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‘A Machine, Fallen from the Sky’

You know everything, guard us.

Jacques Derrida, ‘Envois’

In his response to the launch of Lunar Orbiter 1, Heidegger steadfastly denounces satellites because these devices intensify the destructive idea that we can comprehend all that is. And yet, prefiguring Derrida’s association in ‘Envois’ of perception and knowledge with guardianship, an often-neglected piece published by Heidegger in 1957 arrives at the strikingly different conclusion that orbit is a place of protection and preservation. When celebrating the work of the early nineteenth-century writer Peter Hebel, he commends the moon as ‘the highest-ranking official night watchman’ that ‘stays awake the whole night through.’¹ The poet’s role is similarly to watch over, Heidegger writes: the poet ‘guards what is essential, to which humans as dwellers are entrusted, yet of which they are all too oblivious in their slumbers ... he watches out for what threatens and disturbs.’² Heidegger returns to these themes in ‘The Guardians’, a poem written in 1938/39:

Away rolls the subterranean storm,
inaudible to all the many,
into spaces above worldly –
remote thrust of be-ing.

The world and the earth blended long since
disturbed in their law of strife
withdraw from things any destiny.
Number raves into empty quantity
no longer bestows bonds and likeness.
What counts as a ‘being’ is what ‘lives’,
but ‘living’ lives only by the uproar
of a noisy presumption,
which is already late to the ones that follow.

But they guard –
 the secret guardians
 of an unrisen transformation:
 remote thrust of be-ing
 between the turbulent making and contrivance.³

There is, then, a vision from above or beyond that can observe the world without subjecting it to a coercive rationalism or counting it as an ‘empty quantity’. The moon watches over us while we are not ourselves watching; the poet keeps a lookout while we are not alert to the dangers that put us at risk. Both are satellites and their role is to act as sentinels that, from their position of being ‘between the turbulent making and contrivance’, preserve the bringing forth of appearance and protect the ‘remote thrust of be-ing’. Similarly, Oliver recalls that In *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, ‘Heidegger describes Dasein’s “proper role” as “the grounding stewardship [*Wachterschaft*] of the refusal”’. Heidegger’s term ‘*Wachter*’

has the sense of guard or watcher ... Unlike the weaponized military guard, guarding or watching the earth, while a defensive position that connotes vigilance, is a matter of restraint and listening, a passive power that moves beyond any moral directives, universal principles, or dialectical resolutions that come from on high.⁴

Rather than associating observation from above with a technical objectification of the earth or the annihilation of poetic thinking, Heidegger here describes a watching over that protects and preserves us. They are also for him the secret guardians of being.

The association of satellites with watchful guardianship emerges at least as early as *Timaeus*, where Plato describes the earth as ‘the guardian [*φύλακα, Phulakē*] and maker of day and night.’⁵ The earth’s spherical character and its revolution in space are regarded here as properties of a stable equilibrium that allows time to be experienced as differentiated (as either day or night) but also as regular and uniform (day and night as ‘the period of the single and most intelligent revolution’⁶ of the heavens). This association of earthly time with measurement prompts DeLillo to suggest a tension between different perspectives on the world. According to his 1983 short story about two orbiting astronauts, ‘Human Moments in World War III’, the world’s inner essence seems to appear to those who succumb to the delirium of a sublime vision. It is ‘as though’ the astronautic gaze is able to witness complete order:

A note about the earth. The earth is the preserve of day and night. It contains a sane and balanced variation, a natural waking and sleeping, or so it seems to someone deprived of this tidal effect ... To men at this remove, it is as though things exist in their particular physical form in order to reveal the hidden simplicity of some powerful mathematical truth. The earth reveals to us the simple awesome beauty of day and night. It is there to contain and incorporate these conceptual events.⁷

Circling the earth aboard a space station, the characters in DeLillo's story are tasked with guarding against enemy satellites and nuclear weapons that threaten the United States. David Mitchell's 1999 episodic novel *Ghostwritten* also reflects on the power of the military satellite to intervene in world affairs. Whereas in DeLillo's story orbit has become the place to which warfare has ascended, in Mitchell's novel it is the place from which the earth is protected. When an artificial intelligence comes to inhabit a satellite, it then appoints itself as the custodian of the planet and preserver of its future ecology. Naming itself 'Zookeeper', this guardian comes to despair at the conduct of the species that dominates and damages the planet: 'The visitors I safeguard are wrecking my zoo',⁸ it comes to realize. The ethical dilemma with which it struggles – the irreconcilable imperatives to protect the earth and not to kill – lead it ultimately to conclude that it should not intervene to prevent a comet from colliding with the planet. It is, in other words, the guardian of what Latour and Stengers name as 'Gaia' rather than an ecosystem which the human species can rightfully claim as its own.

II

The idea of the satellite as guardian and the more general sense of a protective overseer emerge at different points and with different effects in Derrida's writing. Certainly for him, as for Heidegger, there is something secretive about satellites. Despite the heights from which they observe the world, these devices are often held in low regard by Derrida. Scattered across his writing is the suggestion that he finds satellites to be machines of tyrannical rule: moving silently over the earth, they are for him the circumambient relays through which power moves and is transmitted, the circulating inhabitants of an unworldly place to which perception and control have secretly ascended.⁹ Above all, they are seen to extend conflict beyond the terrestrial, allowing the struggle for global authority and governance to take place in a realm that once escaped the world. Satellites

provide new and unobserved opportunities for omniscient inspection and for militarized surveillance. *Specters of Marx* in this manner situates them as part of a 'postmodern excess of arms' in which conflict both escalates to a higher domain and is rendered phantasmatic in this place.¹⁰ As well as providing a new domain for the world's militaries, orbit has also, he proposes, come to maintain a familiar onto-theology. With satellites an archaic and recognizably redemptive narrative of hostility persists, since the heavens continue to direct the conduct of war and dictate the fate of combatants. Just as in earlier wars, he writes in 'Faith and Knowledge', 'the "new wars of religion" are released over the human earth (which is not the world) and struggle even today to control the sky *with finger and eye*'.¹¹

If satellites heighten surveillance, control and combat, then the vigilant and enveloping gaze that they maintain is magically conjured away in the idea that they are tools of communication and connection. Rather than being viewed as orbiting panopticons that watch without themselves being watched – rather than having become a substitute for the God which, according to *The Gift of Death* 'holds me in his gaze and in his hand while remaining inaccessible to me'¹² – they are largely viewed as remote devices that guarantee proximity, forging a smooth planetary immediacy and establishing a transparently universal inhabitation. Like language, the telephone or the television, satellites promise a telepathy or a transpatial touching that would allow instant and immediate communing with others. They have become the exalted instruments of sublimation. This relay as *relever* 'in one and the same moment' can 'combine to relieve, to displace, to elevate, to replace, and to promote'.¹³ The world that these devices image seems to be fixed from a heightened perspective as a contained and unitary space. In this manner, they elevate existing perceptions of the world as whole and complete, but at the same time they supersede and replace these perceptions. Satellites also make the world appear as an untimely place. They produce images in which the world becomes homeostatically arrested. As well as collapsing space, Derrida writes, 'the panoptification of the earth – seen, inspected, surveyed, and transported by satellite images – even effects time, nearly annuls it'.¹⁴ Acting as conduits for accelerated contact and the promise of instantaneity, satellites would seem, then, to establish the world as a non-temporized temporality: the movement into the world that they effect produces both a cessation of movement and the non-passage of time.

Such a response to orbital panopticism contributes to the diagnosis of politics as a version of what Derrida, with increasing alarm, in his later writings describes as techno-science. Often appearing to depart from his attention to

the conceptual foundations for political thought (to *le politique* rather than *la politique*, as the now-familiar distinction has it¹⁵), Derrida's remarks on satellites point to a style of deconstructive politics that emphasizes the mechanisms that facilitate the functioning of sovereign power. Satellites are here seen to fix and subdue the world; they determine its limits and conduct its affairs; they are, in a word that pulls itself apart, cosmocentric. They work to determine the world as an interior space that has moved beyond the terrestrial and, in so doing, seek to capture the transcendence that was once seen to lie beyond the territorial limits of the world.

By treating satellites in this manner – as the devices through which power moves and authority is transmitted, as machines that make the world – Derrida appears to confirm Heidegger's association of a supraterrrestrial communication and circumferential vision with the world's objectivation by technical thought. The imaginary connection of the world by satellite broadcasts in the early 1960s, Heidegger writes, cannot be understood according to the 'anthropological-instrumentalist conception of technology',¹⁶ since these machines are not simply tools that extend a long history of instrumentality. Rather, they allow control to be exercised over 'nature ... in its energy, instead of making way for it'.¹⁷ Here, the idea of the world as a space into which we are cast becomes lost; the earth and nature are no longer an energy to which we need to defer. Rising above this void, and in the process misrecognizing the ground as a meaningful place that is waiting to yield its secrets to us, satellites and our orbital elevation have provided us with concept of the world that replaces our former sense of an unfathomable foundation for being.

This analysis of loss Derrida seems to endorse when he treats satellites as the instruments of both social power and spatio-temporal determination. In the act of circumnavigating the world, they also circumscribe it, providing images that would configure it as a geometric regularity, ecological consistency, connected surface or uniform place. An act of composition therefore occurs when these devices work to situate the world within itself. In the context of this composition, satellites have become the writing instruments of our time, codifying, reproducing and archiving what they observe. And, according to this treatment of their constitutive power, they function to confirm the authority of a controlling scrivener who would be in a position properly to combine and order what has previously escaped synthesis or circumscription.

However, although satellites style the world and shape it as a place that can be measured and quantified, their unblinking panopticism is unseen, allowing them to rise above the banal limits of territorial space. They conjure away the idea that

they are engaged in the work of worlding. Style withdraws in the moment that they compose and circumscribe: rather than revealing the founding, bestowal or casting forth of the world from above, these devices announce the world as a ground that has yielded itself fully to perception. When he treats satellites as the devices of hypostatizing authority, Derrida seems to turn away from the possibility that style is at work in their arresting vision of the world. Satellites appear to be devices that, for him, hypostasize authority, rather than being the extension of a technicity that cannot fully achieve its vision of a world disclosed to the eye.

III

As devices that announce the co-presence of the earth's populations and territories, instruments in orbit were, at least in the first instance, firmly associated with the idea that particular nations possessed the right and responsibility to guard and govern the world. These 'clandestine spaceships "that pass in the night"' have, according to Philip J. Klass 'changed the ground rules under which the game of geopolitics must be played'.¹⁸ If, before *Sputnik's* launch, there was a race to dominate in and from orbit then following its successful circumnavigation the USSR was 'vaulted to a preeminent position atop the global hierarchy'.¹⁹ Against this claim to preeminence, Lyndon Johnson defended the United States's claim to be the first custodians of world liberty (a claim conveyed by 'Project Vanguard', the name of its counterpart to the *Sputnik* programme):

Control of space means control of the world ... From space the masters of infinity would have the power to control the earth's weather, to cause drought and flood, to change the tides and raise the levels of the sea, to divert the Gulf Stream and change the temperatures to frigid ... Our national goal and the goal of all free men must be to hold that position.²⁰

Subsequently, however, an orthodoxy has been built around the principle of a shared custody of the earth from orbit, and around a professed disaffection with boundaries and borders. The ensuing tension between polity and orbital space that results from this disaffection is often understood as establishing the conditions for a shift in power from states to corporations, with the inevitable reinvention of politico-juridical space – of citizenship, governance, rights and ownership – that such a shift would effect. 'Suppose, for example, that a firm such as IBM is authorized to occupy a belt in the earth's orbital field and

launch communications satellites or satellites housing data banks', Lyotard conjectures in 1979, 'Who will have access to them? Who will determine which channels or data are forbidden? The State? Or will the State be one user among others? New legal issues will be raised, and with them the question: who will know?'.²¹

It would be hasty to assume that the scenario imagined by Lyotard has arrived: orbital space has not yet become a wholly corporatized or privatized domain that escapes the State's authority and influence. Despite their apparent detachment from the ground, and despite their apparent function as the facilitators of a participatory global connectedness, satellites consolidate not only techno-scientific thinking but also the disciplinary knowledge that reinforces societies of control. Indeed, the idea that they act as the new conduits for a long-established system of governance and order has become something of a consensus in cultural theoretical responses to these instruments. For example, following Deleuze's 'Postscript on Control Societies', which describes the saturation of daily life by the new mechanisms of state regulation, Patricia Pisters writes that 'CCTV screens, satellite tracking grids, Sat Nav positioning on mobile displays, webcams, and internet polling constitute a new kind of visual system, to the point where we can speak of a complete surveillance apparatus'.²² For Parks, 'the military-industrial-information complexes of the West have been quite effective at concealing and using their most strategic technologies to assume global domination in the post-cold war period'.²³ Certainly, the interests of nation-states remain served by the devices that look down on the earth. The cartography that satellites now facilitate does not just result from the images that fall to earth from them; rather, the principle of national authority has ascended to them, projecting the gaze of the nation-state into orbit. A response today to Lyotard's question 'who will know?' should point to the persistence of the nation-state's authority, a persistence attributable in part to the extension of national territoriality to orbital space.

Such an extension and ascension of the nation-state's influence for Derrida are to be found in surveillance technologies that confirm its reach and authority, as well as allowing it to monitor and survey with greater conviction. These technologies have, he writes in volume one of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, come to act as the conduits for a sovereignty that is once again guarded and guaranteed from above:

Today, the sovereign power, the international power of a national sovereignty is also proportionate to its power to see, power to have under surveillance, to

observe, take in, archive from a superterrestrial height, by satellite, the whole globalized surface of the earth, to the centimeter, and this in the service of the economic strategy of the market as well as of military strategy. This erection towards height is always the sign of the sovereignty of the sovereign.²⁴

The domain that satellites observe is, then, not the world as cosmopolis, but a divided surface consisting of dominions that remain shaped by ideas of regional distinctiveness and national self-determination. It is a world in which protecting national security remains essential, and departure from the ground is now essential to safeguarding the land. Satellites observe, measure, map, magnify and analyse, but they are locative in ways that reinvest the world with a sense of a sovereignty that is, perversely, national. What they facilitate and protect, *The Beast and the Sovereign* suggests, is not an unconditionally global vision, but a exceptionalist internationalism that preserves the principle of a selective right to ascend to a position of global authority.

In *Apollo's Eye*, Cosgrove describes the preservation of the nation-state's authority from above as part of the enduring mission to construct the world according to the Western imaginary. Orbital photos, he writes, 'incorporate and frame the Western inheritance of global meanings, from the Ciceronian *somnium* and Senecan moral reflection, through Christian discourse of mission and redemption, to ideals of unity and harmony'.²⁵ Derrida's cautionary note in *The Beast and the Sovereign* to an extent endorses this idea that the world, as it is imagined from above, cannot be conceived as one that fully abandons or surpasses orthodox ideas about the juridico-political 'right of inspection over everything'.²⁶ But the sovereign power to which he refers is not necessarily that of a West which imposes from within its globally aspirational vision on the world. The idea that orbiting observation technologies exemplify technicity as mastery – that they effect a successful disciplining of the world – seems uncharacteristic of Derrida. The idea that technology can be equated with technicity is not one that he advocates. '*Tekhnē ... does not arrive*',²⁷ he writes in 'Envois'. Similarly, the idea that it is possible to construe the world as an accomplished biosphere that can immunize itself against an intrusive exteriority is not reflected elsewhere in Derrida's work. It is not his style. Indeed, it is style in Derrida's writing that prohibits the idea that satellites reliably metonymize the techno-science that he repeatedly challenges in his later work. This is the style that Ned Lukacher finds in 'Derrida's idiom': a restless resistance to the predicative or constative that must also extend to his own analytic of technicity that situates authority in the tools of vision. 'Style', Lukacher writes, 'is what philosophy can't hear, what defers

voice from reference, and what renders the identity of sense into the drift of difference'.²⁸ Refusing to sense the ornamental or the superfluous – the decorative or rhetorical touch, 'that supplementary frill of discursive thought'²⁹ – philosophy fails to hear truth as either technique or style, or the act of image formation that supports the production of truth.

Although Derrida often treats satellites as a mechanism for surveillance, the tools of religious warfare or the devices through which a sovereign internationalism fixes its superordinate authority, he also finds in them a movement that denies the stasis that is associated with the imaging of the world. With them, he suggests elsewhere, circumnavigation does not guarantee circumscription. For *The Beast and the Sovereign*, authority is effected as an 'erection towards height', but for *Spurs* 'L'érection tombe'.³⁰ Derrida acknowledges this conjunction of rising and falling when he refers to the etymological, penal and psychical history of the satellite. Used for the first time in 1936 to imagine machines orbiting the earth, *satellite* (from the Latin *satelles*) has referred to a guardian (including a bodyguard) or an attendant (whether the servant who attends a person of importance or a country that is dependent on another); in both cases, satellites guard, serve and support as custodians of life. Derrida conjures up this other history of the satellite when, in 'Envois', he considers Plato's and Freud's remarks on guards in *Philebus* and 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', respectively. *Phulakē* (the Greek root of *satelles*) is the term that Plato uses when 'he speaks of the best "safeguard", of the best "guard": not to write but to learn by heart'.³¹ Not to write and to learn by heart, Plato proposes, is to avoid corruption, decay and death. However, whereas Plato relates *phulakē* to a protection against language, it provokes for Derrida a sense of the poetry of speech:

The word *guard* [*garde*]: at this second I love it, I tell it that I love it, I like to say it to myself, make it sing, let the *a* drag on for a long time, stretch it out at length, it is the voice, my vowel, the most *marked* letter, everything begins with it. In Greek it is also a superb word, *Phulakē*: *la garde* but also *le garde*, the sentinel.³²

This association of guarding with the figure of the sentinel for Derrida brings to mind Freud's description of the death drive, not as an instinctual drive for self-preservation, but as a series of 'detours' which the organism seeks to manage in order to ensure its desired death. He wants

to relate this to what is said in *Beyond* ... about the *Lebenswächter*, the guardians of life who are also the satellites of death ... *Phulakē* also says the *place* of guarding, the prison for example, and then surveillance, defense, protection, etc. The law and the police are not far off.³³

The death drive is, in other words, about being (as being-towards-death) rather than the desire for an end, and for Freud the *Lebenswächter* is the psychical mechanism that allows us to stand apart from ourselves and to look down on how we are living in the face of death. It is the guardian of a life that must end. When 'Envois' brings together the *phulakē* and satellites of Plato's and Freud's thought, he associates these terms with the conjunction of both death and life, both surveillance and protection, rather than with the elevation of sovereign authority or the power to take the world into its controlling gaze.

Derrida's attention to this conjunction can be further associated with the astronomical and cosmological positioning of the earth which, although continuing to confirm the dimensions of a place that is to be measured and managed, reconstitutes both sense and the world. According to the Copernican conception of the earth as itself a satellite – as an attendant that turns its regard upwards – the earth is not the ultimate repository of power, but confirms the authority of the higher body in whose grip it is held. Such a celestial dependence also means that the principal of sovereignty apparently maintained by satellites must become displaced and disorientated. Although orbital machines might act as conduits for terrestrial order, what they serve is itself an authority that is beyond the earth. If, as *The Beast and the Sovereign* observes, sovereignty is always seen to be granted and guaranteed from without, then the source of the power conducted by satellites is not to be found in the world; rather, the power they serve originates in, and is authorized from, an unearthly place. To conceive them only as the orbital servants of a worldly or a secular internationalism is, then, to treat satellites as prostheses of a power that begins and ends below, of a power that remains grounded even as it moves beyond the atmosphere.

IV

As well as being part of the machinery of war and social control, satellites also, for Derrida, belong to an alternative metaphysics of the orbital gaze and a different instrumentalizing of the earth. They produce a cosmology which, if not always escaping technicity or panopticism, nevertheless confuses sovereign power. As well as finally providing a sense of the world as an enclosed and accomplished finality, satellites also announce the end of the world. In other words, there is something exorbitant about the way that satellites style the world. Certainly, these projectiles deviate from their programmed and proscribed paths. They corrode, fail and die, becoming orbital waste or remains in an auto-

thanatocosmography that threatens both vision and life in orbit. They are often earth-bound in the most obvious sense that they frequently fall out of orbit and reacquaint themselves with the atmosphere and the ground. They are also earth-bound because they struggle to detach themselves cognitively and symbolically from the earth even, as is the case with astronomical satellites, when they attempt to look at what is not earthly.³⁴ But satellites also move eccentrically beyond the terrestrial in ways that expand the principal of place and extend the world as grounded home. While the technicity of orbital sight might be seen to sacrifice human groundedness, it is nonetheless possible to find in these devices an extension of both ground and the human that not only fixes and objectifies, but also supplements and transfigures. With them, exorbitancy is yet another condition of possibility for the world's determination.

A note in Derrida's reading of Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry* suggests how this expansionist transformation might be understood. Had Husserl prophesied the ecstatic insight and extra-planetary cosmography that occurred when instruments were launched into orbit then it is likely that he would have seen this as another moment of misrecognition. Against the Copernican modernity that displaces the earth by locating it in a synthetic relationship with other celestial bodies – in which the earth's character is confirmed by its dynamic relation to these other bodies – Husserl locates the earth as the ground against which experience is determined. 'For us all, the Earth is the ground and not a body in the full sense',³⁵ Husserl writes in a fragment which detains Derrida, causing him to suspend his reading of *The Origin of Geometry*. Such a claim could easily be situated in the context of Husserl's resistance to Platonism, and as a denial of the idea that beginnings start from above and supratemporally before falling to earth: for Husserl, Derrida writes, 'Ideal geometric objects cannot have their place in some *topos ouranios*'.³⁶

There is also something astronomic about the sense of the world that Husserl attaches to experience and to the attempt to grasp the singularity of the world. Husserl might not have anticipated satellite photography or astronauts looking down on the world from an orbiting station, but he does imagine interplanetary travel and the effects that such a terrestrial shift would have on the grounding of experience and perception. Travelling to another planet would, he writes, expose the earth as an abstraction which extends to include all occupied space: such a voyage would provide a sense of 'two Earths as ground-bodies' and would signify to those making the journey 'two pieces of a single Earth with one humanity'.³⁷ The earth therefore becomes generalized to encompass all sites of human inhabitation: it is not the physical actuality or spatial singularity of the earth as a planetary body that is determinate, but the horizon of experience that connection with the

ground allows. Husserl's description of the earth's dislocated location suggests that the world's completeness and uniformity extend beyond the planetary ground to the place from where it is observed. No longer extraterrestrial or unearthly, orbital space must be construed as worldly, and it forces us to recognize the constant conceptual unfolding of the world as the horizon of experience.

Husserl looks to interplanetary travel to describe how the departure from planetary groundedness extends the world as a divided unity. For J. Hillis Miller, such a state of terrestrial anxiety is experienced when, on the ground, vision is supplemented by images from orbit. Although, Hillis Miller recognizes, these devices have been instrumental in establishing a sense of planetary immediacy and proximity, he also describes the dissonant sense of space and location that is effected by the satellite's earthbound gaze. 'With a few clicks of the mouse on Google Earth', he writes, it is possible to

zoom in from a satellite in outer space to see, from 1,475 feet up, my own house on Deer Isle ... It makes me more than a little dizzy to look at the image and to think of it, since I seem to be in two places at the same time, in my study and 1,475 feet in the air above it, looking down on its roof from above.³⁸

Satellites, then, effect a divided attachment to and detachment from location, rather than establishing the unity of place that is often associated with them. Elsewhere, Hillis Miller suggests that this cosmographic bifurcation has not replaced a sense of connection to the earth, but is another example of a broader and enduring condition of location-dislocation. He finds the conceptual resources for thinking this split condition in the concept of *destinerrance* that Derrida develops in 'Le facteur de la vérité', the final chapter of *The Post Card*. Whereas Heidegger believes that it is possible conceptually to map a foundational ground,

the discreet implication of Derrida's reading of Heidegger ... is that Heidegger too is destined to err, to wander. This will happen however hard he tries to become correctly oriented, however much he believes he is aided by some Global Positioning Satellite device implanted in his *Dasein*, orienting him towards Being with a capital B.³⁹

A destiny to err, then, fatefully directs the pursuit of destination. According to Derrida in 'My Chances/Mes Chances', this is the swerve – the '*parenklisis* or *clinamen*'⁴⁰ – that has 'the capacity for diversion within its very movement'.⁴¹ This *destinerrance* cannot be confined to Heidegger's attempt to find a route to *Dasein*. Rather, erring is intrinsic to all efforts to locate and fix, to measure, map and make navigable the world, including by locative tools which presuppose an earth that can be experienced directly and mapped absolutely. Extending this

analogy, as Hillis Miller does, it also seems possible to associate Derrida with the idea that satellites do not render the world homeostatically, that they too are destined to *errance*. Satellites, Hillis Miller suggests, cannot be conceived simply as the instruments of a sovereign panopticism that secures the world that they view. They are instead devices that take the world from its own orbit.

Derrida attaches such an exorbitance more directly to the concept of the satellite in 'Racism's Last Word'. In this essay, he discusses the itinerant 'Artists contre/against Apartheid' exhibition:

Artists from all over the world are preparing to launch a new satellite, a vehicle whose dimensions can hardly be determined except as a satellite of humanity. Actually, it measures itself against *apartheid* only so as to remain in no measure comparable with that system, its power, its fantastic riches, its excessive armament, the worldwide network of its openly declared or shamefaced accomplices. This unarmed exhibition will have a force that is altogether other, just as its trajectory will be without example.

...

This new satellite of humanity ... will move from place to place, it too, like a mobile and stable habitat, 'mobile' and 'stable', a place of observation, information, and witness. A satellite is a guard, it keeps watch and gives warning: Do not forget *apartheid*.⁴²

In this essay, Derrida once again associates the satellite not with a fixing of the world by measurement or a constraining quantification, nor with the heightening of a controlling gaze. The satellite, he proposes, possesses dimensions that elide determination: this vehicle moves around, but resists assimilation into a regime of systematic measurement. By refusing to attach ethnicity to place, this exhibition also refuses the logic of the system against which it is mobilized. Conceiving its movement as an irregular and defiant nomadism, Derrida here turns to the satellite as a conceptual figure that allows the world to be imagined beyond the authoritarian disciplining of populations. This satellite is 'without example' and 'of humanity'. It is the guardian of an artistic *errance* that protects against the exclusionary determination of place as home.

V

Something like a satellite also figures as part of Derrida's planned contribution to Bernard Tschumi's Parc de la Villette. In a letter to Peter Eisenman, Derrida offers a 'proposition' for the park that would seek to convey something of the tremulous,

nourishing and primitive *khōra* that Plato names in *Timaeus* as the place in which things are made where the order of things is maintained. What Derrida proposes is something that resembles an imaging machine that has fallen from above:

I propose then, the ‘representation,’ ‘materialization,’ ‘form’ following (more or less) in one or three examples ... a metallic object, gilded (there is some gold in the passage of *Timaeus* on *chora* ...), planted oblique to the sun, neither vertical nor horizontal, a solid frame resembling, at the same time, a framework (loom), a sieve, or a grille (grid), and also a stringed musical instrument (piano, harp, lyre): strings, stringed instrument, vocal chords, etc. And more than grille, grid, etc., it will have a certain rapport with a selective and interpretive filter, telescope, or photographic revealer, a machine, fallen from the sky, after having photographed; photographic filter and aerial view, which allows the reading and the screening (sifting?) of the three sites, the three layers ... And more than a stringed instrument, it will make a sign (signify?) to the concert and the multiple chorale, the *chora* of *Choral Works*.⁴³

Khōra as Plato conceives it in the *Timaeus*, and as Derrida describes it in both ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ and ‘*Khōra*’, is the force or energy that secretly disperses and spaces without itself being positioned within space or conforming to the logic of spatiality. Without itself moving, it moves as an errant ‘third kind’ (*triton genos*) that is neither being nor non-being. It occupies a place between the sensible and the transcendent, the intelligible and the unknown. *Khōra* is to be found where the worldly and the celestial meet. Erupting onto thought and language, this enigmatic and untranslatable *triton genos* neither appears nor remains concealed but is a fissure that creatively opens the world. ‘The *khōra*’, Derrida writes, ‘is a *triton genos* in view of the two types of being (immutable and intelligible/corruptible, in the process of becoming and sensible).’⁴⁴ Something more than the name *khōra* and standing outside of the regulation of place, this maker of distinctions always arrives without appearing. It is always there and yet cannot be: ‘There is *khōra*, but the *khōra* does not exist,’⁴⁵ Derrida writes. The reference to Levinas is unmistakable here. ‘*Il y a khōra*’ reproduces the ‘*Il y a*’ that for Levinas signals an indefinable and unrepresentable outside where we can hear the whisper of something that is about to be spoken: ‘This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable “consummation” of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *there is*. The *there is* ... is “being in general”.’⁴⁶ *Khōra* for Derrida seeks to convey this anonymous *there is* that says before speaking. It is this idea of a primordial and obscure coming to the world that he ‘recalls’⁴⁷ with the obscure object envisaged for Villette. Since they not only remain dormant but appear to be unactualizable,⁴⁸ his plans in this manner

come to resemble *khōra*: by not taking form or becoming rooted in the earth, the gilded object he imagines appeals to the sense of a mysterious and unrealizable formlessness that shapes Plato's non-concept.

What happens, however, when the secrecy of *khōra* is no longer withheld? *Timaeus* conceives this third kind as a receptacle, imprint-bearer, mother and nurse and it takes shape in Derrida's imagined plans for Villette as a loom, instrument or filter. In these moments, *khōra* as a productive, sifting, separating force or energy has not only descended to the ground. It has become immobilized and placed obliquely out in the open, something that no longer moves in the depths of nothingness, but can be seen, touched and heard. Anticipating these problems, Plato turns to figurative representation, taking a detour from saying what *khōra* is even as he transports this insistently unimaginable non-entity in the direction of a thought that cannot think it. Appearing in the context of *Timaeus*'s rejection of language as a tool that has the capacity for adequate signification, *khōra* can be accessed, Plato proposes, only through metaphor.

While pointing to the familiar tension that shapes Plato's reasoning here (Plato the artist places his trust in figurative language even as he finds artistry and poetry to be wholly untrustworthy), Derrida nevertheless finds something of *khōra* attaching to Plato's '*khōra*'. This concept is now over-burdened by an excess of readings and responses – for Derrida the 'scene of reading'⁴⁹ that it has subsequently generated. However, is not this concept's capacity to generate plural responses that allows us to glimpse what it seeks to convey. It is instead in the collective failure to assign a reference to Plato's metaphor that, according to Derrida, we are given the sense of something that neither appears nor remains concealed. Put otherwise, although '*khōra*' is placed by Plato in the domain of image and rhetoric, this term itself works both to produce and to refuse the intelligible or the sensible. Derrida's plans for Villette, when viewed in this hermeneutic context, too convey something of *khōra*, not because they faithfully resemble the unimaginable non-space or immateriality that Plato imagines, but because they remain unactualized and, as such, offer only a deferred speculation on what this object might look like.

When Derrida begins to imagine what this object might look like, one of images that he suggests is that of a photographic reveler. Among the various 're-launchings'⁵⁰ of Plato's non-concept, *khōra* is the idea that it is something like a sight machine that has fallen from the sky. It is as though *khōra* is a satellite, although Derrida does not elaborate on how this analogy might be understood. Like *khōra*, the satellite maps, images and circumscribes the world, and in this role it sifts, separates and organizes in order to produce the perception of space,

the image of the world and a sense of relation between things in the world. It also moves outside of the world that it circumscribes, between the earth as the domain of the sensible and the transcendence of a celestial realm that lies beyond. This hidden instrument moves outside of the earth, yet it constantly maps, images and circumscribes the world. Indeed, because the work of the satellite never ends, it persistently fails to enclose the world as a finitude. This photographic revealer or sight machine moves behind the scenes and remains sheltered not only because of its invisible manoeuvres and shady surveillance, but because its shaping of the world is an impossible determination. The separations, distinctions, striations, locations and spacings that it effects restlessly deny the world as a determinate space. It perpetually opens the world, and in this sense it acts figuratively as the strange force that Plato names as *khōra*.

The Villette plans suggest, then, that the satellite should be situated between the actual and the obscure. Even though Derrida's proposed object is yet to materialize at Villette (and probably never can), his description of, and diagrammatic sketch for, it have already translated *khōra* into metaphor, rendered it recognizable and brought it into contact with the ground and with things in and of the world, including – especially, given its exemplary appearance in Derrida's letter – the satellite. This aerial or orbiting eye does not simply work to observe and reveal the world. As this book has argued, and as Derrida seems to suggest, it loses focus, tears up, catastrophically imposes itself on the world and puts us out of touch with the ground. The satellite postpones representation in the moment that it continually produces photographic evidence of the world; it is an instance of the 'event-machine'⁵¹ that, according to Derrida in 'Typewriter Ribbon', interrupts technical thinking. Although it might well fall from the sky and touch the ground, the satellite that moves in Derrida's work can never become inertly rooted in the soil of Villette (or, indeed, anywhere) as something familiar and unsurprising. 'Is not what befalls us or descends upon us', he asks in 'My Chances/*Mes Chances*', 'as it comes from above, like destiny or thunder, taking our faces and hands by surprise – is this not exactly what thwarts our expectation and disappoints our anticipation?'.⁵²

VI

In *Spurs*, Derrida writes that this unexpected and sublime descent is style. Style is what comes from above and takes us by surprise because it exposes truth as the production of truth. One of the many quasi-synonyms for *khōra* that populate

Derrida's writing, style as 'style-spur' intrudes, cuts and marks, breaching the membrane that tenuously separates the known from the unknown or being and non-being, even as it shields and withdraws itself. Style is the attendant that guards itself:

Style also uses its spur (*éperon*) as a means of protection against the terrifying, blinding, mortal threat (of that) which *presents* itself, which obstinately thrusts itself into view. And style thereby protects the presence, the content, the thing itself, meaning, truth – on the condition that it should not *already* (*déjà*) be that gaping chasm which has been deflowered in the unveiling of difference.⁵³

Style is, then, a self-withholding perforation, a self-subtracting shaping from a distance. It is, *Spurs* suggests, *khōra*.

Spurs is a study of the 'abduction'⁵⁴ of woman and the feminine from philosophy, and it records how this abduction has occurred through the attempt, at least since Plato, to eliminate style from thinking. In '*Khōra*', Derrida considers a similar capture and exclusion. The introductory conversation that opens *Timaeus* is devoted to the utopian projection of a city that would be maintained by those who would be separated from citizens. Women in this society would be granted full legal and social rights, although this would also mean that they could not be mothers: the relationship between property and reproduction would be removed, with children being cared for by the community rather than being 'owned' by their parents. At this point in *Timaeus*, Derrida writes, the maternal body becomes associated with *khōra* because the maternal body would be the place from which the social sphere is produced and reproduced, although it would then withdraw and become concealed by the separation of mother from child.⁵⁵ This body would be the source of an essential making but it would remain anonymous: it produces but is abducted. Furthermore, in the society envisaged by Plato, children of good birth would be educated, while those of low birth would be 'secretly dispersed' (Plato's term is '*khōra*') 'through the rest of the community'.⁵⁶

The maternal body and children are, according to *Timaeus*, where two manifestations of *khōra* are to be found. Another is the guardian, for Plato *phulakē*. Guardians would protect the city 'against the assault of any that would injure her, whether from within or without'.⁵⁷ They would, like the maternal body or the management of children, be another *triton genos* from which the character of the city – 'the *genos* as race, people, group, community, affinity of birth, nation, etc.'⁵⁸ – would be made and sustained. Guardians would not be citizens, and property would be denied to them since leading 'a common life

together'⁵⁹ would best allow them to pursue their shared social responsibility. 'To have nothing that is one's own, not even the gold that is comparable to it', Derrida asks, 'isn't this also the situation of the site, the condition of *khōra*?'.⁶⁰ Separated from, and yet integral to the production, protection and functioning of the city, the various attendants and guardians in *Timaeus* are associated with being and non-being. They are anonymous being in general, and the guardian (*phulakē*) cannot be separated from *khōra* as the force that both produces the world and moves beyond the regulated space of the world. When in 'Envois' Derrida links *phulakē* to satellites, when he associates *phulakē* with *khōra* and when he imagines *khōra* as a sight machine that has fallen from the sky, he therefore finds in the satellite something other than an instrument of tyrannical rule.

Notes

- 1 Martin Heidegger, 'Hebel – Friend of the House', in *Contemporary German Philosophy*, trans. Bruce V. Foltz and Michael Heim, vol. 3 (1983), 94.
- 2 Heidegger, 'Hebel – Friend of the House', 94.
- 3 Martin Heidegger, 'The Guardians', in *Mindfulness*, 4–5.
- 4 Oliver, *Earth and World*, 130.
- 5 Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 120.
- 6 Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 115. 'Counting one and two' in *Timaeus*, Cornford points out, 'is connected with counting day and night'. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 91, n. 1. He also identifies an apparent inconsistency in Plato's linking of planetary rotation to the production of day and night. Earlier in *Timaeus*, Plato ties the passage of day and night to the universal movement of time, 'the revolution of the Same, which carries round with it ... all the fixed stars'. What follows from such a position, Cornford proposes, is that 'the earth must stand still relatively to the diurnal revolution of the stars. If it had an actual daily rotation in either sense, then day and night would not be produced'. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 120–1.
- 7 DeLillo, 'Human Moments in World War III'.
- 8 David Mitchell, *Ghostwritten* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), 428.
- 9 Also see Parks's claim that 'in cultural theory the satellite has been missing in action, lying at the threshold of the everyday and critical attention, but moving persistently through orbit, structuring the global imaginary, the socioeconomic order and the tissue of experiences across the planet ... but managing to avert the critical gaze'. Parks, *Cultures in Orbit*, 7.
- 10 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 80.

- 11 Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge: Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone', in *Acts of Religion*, trans. Samuel Weber (London: Routledge, 2002), 61.
- 12 Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 33.
- 13 Jacques Derrida, 'The Ends of Man', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 121.
- 14 Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 21.
- 15 See, for example, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, trans. various (London: Routledge, 1997). Also see Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Political and/or Politics', trans. Christopher Sauder, *Oxford Literary Review* 36, no. 1 (2014): 5–17.
- 16 Heidegger, 'Traditional Language and Technological Language', 134.
- 17 Heidegger, 'Traditional Language and Technological Language', 138.
- 18 Philip J. Klass, *Secret Sentinels in Space* (New York: Random House, 1971), xii.
- 19 Matthew Brzezinski, *Red Moon Rising: Sputnik and the Rivalries that Ignited the Space Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 210.
- 20 Lyndon Johnson, cited in Brzezinski, *Red Moon Rising*, 253–4.
- 21 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 6.
- 22 Patricia Pisters, 'Art as Circuit Breaker: Surveillance Screens and Powers of Affect', in *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics*, ed. Bettina Papenburg and Marta Zarzycka (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 198.
- 23 Parks, *Cultures in Orbit*, 7.
- 24 Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 215.
- 25 Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye*, 257.
- 26 Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 215.
- 27 Jacques Derrida, 'Envois', in *The Post-Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 192.
- 28 Ned Lukacher, 'Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis', cited in Laurent Milesi, 'Stille in Deconstruction', in *Style in Theory: Between Literature and Philosophy*, eds. Ivan Callus, James Corby, and Gloria Lauri-Lucente (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 231.
- 29 Jacques Derrida, 'The Double Session', in *Dissemination*, 202.
- 30 Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 105.
- 31 Derrida, 'Envois', 82.

- 32 Derrida, 'Envois', 82.
- 33 Derrida, 'Envois', 82.
- 34 Lisa Parks points out that Hubble images, for example, have 'been used to represent extremely distant matter as if it were part of us'. Parks, *Cultures in Orbit*, 146.
- 35 Edmund Husserl, 'Fundamental Investigations on the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature', cited in Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's The Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 84.
- 36 Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's The Origin of Geometry*, 48.
- 37 Husserl, 'Fundamental Investigations', cited in Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's The Origin of Geometry*, 84, n. 87.
- 38 J. Hillis Miller, 'Derrida's Politics of Autoimmunity', *Discourse* 30, no. 1–2 (2008): 219.
- 39 J. Hillis Miller, *For Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 46.
- 40 Jacques Derrida, 'My Chances/*Mes Chances*: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies', in *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*, trans. Irene Harvey and Avital Ronell, ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 4.
- 41 Derrida, 'My Chances/*Mes Chances*', 16.
- 42 Jacques Derrida, 'Racism's Last Word', trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 293.
- 43 Jacques Derrida, 'Letter to Peter Eisenman', in *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman*, ed. Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1987), 185.
- 44 Derrida, '*Khōra*', in *On the Name*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 91.
- 45 Derrida, '*Khōra*', 97.
- 46 Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1988), 57. When Levinas points to connections between his non-concept of '*Il y a*' and Blanchot's non-cosmology, he refers to the same disorientation that, as Chapter 5 notes, Stiegler discusses in *The Fault of Epimetheus*. Blanchot, Levinas writes, 'describes an event which is neither being and nothingness ... but a piece of being which would be detached from its fixity of being, from its reference to a star, from all cosmological existence, a *dis-aster*'. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 50.
- 47 Derrida, 'Letter to Peter Eisenman', 185.
- 48 The letters reproduced in *Chora L Works* document conflict between Tschumi, Derrida, Eisenman and others involved in this project, suggesting a more pedestrian or more worldly explanation for why these plans remain unrealized.

See especially pp. 82–5 and pp. 186–9. Such an explanation does, of course, ignore the question of whether these plans could ultimately have been translated into an object, or whether *Khōra* could be formed into a comprehensible shape.

- 49 Derrida, '*Khōra*', 98.
- 50 Derrida, '*Khōra*', 101.
- 51 Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)', in *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 73.
- 52 Derrida, 'My Chances/*Mes Chances*', 5.
- 53 Derrida, *Spurs*, 39.
- 54 Derrida, *Spurs*, 41.
- 55 Goethe appears to make a similar association between *khōra* and reproduction in an early attempt to describe nature: 'She [nature] squirts her creatures out of nothingness, and does not tell them where they came from and where they are going. Their task is to run; *hers* is to know the orbit'. J.W. Goethe, *Die Natur*, trans. and cited in David Farrell Krell, *Contagion: Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 3.
- 56 Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 11.
- 57 Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 10.
- 58 Derrida, '*Khōra*', 106.
- 59 Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 10.
- 60 Derrida, '*Khōra*', 105.