feet, Paths.

FOOTNOTES

¹Jacques Derrida suggests - in a footnote - that 'The deconstruction of the end and of man takes place in the *margins* of philosophy, in titles and footnotes'¹.

²Derrida asks 'Is every footnote a little Oedipal? In pure a propos logic, is not a footnote a symptomatic swelling, the swollen foot of a text hindered in its step-by-step advance?'².

³The Jan Hus Foundation was set up by Oxford philosophers in response to a letter from a dissident Czech philosopher, Julius Tomin, who had been holding 'home seminars' in his apartment. Tomin named his unofficial teaching arrangement the Jan Patočka University to remember the Czech philosopher Patočka's violent death in 1977 at the hands of the Czech secret police. Patočka had been one of the main signatories of Charter 77, the document that demanded that Czechoslovakia honour its supposed commitments to human rights.

⁴Derrida became involved with the French branch of the Foundation, and in 1981 went to Prague to give some seminars. As he was about to fly back to France he was arrested on charges of drug smuggling, and thrown into jail. Earlier in his visit he had visited the grave of Franz Kafka, whose work he greatly admired. Now it appeared that he was embroiled in a paradigmatically Kafkaesque situation. Perhaps the experience of helplessness in relation to an opaque and unreasonable legal and political system helped inspire his reading of Kafka's short story 'Before the Law', the first presentation of which he gave the year after his arrest in Prague. The visit to Prague may have also informed his scrupulous reading of one of Jan Patočka's 'heretical essays' which forms a large part of his 1992, *Donner la Mort*, translated as *The Gift of Death*.

Perhaps more trivially his experience of prison may have also found its way into his later work. Barbara Day, in her account of his arrest in her book on the Jan Hus Foundation,

describes him being asked to choose some shoes to wear from a pile, and realising once he had done so, that he chosen two left shoes. Though Day does not point this out, this echoes his suggestion in his essay 'Restitutions' that we cannot know that the shoes in Van Gogh's painting are a pair, and indeed may be two left shoes³.

⁵Legs, feet, shoes, pace, gait, paths (*hodos*) are constantly leaving their mark or trace in Derrida's work. For example, taking his cue from Blanchot, he frequently invokes the undecidability of the French word '*pas*', which, in English, can mean both 'not' and 'step'. Derrida's untranslatable phrase '*pas sans pas*' can mean both the forbidding of further movement and a step beyond. One way of putting it maybe that the step neither is nor is not.

⁶In September, 1969, shortly after the Moon landing, the novelist Philippe Sollers wrote an appreciation of his friend Jacques Derrida's work in the *Times Literary Supplement*. He entitled 'A Step on the Moon', and he explains his title by way of Egyptian mythology, in which the Moon was created by the Sun God to replace him during the night, in the form of Thoth, the God of writing, and thus, as far as speech is concerned, 'the elusive, impalpable figuration of replacement of usurpation'. Thus if the Sun is 'the logos, word, reason, life, wealth, father', the 'dead Moon' is that 'whose function is reflection only; that rocky mirror whose feminine, hidden face... could only come near, could only be walked on – violated – now and in the perspective of the future'. Sollers points out that the Chinese for literature, 'wen' also means 'lines, veins, (in stone or wood), constellations, marks of bird's feet, tattoos, designs on reptile shells'. When Armstrong made the first step on the Moon, it is equivalent to Derrida's step on or advance towards writing⁴.

⁷In *Erring*, the first book to engage with the theological implications of Derrida's work, Mark C Taylor suggests that

deconstructive writing is always paradoxical, double, duplicitous, eccentric, improper ... errant. Calling into question the very notion of propriety the language of deconstruction can possess no final or proper meaning. It remains transitional. Its words cannot be completely fixed, mastered, or captured in the net of either/or. Forever wavering and wandering, deconstruction is (re)inscribed betwixt 'n' between the opposites it inverts, perverts, and subverts. ⁵

Taylor parses the origins of the word 'err', one of the roots of which is Latin 'iterare' to journey or travel, which is also the root of Derrida's 'iterable'.

⁸In *Of Grammatology* Derrida suggests that we think of

writing as the possibility of the road and of difference, the history of writing and the history of the road, of the rupture, of the *via rupta*, of the path that is broken, beaten, *fracta*, of the space of reversibility and of repetition traced by the opening, the divergence from, and the violent spacing, of nature, of the natural, savage, salvage, forest. The *silva* is savage, the *via rupta* is written, discerned, and inscribed violently as difference, as form imposed on the hyle, in the forest, in wood as matter. ⁶

⁹The image of the foot and the footprint is indeed apt for Derrida, given his invocation of the trace, which in French, as Gayatri ChakravortySpivak points out, in the introduction to her English translation of *Of Grammatology*, 'carries strong implications of track, footprint, imprint' and is 'a word that cannot be a master-word, that presents itself as the mark of an anterior presence, origin, master'⁷.

¹⁰Peter Benson suggests that

A 'trace' is a mark remaining after the moment of its inscription. In French, the word 'trace' also carries as one of its connotations the idea of a trail left by an animal that a hunter might follow. These footprints or flattened foliage indicate the animal (the

producer of the *grammè*) that has now passed; they remain there whether the hunter (the receiver of the *grammè*) arrives on the scene or not; and it is always possible that their significance may fail to be read (by an inexperienced tracker). So the trail, like the *grammè*, conjures forth what is absent (producer, receiver, message). This is a striking quality for any entity to have. In general, things are what they are, and nothing else – self-contained elements of existence. But a *grammè* (once it's recognised as being a *grammè*) also brings with it the shadows of things it is not.⁸

¹¹'Freud's Legacy' is one of the essays at the end of Derrida's *The Post Card*. In French this is 'Le Legs de Freud', and 'the wild cross-lingual pun', as Marion Hobson calls it, on the English word 'legs' is intentional⁹. As the translator of *The Post Card* puts it, in, yes, a footnote. 'The bilingual pun - legs, legacy-is at work throughout. It is related to Derrida's analysis of the rhetoric of *Beyond...* Freud's repeated gesture of taking another step forward that goes nowhere, the rhetoric of the atthesis'¹⁰.

¹²In the essay, writing about Freud's essay on the pleasure principle and the rhythm of Ernst Freud's '*Fort/da*' game, Derrida writes that

if one attempts to make oneself attentive to the original modality of the "speculative," and to the singular proceeding [*démarche*] of this writing, its *pas de thèse* which advances without advancing, without advancing itself, without ever advancing anything that it does not immediately take back, for the time of a detour, without ever positing anything which remains in its position, then one must recognize that the following chapter repeats, in place and in another place, the immobile emplacement of the *pas de thèse*. It repeats itself, it illustrates only the repetition of that very thing (the absolute authority of the PP) which finally will not let anything be done without it (him), except repetition itself.¹¹

¹³Derrida invokes the act of walking in that the ‘normal step has to bear equilibrium, within itself, in order to carry itself forward, in order to have itself followed by another one, the same again, that is a step, and so that the other comes back, amounts to the same, but as other’. Thus ‘limping has to be the very rhythm of the march’¹². This limping is a reference to the last lines of Freud’s essay, a quotation from the poet Ruckert: ‘Whatever we cannot achieve on the wing, we have to achieve at a patient limp... Scripture tells us clear enough: it was never a sin to limp’¹³.

This limping rhythm describes Freud’s text, his method (*hodos* – path), of argumentation, but also the *démarche* of life itself. As Marian Hobson puts it.

The text limps (as the devil, incarnation of negativity, is supposed to), but so too does the living organism which at each set of points, changes very slightly in direction. It is *via*, way, detour from the nothing before birth to the nothingness that is death, but the way, with its filamentary structure, its walks between nodal points, is created out of a deferring of death, a ‘living on’, to quote one of Derrida's titles. The identity of an organism is not homogeneity, but one of trajectory, where there is not a distinction between transiting object and route traced, but instead a destabilizing self-replication, which, by repeating the self, relays the self:¹⁴

¹⁴In his seminar *Life Death* from 1975 and 1976 Derrida discusses how Heidegger, in his great work on Nietzsche ‘at every instant... plays a game of *fort/da* with him, throwing him back into metaphysics, taking him back beyond metaphysics, *fort/da*, or else affirming in him a certain beyond of metaphysics (*fort* this time, positively valued) and then taking him back into metaphysics (*da*)’¹⁵.

¹⁵The connection between uprightness and writing is reflected in Derrida’s interest in the figure of the Mime, who stands and gestures.

There is no imitation. The Mime imitates nothing. And to begin with, he doesn't imitate. There is nothing prior to the writing of his gestures. Nothing is prescribed for him. No present has preceded or supervised the tracing of his writing. His movements form a figure that no speech anticipates or accompanies.¹⁶

The 'Mime follows no pre-established script'. However that does not mean he 'improvises or lets himself go spontaneously: he simply does not obey any verbal order. His gestures, his gestural writing (and Mallarme's insistence on describing the regulated gesture of dance or pantomime as a hieroglyphic inscription is legendary), are not dictated by any verbal discourse or imposed by any diction. The Mime inaugurates; he breaks into a white page'¹⁷.

However, this should not lead us to make the mistake of thinking that by imitating nothing the Mime somehow reveals truth in the Heideggerean sense of *aletheia*, unveiling. To the contrary there is mimicry.

We are faced then with mimicry imitating nothing; faced, so to speak, with a double that doubles no simple, a double that nothing anticipates, nothing at least that is not itself already double. There is no simple reference. It is in this that the mime's operation does allude, but alludes to nothing, alludes without breaking the mirror, without reaching beyond the looking-glass.¹⁸

Thus 'it is a difference without reference, or rather a reference without a referent, without any first or last unit, a ghost that is the phantom of no flesh, wandering about without a past, without any death, birth, or presence'¹⁹

¹⁶In his address to Columbia University, published as 'Mochlos: or the conflict of the faculties' Derrida examines Kant's idea of how a university should be organised. He ends the essay by alluding to Kant's famous essay on orientation in thinking and then shifts to an image of walking, feet and shoes to suggest that, for Kant, 'the university will have to go on

two feet, left and right, each foot having to support the other as it rises with each step to make the leap. It involves walking on two feet, two feet with shoes, since it turns on an institution, on a society and culture, not just on nature'²⁰.

Derrida then refers to a previous talk he had given at Columbia, asking to be forgiven 'this rather rapid and brutal leap', 'on the subject of certain shoes in Van Gogh. This was concerned, in the first place, with the Heideggerian interpretation of that 1935 painting, and with knowing whether those two shoes made a pair, or two left shoes, or two right shoes, the elaboration of this question having always seemed to me one of greatest consequence' (ibid).

Here Derrida is referring to the essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art' by Martin Heidegger, who drafted the text between 1935 and 1937, reworking it for publication in 1950 and again in 1960. Heidegger based his essay on a series of lectures he had previously delivered in Zurich and Frankfurt during the 1930s, first on the essence of the work of art and then on the question of the meaning of a 'thing', marking the philosopher's first lectures on the notion of art. Heidegger starts the essay by explaining what he means by the 'origin' of the work of art, which means the source of its nature (not its beginning or start). The work of art is originated by the artist, and is also the origin of the artist (i.e. the artist is the artist by virtue of having produced a work of art). Both are (exist) by virtue of a third thing, 'art'. But 'art' does not correspond to anything real; It is the name we give to what makes a work of art art, and thus what makes the artist an artist²¹.

We can only recognise a work of art through knowing the nature of 'art'. But we can only infer what art is in the first place by reference to actual works of art. So we therefore are in a 'hermeneutic circle'. For Heidegger this is not actually a bad thing, and is the very basis of 'thinking as a craft'²². So Heidegger suggests we look at actual works of art, to see if we can find out what makes them art. Works of art are 'things', but this is not how they are to be understood. In short Heidegger's analysis works through a distinction between mere things,

equipment, works of art, and how our understanding of all these are governed by the shift between Greek understanding of the thing in terms of *hupokeimonon*, the core of the thing, and *ta sumbebekota*, that which always occurs along with it, which gets translated into Latin as *subjectum*, and *accidens*, which then translates as ‘subject’ and ‘accident’²³. For Heidegger this translation represents a loss of the Greek understanding, and the beginnings of the Western conception of the thing as a subject with its accidents, as represented in the structure of Western grammar, as in, the block of granite *is* ‘hard, heavy, extended, massive, unformed, rough, colored, partly dull, partly shiny’. For Heidegger this becomes the source of the aesthetic understanding of phenomena, in which we define things in terms of what is perceptible by our senses, ie hardness, heaviness, extension etc...²⁴

In order to properly understand the thingliness of things, we need to first understand the equipmentality of equipment. For this Heidegger now brings in his most famous invocation of a work of art, a painting by Vincent van Gogh, not yet to discuss the work of art itself, but what it represents, a pair of peasant shoes (or what he thinks is pair of peasant shoes). Very importantly, nowhere in the essay does he state explicitly which Van Gogh painting of shoes he was referring to, though in later correspondence with Meyer Schapiro he indicates that what he says is based on a particular painting. However this is not art history or analysis. Heidegger is not interested in Van Gogh’s painting as an art- historical artefact, but rather as exemplary of his idea of the work of art

Heidegger asks is there a lot to see here? We know what shoes are made of, which differs depending on how they are to be used, but that is not what the painting gives us. Rather it reveals the equipmentality of equipment. But we can only understand the equipmentality of equipment if we understand it in use, in this case, according to Heidegger, their being worn by the peasant woman in the field. We cannot apparently tell this from the painting itself,

which gives no explicit clue to this or any use²⁵. This is Heidegger's extraordinary gloss on the painting.

From out of the dark opening of the well-worn insides of the shoes the toil of the worker's tread stares forth. In the crudely solid heaviness of the shoes accumulates the tenacity of the slow trudge through the far-stretching and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lies the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. The shoes vibrate with the silent call of the earth, its silent gift of the ripening grain, its unexplained self-refusal in the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, wordless joy at having once more withstood want, trembling before the impending birth, and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth and finds protection in the world of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.²⁶

It is only in the picture that the things that Heidegger sees in the shoes are revealed. The peasant woman merely wears the shoes. For her they are 'ready- to-hand' rather than 'being-at-hand'. World and earth exist for her only in the usefulness and reliability of the shoes as 'equipment'. According to Heidegger Van Gogh's painting revealed to us something about the equipmentality of the shoes as equipment, much more than would, say, a 'description and explanation of a pair of shoes actually present. Not through a report on the process of shoemaking. And not through the observation of the actual use of shoes as it occurs here and there'²⁷. 'The artwork let us know what the shoes, in truth, are'²⁸. 'Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, in truth is. This being steps forward into the unconcealment of its being'²⁹. Here Heidegger goes back to the Greek word

for truth, *aletheia*. This is part of his critique of Western, metaphysical conceptions of the truth as ‘correspondance’, ‘*adequatio*’.

In the Work of Art essay Heidegger gives us an the image of the ‘*lichtung*’, the clearing in the woods, in which being comes into view.

In the midst of beings as a whole an open place comes to presence. There is a clearing. Thought from out of beings, it is more in being than is the being. This open center is, therefore, not surrounded by beings. Rather, this illuminating center itself encircles all beings - like the nothing that we scarcely know³⁰.

¹⁷Heidegger loved walking in the Black Forest, near his famous hut, and walking imagery pervades his work, without him ever addressing walking directly. The Work of Art essay was first published in his 1950 book *Holzwege*, recently translated into English as *Off The Beaten Track*. *Holzwege* are woodcutters' paths in the woods. In German these are colloquially used to refer to paths that lead nowhere and which we follow in vain. For Heidegger, following such paths that are not obviously on the way to a pregiven destination is what thinking is.

¹⁸In the end, for Heidegger, it seems to come back to feet, and shoes, and walking. As Derrida puts it, writing about the Work of Art essay ‘There is the insistence on questioning thought as “*Weg*,” as road or as traveling. It regulates everything in Heidegger. It is difficult and we should have to put it in accord with the “subject” which is occupying us in its proper place, with its countryside, its peasantry, its “world,” and this “thing” which is neither of the ground nor of the peasant but between them, the shoes’³¹. Ernst Junger suggested that the forest was Heidegger’s home: There he is at home – on untrodden ways, on timber tracks’³². Heidegger himself saw his philosophy as paths rather than works, which was the motto of *Gesamtausgabe*, or collected works.

¹⁹In the 1930s Heidegger was repudiating what he saw as the mistakes in *Being and Time* and looking for a more grandiose responsibility for philosophy, that of founding a new state, based on a people rooted in a particular place, a particular soil. In his 1933/1934 seminars on nature, history, state, he singles the rootless Jew, the nomadic semite as being particularly responsible for the machinations and calculativeness of modernity.

History teaches us that nomads have not only been made nomadic by the desolation of wastelands and steppes, but they have also often left wastelands behind them where they found fruitful and cultivated land—and that human beings who are rooted in the soil have known how to make a home for themselves even in the wilderness.

Relatedness to space, that is, the mastering of space and becoming marked by space, belong together with the essence and the kind of Being of a people. So it is not right to see the sole ideal for a people in rootedness in the soil, in attachment, in settledness, which find their cultivation and realization in farming and which give the people a special endurance in its propagation, in its growth, in its health. It is no less necessary to rule over the soil and space, to work outwards into the wider expanse, to interact with the outside world. The concrete way in which a people effectively works in space and forms space necessarily includes both: rootedness in the soil and interaction.³³

His antipathy towards those not grounded in state and soil is much more explicit in *The Black Notebooks*. This is from *Ponderings XV*.

World-Judaism, incited by the emigrants allowed out of Germany, cannot be held fast anywhere and, with all its developed power, does not need to participate anywhere in the activities of war, whereas all that remains to us the sacrifice of the best blood of the best of our own people.³⁴

As Peter Trawny points out Heidegger's thought is bound up with errancy, and all the ambulatory and mobile ideas that invokes. Heidegger proclaimed that 'he who thinks greatly must also err greatly', and as Trawny suggests, Heidegger's thought did indeed err, fall into error, become errant, lose its way or path³⁵.

²⁰In the late 1960s the (Jewish) art historian Meyer Schapiro attacked Heidegger's analysis of the shoes in van Gogh's painting, and suggested that they were instead those of a nomadic city dweller, in fact van Gogh's. This was in some senses an attack on the implicitly Fascist element in Heidegger's arguably highly romanticised understanding of van Gogh's shoes, as to do with 'soil', a key Nazi term. As Schapiro puts it 'a moving set of associations with peasants and the soil, which are not sustained by the picture itself but are grounded rather in his own social outlook with its heavy pathos of the primordial and earthy'³⁶. Schapiro compares Van Gogh's feeling for shoes with a passage in Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger*, in which the protagonist looks at his own shoes. 'As I had never seen my shoes before, I set myself to study their looks, their characteristics, and when I stir my foot, their shapes and their worn uppers. I discover that their creases and white seams give them expression—impart a physiognomy to them. Something of my own nature had gone over into these shoes; they affected me, like a ghost of my other I—a breathing portion of my very self'³⁷. Schapiro suggests that this is what motivated Van Gogh to paint his own shoes.

In isolating his own worn shoes on a canvas, he turns them to the spectator; he makes of them a piece from a self-portrait, that part of the costume with which we tread the earth and in which we locate the strains of movement, fatigue, pressure, heaviness—the burden of the erect body in its contact with the ground. They mark our inescapable position on the earth. To 'be in someone's shoes' is to be in his predicament or his station in life. For a painter to represent his worn shoes as the main subject of a picture is for him to express a concern with the fatalities of his social being. Not the

shoes as an instrument of use, though the landscape painter as a worker in the fields shares something of the peasant's life outdoors, but the shoes as 'a portion of the self' (in Hamsun's words) are van Gogh's revealing theme.³⁸

In a later essay, 'Further Notes on Heidegger and Van Gogh' Schapiro quotes from a letter from Flaubert to Louise Colet, which he suggests Van Gogh may have been able to read, in which Flaubert suggests that there is something melancholy in the sight of a pair of old shoes, when 'you think of all the steps you have taken in them to only God knows where, of all the grass you have trodden, all the mud you have collected'³⁹. He links Van Gogh's paintings of shoes to his remarks in conversation about 'the idea of the shoe as a symbol of his life-long practice of walking, and an ideal of life as a pilgrimage, a perpetual change of experience'⁴⁰. Ursula Franklin describes Schapiro, who had to leave Germany for America on account of the Nazis, as a 'wandering Jew' whom she contrasts with Heidegger, a 'heimatliche Schwarzwaldler'⁴¹.

²¹A friend points out that in the legend of the wandering Jew, he is often described as a shoemaker.

²²In 1967 the poet Paul Celan visited Heidegger in his mountain hut in Todtnauberg. Celan was greatly influenced by Heidegger's thought and, as a Jew, agonised by his failure to explain or apologise for his involvement with Nazism. This meeting has been much discussed and debated as has the poem Celan wrote as a consequence. I don't wish to add to this literature other than to point to the last five lines.

die halb-
beschrittenen Knüppel-
pfade im Hochmoor,

Feuchtes,

viel. (Celan, 1996, 300)

In Michael Hamburger's translation

the half-

trodden

walks over the high moors,

dampness,

much⁴²

Pierre Joris glosses this as follows:

two men, insisting on their singularity, on their separateness, are walking along...

And where do they walk? They walk on '*halb-/beschrittenen Knüppel-/Pfad*.'

'half-trod log-trails', literally on 'paths made of wood' - the German *Holzwege*, which

refers to a path in a forest, but also, in common parlance, to a dead-end, to a mistaken

route, and is, of course, the title of a well-known book by Heidegger. Celan is too

subtle to use Heidegger's word, and his 'log-paths' complexify the image further as

Knüppel - the German word means both 'logs' and 'rods' - are also used as weapons

to beat people, prisoners, etc...⁴³

²³Derrida's great essay on Heidegger's work of art essay and Schapiro's response to it,

'Restitutions', takes the form of a polylogue of N+1 female voices. One of the voices argues

that both Heidegger and Schapiro are still bound up in a metaphysics of realism in which the

subject of a painting must represent something real out there. Throughout the essay Derrida

plays on images of laces and unlacing and continually returns to the question of whether the

shoes are a pair, as both Heidegger and Schapiro clearly presume. The idea of the shoes as a

pair mirrors a pairing of a correspondence between Martin Heidegger and Meyer Schapiro. Shoes become, in a sense, are the ground of culture.

More strictly, the pair of shoes and even, to limit oneself to what supports the base of the feet above the ground-of towns or fields, it makes little difference-the pair of soles. Its external, and thus lower, surface goes lowest and that's what I think I've never talked about. It is lower than the foot.⁴⁴

Derrida even questions whether the shoes in the painting are actually a pair, and compares the need to see them as such to the pairing of the two professor, one on the right and the other on the left.

It's certainly a question of feet and of many other things, always supposing that feet are something, and something identifiable with itself. Without even looking elsewhere or further back, restitution reestablishes in rights or property by placing the subject upright again, in its stance, in its institution. 'The erect body,' writes Schapiro [sic].⁴⁵

The voice in 'Restitutions' that sounds most like Derrida continues, a little later that he has always dealt with questions of walking, *la marche*, the mark, margins, and pas, which is both 'step' and 'not'. 'Did I talk about feet then? I'm not sure (I'll have to look); nor am I sure of having talked, that's the word, of walking, namely, closest to the ground, the lowest degree, the most subjective or underlying level of what's called culture or the institution, the shoe, More strictly, the pair of shoes.'⁴⁶

The shoes are 'subject-shoes (support destined to bear their wearer on the ground, of towns or fields, support which would here figure the first substratum, unless the wearer put them to a use other than that of walking, in which case the word "use" would, according to some, run the risk of perversion) but itself the subject of a canvas which in turn constitutes its subject or framed support'. Derrida suggests that it is 'double subject (shoes in painting) that the two

litigants want to see restituted to the true subject: the peasant man or woman on the one side, the city-dwelling painter on the other'. As subject-shoes they invoke Heidegger's discussion of the subject and its Greek origins in the Work of Art essay. The 'question of the underneath as ground, earth, then as sole, shoes, sock-stockings-foot, etc., cannot be foreign to the "great question" of the thing as *hypokeimenon*, then as *subjectum*'⁴⁷.

²⁴At one point in 'Restitutions' one of the interlocutors suggests that 'Everything points to a desire to speak the truth about the fetish. Will we take the risk of trying to do so here?'. The names of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud are invoked, the last in particular

who speaks more strictly of the fetishism of the shoe. In the first part, or the first movement, of his 1927 essay on Fetishism. The genealogy which he proposed at that time for the fetish (as a substitute for the woman's or the mother's phallus) also, according to him, accounts for the privilege accorded the foot or shoe - the shoes or the shoe? - the shoe. This preference, according to Freud, hangs on the fact that in the terrifying experience he has had of what he lives as his mother's "castration," the "boy" looked "from below." Slowly, he raised his eyes. From the ground.⁴⁸

According to Freud 'the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish - or a part of it - to the circumstance that the inquisitive boy peered at the woman's genitals from below, from her legs up'. Thus, in Derrida's words, 'shoe, as compromise or reassuring substitute, would thus be a "form" of prosthesis, but always as a penis and a woman's penis. Detachable and reattachable'⁴⁹.

²⁵At the very beginning of 'Restitutions', the first voice suggests, '- And yet. Who said-I can't remember-"there are no ghosts in Van Gogh's pictures"? Well, we've got a ghost story on our hands here all right'⁵⁰. Returning to the question of van Gogh's shoes, and the desire to attribute them to their rightful owner, Derrida asks

if it's a question of knowing what ghost's step, city dweller or peasant, still comes to haunt them... if it's a question of knowing whether the shoes in question are haunted by some ghost or are ghosting/returning itself (but then what are, who are in truth, and whose and what's, these things?) . In short, what does it all come down to? To whom? To whom and to what are we to retribute, to reattach, to readjust precisely. ⁵¹

He continues to ask

Can a ghost be attributed? Can one say 'the ghost-of,' if one can't say the shoes of? There is no distributive justice for this tribute. The shoes are always open to the unconscious of the other. Rented out, according to an other topic or the topic of another. Rented out, in a cutprice sale, up for auction, being gambled-for, to be taken however you can, but never to be possessed, still less to be kept. You can only give them back [*rendre*] if you think you have them, and you can only think you're giving them if you haven't got them. ⁵²

Later on one of the voices invokes the chilling image of the shoes abandoned by the victims of the Shoah.

But an army of ghosts are demanding their shoes. Ghosts up in arms, an immense tide of deportees searching for their names. If you want to go to this theatre, here's the road of affect: the bottomless memory of a dispossession, an expropriation, a despoilment. And there are tons of shoes piled up there, pairs mixed up and lost. ⁵³

²⁶As Jeffrey Feldman points out in his essay 'The Holocaust Shoe: Untying Memory: Shoes as Holocaust Memorial Devices' from the book *Jews and Shoes*, edited by Eda Nahshon, the pile of shoes expropriated from the victims of the Shoah has become such a metonym of that catastrophe that it runs the risk of becoming a kind of fetish⁵⁴. However he traces one origin of this image to Adolf Eichmann's trial in 1960. Heidegger's erstwhile lover Hannah Arendt

attended the trial. Her account, published as *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, famously and controversially analyses Eichmann in terms of the ‘banality of evil’ and his inability, in terms not used by Arendt herself, of being imagine himself in someone else’s shoes⁵⁵. Arendt’s attempts to cast Eichmann as a dull functionary rather than as an antisemitic psychopath echoes her refusal to condemn Heidegger’s Nazism in the essay she wrote for his 80th birthday.

The pathways may safely be called *Holzwege*, wood-paths (after the title of a collection of essays from the years 1935-1946), which, just because they lead nowhere outside the wood and ‘abruptly leave off in the untrodden,’ are incomparably more agreeable to him who loves the wood and feels at home in it than the carefully laid out problem-streets on which scurry the investigations of philosophical specialists and historians of ideas. The metaphor of “wood-paths” hits upon something essential—not, as one may at first think, that someone has gotten onto a dead-end trail, but rather that someone, like the woodcutter whose occupation lies in the woods, treads paths that he has himself beaten; and clearing the path belongs no less to his line of work than felling trees.⁵⁶

Having written of the *holzwege* and the ‘thought paths’ he forged that enabled the collapse of traditional metaphysics she compares him to Thales of Miletus, whose stumble while looking at the stars made the Thracian maid laugh. His embrace of Nazism is dismissed on the grounds that he was still young enough to learn from the shock of the collision, which ‘after ten short hectic months thirty-seven years ago drove him back to his residence, and to settle in his thinking what he had experienced’⁵⁷.

²⁷At the trial after the psychologist Adolf Avraham Berman described seeing the Treblinka concentration camp ‘covered in bones and skulls, and nearby tens upon tens of thousands of shoes, many of them children’s shoes’, the Israeli Attorney General Gideon Hausner

unwrapped a package containing a single worn pair of children's shoes to conclude the testimony. Berman had brought 'it as a very precious thing, because I knew that over a million of such little shoes, scattered over all the fields of death, could very easily be found'⁵⁸. Pearlman continues his account of the trial.

... no one who attended the sessions that day will ever forget the sight of these two tiny tot's shoes, held aloft in the Jerusalem courtroom. For seemingly endless seconds, we were gripped by the spell cast by this symbol of all that was left of a million children. Time stood still, while each in his own way tried to fit flesh to the shoes, multiply by a million and spin the reel back from death, terror and tears to the music and gay laughter and the animated joy of youngsters in European city and village before the Nazis moved in.⁵⁹

²⁸Derrida returns to Heidegger and feet in the second session of the last seminar he gave in 2002 to 2003, on the Beast and Sovereign. He starts that session rather archly; 'Without wishing to retrace my steps (long pause), without wishing to retrace my steps (long pause) and recall all the readings via which we turned around...' ⁶⁰. Following this he pursues the 'question of the path' in Heidegger, in particular the path of philosophy, the '*hodos*' in '*methodos*' ⁶¹. Derrida sees philosophy as a closed circle or as an island, separated off from science, art or religion, in which one 'goes around in circles, either circularly or specularly, one is sent back to oneself, to one's own point of departure, one steps in one's own footprint, one goes round in circles as on an island' ⁶². For Derrida the question of where to go always involves a decision, which

always to come down to a path to be taken, or a track [*une trace*] to be followed along a path to be determined. To decide is to decide on a direction, on a sense in the topographical sense of orientation. Such at least is the dominant trope or figure. Where to go? Where to take oneself? How to orient one's step? That is the form of

every question concerning a decision, a decision to be taken. Where to go? Where to take oneself? Am I going to go there or not, here or there? What is the best path?⁶³

However 'there is decision only where, at first, one does not know where to go'⁶⁴.

Derrida compares Heidegger to Robinson Crusoe, and goes so far as to call him Heidegger-Robinson, suggesting he is alone and sovereign on his island of philosophy. Above all this island has 'No trace of woman. [*Pas trace de femme.*] ... no woman. No trace of woman's step. [*Pas de trace de pas de femme*] That's sovereignty, that's solitary and exceptional sovereignty: slave, animal, and no woman. No desire to come along and limit sovereignty'⁶⁵. It is a 'little as though there were some secret contract between sovereign euphoria, paradisiacal euphoria, and the absence of women, of the other as woman, even the desire of or for the other woman, the other as woman'⁶⁶. When women do appear in Robinson Crusoe, death is there, waiting. 'The other woman is always death'⁶⁷

Now, to begin to cross the paths of Robinson and Heidegger in the most improbable places, you will have noticed (if, as I hope, you have reread Robinson Crusoe) that he is always looking for, or breaking, paths on his island. He tries to get his bearings [*s'orienter*]. He tries to decide, to come to a decision as to the best path. His island is an isolated world within the world, and we see him, and he constantly shows himself, solitary in this insularity, constantly in the process of deciding as to the best path, given that he has no map, neither a map of the world nor above all a map of the island.⁶⁸

²⁹It is in this tracking that Crusoe makes the discovery that leaves him thunder-struck, the footprint that may be his or may be that of another.

It happened one day, about noon, going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen on

the sand. I stood like one thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an apparition. I listened, I looked round me, but I could hear nothing, nor see anything; I went up to a rising ground to look farther; I went up the shore and down the shore, but it was all one; I could see no other impression but that one. I went to it again to see if there were any more, and to observe if it might not be my fancy; but there was no room for that, for there was exactly the print of a foot—toes, heel, and every part of a foot. How it came thither I knew not, nor could I in the least imagine; but after innumerable fluttering thoughts, like a man perfectly confused and out of myself, I came home to my fortification, not feeling, as we say, the ground I went on, but terrified to the last degree, looking behind me at every two or three steps, mistaking every bush and tree, and fancying every stump at a distance to be a man. Nor is it possible to describe how many various shapes my affrighted imagination represented things to me in, how many wild ideas were found every moment in my fancy, and what strange, unaccountable whimsies came into my thoughts by the way.⁶⁹

³⁰For Derrida the footprint, which may be the trace of the other or Crusoe's own returning, revenance, haunting, in the sight of which Crusoe retreats to his 'Castle', is the entry of death into his sovereign seclusion. He does not know if it is the trace of another, or of his own foot, haunting him.

Is it me? Is it my track? Is it my path? Is it the specter of my print, the print of my specter? Am I coming back? Am I or am I not returning? Am I a revenant of myself that I cross on my path like the trace of the other, on a path that is already a return path or a path of revenance, etc?⁷⁰

As Derrida puts it, anticipating his own death, the trace of the other is death: 'I run toward death, I hurry toward death and death comes to meet me just as fast. (I run at death, I run to

death and death comes upon me, chance death encounter seizes me, catches me or catches up with me just as fast, as soon.)⁷¹.

³¹One of the first things Robinson Crusoe makes on his island is an umbrella

I spent a great deal of time and pains to make an umbrella; I was, indeed, in great want of one, and had a great mind to make one; I had seen them made in the Brazils, where they are very useful in the great heats there, and I felt the heats every jot as great here, and greater too, being nearer the equinox; besides, as I was obliged to be much abroad, it was a most useful thing to me, as well for the rains as the heats. I took a world of pains with it, and was a great while before I could make anything likely to hold: nay, after I had thought I had hit the way, I spoiled two or three before I made one to my mind: but at last I made one that answered indifferently well: the main difficulty I found was to make it let down. I could make it spread, but if it did not let down too, and draw in, it was not portable for me any way but just over my head, which would not do. However, at last, as I said, I made one to answer, and covered it with skins, the hair upwards, so that it cast off the rain like a pent-house, and kept off the sun so effectually, that I could walk out in the hottest of the weather with greater advantage than I could before in the coolest, and when I had no need of it could close it, and carry it under my arm. ⁷²

³³“I have forgotten my umbrella” is the entire text of a scrap of writing found among Nietzsche’s unpublished manuscripts. In *Spurs/Eperons: Nietzsche’s Styles* Derrida takes this scrap as indicating the impossibility of restoring or restituting the truth of any writing. ‘We will never know *for sure* what Nietzsche wanted say or do when he noted those words, nor even that he actually *wanted* anything’⁷³. He suggests that even if we could discover the context of this string of words we cannot restore its truth, and this is structural. Derrida runs through the different psychoanalytical and hermeneutic means by which we might do so, but

points out that ‘it is a matter of *reading* it, its *what for*, or why, like a woman or like writing, it passes itself off for what it passes itself off for’⁷⁴. In the end ‘there is “no totality to Nietzsche’s text,” not even a fragmentary or aphoristic one. There is evidence to here to expose one, roofless and unprotected by a lightning rod, as he is, to the thunder and lightning of an enormous clap of laughter’⁷⁵. Derrida takes ‘one step further’ (*un pas encore*), to suggest that the totality he has presented maybe of the same sort as “I have forgotten my umbrella’. He suggests he could have chosen words in the text such as ‘spur’ for reasons ‘whose history and code I alone know’. ‘In other words, the text remains closed, at once open and closed, or each in turn, folded/unfolded (*ploye/deploie*), it is just an umbrella that you couldn’t use (*don’t vous n’auriez pas l’emploi*)’⁷⁶. ‘Maybe this is what Nietzsche was calling style, simulacrum, woman. A joyful wisdom shows it well: there never has been *the* style, *the* simulacrum, *the* woman. There never has been *the* sexual difference’⁷⁷.

³⁴Jean-Luc Nancy has emphasised Heidegger's failure to fully engage with the idea that one of the central aspects of *Dasein* is *Mitsein*, or, in other words Being There is always Being With, and the 'I' is always preceded by the 'We'.

Language is the exposing of plural singularity. In it, the all of being is exposed as its meaning, which is to say, as the originary sharing according to which a being relates to a being, the circulation of a meaning of the world that has no beginning or end. This is the meaning of the world as being-with, the simultaneity of all presences that are with regard to one another, where no one is for oneself without being for others. This is also why the essential dialogue or polylogue of language is both the one in which we speak to one another and, identically, the one in which I speak to ‘myself,’ being an entire ‘society’ onto myself—being, in fact, in and as language, always simultaneously ‘us’ and ‘me’ and ‘me’ as ‘us,’ as well as ‘us’ as ‘me’ For I would say nothing about myself if I were not with myself as I am with numerous others, if this

with were not 'in' me, right at me, at the same time as 'me,' and, more precisely, as the at-the-same-time according to which, solely, I am.⁷⁸

As Simon Critchley puts it

What has to be recovered from the wreckage of Heidegger's political commitment is his phenomenology of everyday life, the sheer banality of our contact (*cotoiment*) with the world and with others, what Nancy calls 'the extremely humble layer of our everyday experience'.⁷⁹

We are who we are only through the encounter with the other, who haunts us.

³⁵In a paper published in *The Harvard Theological Review* in 1964 the theologian Julius Seelye Bixler similarly looks to Heidegger's '*Miteinandersein*', 'the fact that our human lot binds us together indissolubly with our fellow men', as an example of how his 'philosophy had ideas 'that promise rich rewards for the sensitive and imaginative pioneer, and in each case he returns empty-handed'⁸⁰. Bixler suggest that

perceptive as he is in describing the lonely individual, Heidegger always stumbles when he tries to come out into the world of social life. He was unable to see that his philosophy, instead of opening the gates for universal love, would lend itself to the purposes of a group conspicuous for its prejudice and hate. His discussion of suffering omitted the most poignant of all - our share in the suffering of those we love. And his treatment of death is just as one-sided. For, actually, it is not my own approaching death that affects my feeling and thought, but the death of my friend, as both a possibility and a fact.⁸¹

Bixler's paper is entitled 'The Failure of Heidegger'. The word failure comes from the Latin *fallere*, to trip or cause to fall, and ultimately from a proto-Indo-European root meaning to stumble. Heidegger's trip is also his stumble against the other, whose footprint disturbs the

sovereign tranquility of his island of philosophy. When writing this paper I kept thinking of the ‘*stolpersteine*’, ‘stumbling stones’, small metal plaques embedded in streets and pavements in Germany and now all over the world, near the last known self-chosen residence of victims of the Shoah. Their names, places and dates of birth and death are engraved on the plaques, and they are raised from the road or pavement surface, so that one can trip over them. In the end Heidegger’s behaviour was a scandal, a word that comes from the Greek ‘*skandalon*’, and refers to that which causes sin, but means, literally, a stumbling block.

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