

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Edinburgh University Press in Paragraph. The Version of Record is available online at:
<https://www.euppublishing.com/doi/full/10.3366/para.2022.0407>

Caught on the Hop:
Politico-philosophical writing of the ‘leap’

Leap Here: Kierkegaard, Hegel, Marx, Freud, Heidegger...

Talk about the ‘leap’ in philosophical circles usually begins with Kierkegaard, who provides a key reference point for subsequent attempts to deploy this motif in various types of modern and contemporary thought. What is so important about Kierkegaard’s usage of the word, often wrongly termed the ‘leap of faith’ (a phrase he never used)? In contrast to what Kierkegaard deems the ‘quantitative transition’ whereby, through ‘immanent necessity’, Hegelian dialectics ‘flops over’ into its further stage, the ‘qualitative leap’¹ found in his writings implies a different order of transformation that is far from cumulative or progressive. While the Kierkegaardian leap includes a circular element insofar as the leap *to* faith is only made through or *by* faith, the very nature of this paradox does not imply a self-serving, integrative interiority, but rather unsettles the type of sequential or even developmental logic (that is, of one thing following from another) on which dialectics—in its cruder, more automatic forms at least—would seem to rest. Thus circularly mediated, the question of the ‘qualitative leap’ forgoes directness as such: one does not directly transition to faith either on the basis of religious study and theological argument, or by logic, method or reason of whatever philosophical type. Rather, the very possibility of such a leap communicates itself more obliquely through indirect forms (and, indeed, pseudonymous authors such as Johannes de Silentio, Constantine Constantius, Vigilius Haufniensis and Johannes Climacus, the latter of whom contemplates the leap in Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*): irony, parody, or satire.

If it is through ‘qualitative’, existential extremity that the Kierkegaardian leap is decisive, such ‘decision’ is however far from the result of deliberate volition, for instance of the muscularly purposeful, albeit obviously ludic, Munchausen type, whose ‘leap’ realizes itself directly, if ridiculously, through sheer force of will. In fact, far from grasping (oneself) tight, for Kierkegaard such a leap involves a certain ‘letting-go’²—an exposure to the ‘other’ of oneself—which disturbs and disorganizes the conventional borderline between active and passive from the outset. This

Kierkegaardian leap, then, appears to eschew rational necessity, logical continuity or progressive determination, but equally its extraordinary momentum is not derived simply from energetic agency. Even though faith is required in taking the leap toward faith, the means of doing so are not merely a property of the leaping subject as its ‘quantitative’ resource, but are instead received from that ‘other’ which can neither be absorbed or assimilated (for in order to leap, faith is needed by the subject *lacking* in faith), nor externalized and demarcated as such (since one leaps to faith having faith, as it were.) Yet in its circular and yet non-self-identical singularity, the Kierkegaardian leap is not just without grounds, context or conditions. The qualitative transition is not merely arbitrary, it is not totally devoid of structure, but is rather shaped and impelled by the intensity of a paradoxical relation to the ‘other’ that itself resists synthesis or mediation in any ‘quantitative’ or relative terms. The paradox of the qualitative leap’s ‘circle’ is that it does not—and cannot—contain itself. It is not capable of dialectical self-projection or systematic reincorporation. That is its ‘leap’, one might say.³

Found at the intersection of key traditions of thought that we inherit today, Kierkegaard’s anti-Hegelianism⁴ raises religious and philosophical questions but also political ones. If the ‘leap’ frequently provides an image of radical political praxis capable of springing decisively into action—whether to actualize or supersede theoretical politics—then what are we to make of the Kierkegaardian claim that Hegelian dialectics will ultimately prove a ‘flop’? What are we to do with the idea that a ‘proper’ leap (‘qualitatively’ distinctive, not just ‘quantitatively’ determined) derives its Kierkegaardian potential instead from a circularity which, since it is as asymmetrically *unheimlich* as it is roundly paradoxical, foregoes the very property or propriety that such ‘properness’ implies? Would such a leap eschew, limit, or transform political possibility? How might we re-stage the profound encounter over the question of the kind of ‘leap’ that we find in the Kierkegaardian text, which, if it occurs at the very crossroads of our own philosophical heritage, unsurprisingly lingers in works by several notable authors in the canon of modern European thought, coming as they do from the various and sometimes antagonistic positions made possible across its philosophical spectrum? What, indeed, can the concept or motif of the ‘leap’ tell us about such antagonisms, and indeed their wider politics?

In the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, taking his cue from the citation found in Hegel's preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, Marx alludes to a famous phrase from Aesop. 'Hic Rhodus, hic salta!' or, more originally, 'hic Rhodus, hic saltus!'⁵ ('here is Rhodes, leap here'), used to illuminate Marx's discussion of the proletarian versus the bourgeois revolution, certainly tasks us to think what we might term the 'politics' of the 'leap'. Indeed, up to the present day, in the work of authors such as Slavoj Žižek one finds occasional references to the leap of faith, whether via Kierkegaard or Pascal, used in order to analyse and evaluate the current possibilities of cultural or political transformation. If the motif of leaping, jumping, springing or rising up is undoubtedly a favorite of radical politics (its most famous instantiation perhaps being the 'Great Leap Forward' campaign in China between 1958 and 1961, the failure of which preceded the Cultural Revolution, of which the Marxist philosopher Alain Badiou gives a detailed summary in his 2006 book *Polemics*⁶), then equally the conceptual resources for thinking the leap 'philosophically' potentially complicate as much as heighten its 'political' resonances. One might think of the originary leap that in Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art' characterizes art's essence and grounds the historical truth of *Dasein*, as much as the aporia of auto-foundation that seems to confront Kierkegaard's qualitative leap; of the two-step movement that connects Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* to Derrida's 'Mochlos' and which leads in turn to his treatment of the dispute between Heidegger and Meyer Schapiro over the interpretation of Van Gogh's painting of shoes, as much as the singular leap of decision one finds in Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* or even the leap into the past as a revolutionary spring into the open air of history, blasting apart its 'continuum', that arises from Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'.

How, then, might the critical and textual legacies of this motif be deciphered in the interests of thinking and acting upon the 'political' today? What lessons might it teach, and what risks might it entail? Is the 'leap' just a metaphor for what may be required, or desired, in politics, a figurative tool rather than an actual instrument of change? Or prior to its translation into political 'actuality' does this figure—in its philosophical and other inscriptions—unlock something more profound about politics itself, whether as a possibility, a provocation or a constraint? The very point of 'here is Rhodes, leap here', that favored slogan of a certain leftism, is that it calls on us to imagine a

political leap or jump that resorts to no specific prior context or privileged justification—just ‘leap here’, where you are, this very instant!—a leap, then, which not only acknowledges and assumes its own immediate circumstances but indeed powerfully creates them, inventing its own conditions of possibility seemingly at a stroke.⁷ As if the leap could absolutely leap away from, by absolutely realizing, its own situation. And yet, it is as though finding oneself *in* Rhodes doesn’t just create the impetus for leaping *from* Rhodes; but rather that *by* leaping we know that we are finally in Rhodes as the place *par excellence* for leaping. We appear to be leaping away *from* Rhodes, in other words, at the same time as the leap places us *there* at long last. ‘Leap here’ rather than ‘leap there’ may not suggest a paradoxical and perhaps unintentional degree of stasis, immobility or repetition somewhat at odds with the political optimism that seems to spring up or leap out from the phrase itself, but it does at least complicate the very trajectory of leaping in its political sense. Kierkegaard himself writes that, strangely enough, ‘everyone knows that the most difficult leap, even in the physical realm, is when a man leaps into the air from a standing position and comes down again on the same spot.’⁸ Meanwhile, to take a somewhat different canonical reference point, Freud’s essay on the uncanny teems with buried springs (*Brunnen*), with not only the hidden or obscure *Urprung* (the radical root) but an array or swell of sources (*Quellen*) that spring up; with eyes that strangely leap, jump or pop (*herausspringen*) in their own sockets, as symptomatic of the uncanny’s close proximity; with barely animate (semi-clockwork) beings wildly spinning or turning about; and, in the final footnote, with the somewhat ludicrous image of a Freud who jumps up (*sprang auf*) to confront his own mirror image, almost as if he was in the midst of a sprung trap.⁹ What of such ‘uncanny’, decidedly non-linear or non-self-identically circular jumps, leaps and springs here, and indeed throughout the ‘text’ of the critical tradition we have alluded to? The Heideggerian leap, too, exposes some of the uncanny aspects of leaping. ‘Where have we leapt?’ Heidegger asks in one place. ‘Perhaps into an abyss? No! Rather, onto some firm soil. Some? No! But on that soil upon which we live and die, if we are honest with ourselves. A curious, indeed unearthly thing that we must first leap onto the soil on which we really stand. When anything so uncanny as this leap becomes necessary, something must have happened that gives food for thought.’¹⁰ Would further research and investigation merely help to clarify and perhaps even resolve the disagreements and disputes among these various thinkers

about what ‘leaping’ may mean, or about what it might do? Or might it point instead to a rather more complicated, *unheimlich* set of interactions happening right across our philosophical inheritance?

To Gather and Leap: Derrida, Heidegger, *Geschlecht*

Perhaps surprisingly, one place where such issues may be taken up is Derrida’s recently rehabilitated text, *Geschlecht III: Sex, Race, Nation, Humanity*, one of a four-part series of essays on Heidegger concerned particularly with questions of philosophical nationality and nationalism in their relationship to a family of terms surrounding this German word, including genus, species, race, stock, generation, gender and sex (the ‘politics’ of such a family group provoke questions that are as complex and tenacious they are obvious). Alongside *Aporias* and *Of Spirit*, this series represents Derrida’s most sustained confrontation with Heidegger. *Geschlecht III* remained in typescript form for many years after it was first circulated under embargo, early in 1985, at a colloquium at Loyola University in Chicago organized by John Sallis, with its author publicly presenting just some indicative remarks about the text’s principal concerns. Derrida nevertheless referred to *Geschlecht III* on several occasions afterwards, no doubt due to his own sense of its eventual importance, and even suggested—albeit rather enigmatically—that it ‘magnetized’ the whole series. However, he never completed *Geschlecht III* for publication during his lifetime, and it was only because of the enthusiasm of David Farrell Krell and the recent efforts of scholars involved in the Derrida Seminars Translation Project that it—the Loyola text and the seminar to which it belonged—finally appeared in French in 2018, with the English translation coming hard on its heels. I want to conduct a fairly detailed reading of *Geschlecht III* to explore how, in this text, Derrida’s analysis of Heidegger’s musings on the Austrian poet Georg Trakl opens up questions of philosophical nationalism in ways that are highly relevant to the issues I have alluded to thus far concerning the curious and perhaps conflicted ‘politics’ of the leap.

Such a reading will unavoidably take us on a somewhat winding and hazardous pathway, with many pitfalls, twists and turns in the road. However, one might begin by asking whether the politics of this nationalism establishes merely a determining context for Heidegger’s treatment of the motif of

the leap as purely an epiphenomenon or secondary figure of the ‘political’, or whether, conversely, this question of leaping is somehow integral to its specific formation from the outset. In answer to the Heideggerian text, or to Heidegger’s ‘manner or style’ (33), Derrida commences *Geschlecht III* (the initial part is described as a ‘first step’) with a question of the rhythm and approach for which Heidegger’s writing calls. It is as if something like a methodological precondition for Derrida’s own text—albeit one that questions the very idea of methodological preconditions—is the interruption of a progressive approach, of concerted and deliberate forward-movement on a given ground, one that operates according to ‘simple... reference points’ that might be taken to chart the evolution of a certain type of philosophical thought (35). This is in favor of ‘abrupt jumps, leaps, and zigzags, decided each time’, surprising and singular movements found at the limits of a plottable repeatability which nonetheless challenge the once-and-for-all identity or indivisible intactness of any single term (such as ‘jump’, ‘leap’, and so forth) not only due to their iterability but because of their lexical and indeed metonymic inscription in a somewhat fluid chain—a family without master. Such terms, in other words, themselves jump or leap.

While Derrida’s text thereby folds itself back into the folds of ‘poetic rhythm’ which move Heidegger’s writing beyond the confines of referential language and indeed ‘metaphysico-aesthetic representation’ (33) as Derrida puts it—a ‘rhythm’ which guides Heidegger in a reading of Trakl whose choices entail paths riddled with holes, dinks and kinks, in fact staggering double-bends, steep jumping-off points, and other abrupt ‘metonymic transitions’ which ‘will seem arbitrary or capricious to those who speak in the name of competency or method’ (60)—this approach nonetheless puts Derrida as much *out of* as *in* step with Heidegger. The interruptive quality of unpredictable zig-zaggery causes Derrida to leap away from, as much as into or toward, Heidegger’s ‘style’ of writing; or, rather, it leads him to ‘interrupt a jump, suspend its gesture’ (34)—in other words, to deviate from or deconstruct Heidegger in the most singular fashion, precisely through a certain re-marking of Heidegger’s own procedure, one that is inevitably as faithless in its fidelity to Heidegger’s type of approach as it is faithful in following Heidegger’s own infidelities. But how can one jump within a jump, re-leap in mid-leap? For all its craziness, this rather astounding proposition nevertheless calls up the very question of relation itself—and, for that matter, of reference (or the relation of ‘relation’ to

‘reference’)—in which the whole question of *Geschlecht* is so profoundly caught up. Derrida writes:

To anticipate abruptly, we see announced that, in the question of *Geschlecht* and of ‘*Geschlecht*’—of the thing, word, or mark (and before the question, which is then no longer the most general term, there is the mark), of a thing, word or mark that never again rest in their essence of thing or word – there is only a provocation to think relation as reference, as a relation of word to thing, nor only the sexual relation... but also a relation of the one to the two in which the fold of reference as difference precedes a certain duality or situates it between two forms of the two... (36)

The constituting supplementarity of difference at play in the very operations of reference profoundly disrupts the orders of identity and recognition (the ‘one’) which contrive the minimal effects of referentiality; but equally such difference in its deconstructive sense—*différance*—exceeds and outstrips as much as it makes possible the attribution of pairs, oppositions, dualities (the ‘two’) which is, of course, the very counterpart of a referential understanding of ‘relation’. On condition of reference, then, or due to its very conditions, there is ultimately no rest nor repose in reference or relation, neither in regard to the ‘one’ nor the ‘two’, and this problematic situation permeates every aspect of Derrida’s ‘approach’ to Heidegger, just as it deeply constructs the very problem of *Geschlecht* that one encounters in, or via, Heidegger. In other words, this deconstructibility re-opens the question of *Geschlecht* (or of *relations*) as also the question of ‘Heidegger-Derrida’ itself, according to ‘relations’—if they may unproblematically be called that—for which the motif of the ‘leap’ seems to remain indispensable, indeed redoubling itself as these questions are gathered together. So that, from the outset, making reference—of any kind whatsoever—to Heidegger’s text, let alone establishing a relationship to it, of whatever sort (an endeavour that is needless to say extremely fraught, both politically and philosophically, as much for Derrida as for us) demands engagement with this proposition of a re-leap mid-leap, a jumping-off from the point of a jump that is always already underway—rather than constructing or pursuing an interaction which presumes some degree of referential or relational grounding, or otherwise lapsing into the comicality of a Munchausenesque defiance of gravity.

And yet, despite questions of the leap and of the deconstructibility of relation and reference, a

text calls to be signed, as Derrida himself notes. ‘Because a signature is of a type’, as he puts it, its singularity nevertheless suggests ‘typical gestures’; those that—recalling once more the question of *Geschlecht*—‘fall under the same type’, however idiomatic that may be. The typical is not just the same, the mark of an intact repetition; in fact, as Derrida points out, through its own family of terms it also implies a ‘stroke’ or ‘strike’, as of the typewriter key that leaps out from the machine and up towards its moving target (so that any strike risks the possibility of a mis-hit or mis-type.) The Greek verb *tuptein* means to hit, the *tupos* is the mark of a ‘blow’ or ‘stroke’, as much as it makes the gods in their own image (think again of that striking Freudian leap in front of the mirror), so that—above all—the ‘typical’ re-marks, introducing generality and genus only through the gesture and movement of a certain force or violence akin to the impact of a ‘leap’.

To re-mark is thus to re-leap. The ‘typical’ is not just formed from a constraint, from the ‘limit’ that confers recognisability, but in Derrida’s own words it ‘makes possible’ or ‘gives rise’ (*donne lieu*, which also means to ‘give place’), giving place in the very act of giving rise, of leaping *up* or *away* as much as *into* or *toward*. Any consideration of the ‘determination of the essence of place’, in the manner of Heidegger, would therefore need to reckon in some fashion with this ‘leap’ of place, just as we might need to account for the ‘place’ or ‘type’ of Heidegger’s or Derrida’s discourse in terms of that to which they may ‘give rise’. When, in regard to Heidegger, Derrida asks about ‘the situation of the place, the gesture that seeks to indicate the proper site’, the question of leaping is, therefore, precisely what is at stake. In any effort to make one’s way toward the question of place, one should acknowledge this most essential yet forceful gesture or movement inscribed within such ‘making way’. If, for Heidegger, the ‘way’ and the ‘step’—rather than the ‘leap’—seem more properly connected, what is the difference between a step and a leap? Is it possible or likely one can impose hard and fast distinctions or discriminations, as Heidegger at times seems inclined to do? We will come back to this. But in Heidegger’s reflections, if place is ‘gathered’—in the multiple sense of this term: cohered but also comprehended as such—by means of an approaching ‘pathway’, the steps this entails may also depend on leaps. Leaps of the type that strike, suggests Derrida; which come to blows as ‘place’ takes place—taking place, in other words, before place can take place. Which, for all that, does not make such ‘leaps’ placeless, far from it, since as Derrida himself remarks ‘one must already

be on the way in order to ask one's way' (44-5). Put in another context, one must leap *somewhere*: 'Hic Rhodus, hic saltus.' The question of place, in whatever form, is itself always already situated in some fashion; it always has or holds a place of sorts, it does not occur in a vacuum or thin air. Instead, as Derrida remarks, such a question is already 'on the way' both toward and after a place.

In Derrida's *Glas*, of course—a text explicitly alluded to more than once in *Geschlecht III*—the problem of gathering is one of 'transcendental excrescence', as he puts it, since that which gathers—for instance, the flower as 'the poetic object par excellence', the very figure of poetics or rhetoric (14)—is the key element that designates and demarcates the whole from a transcendent or extraterritorial standpoint, while at the same time remaining the typical or exemplary 'figure of figures' precisely within the group or set which it effectively allots. The flower as gatherer leaps up, without sure and certain grounds it is set apart from 'the series of bodies or objects of which it forms a part', or which 'place' it as such, becoming in the process an excrescent or de-parted part, one that exposes the deconstructibility of relations in general. The same might be said, via Derrida's essay 'Mochlos', of philosophy's relationship to the Enlightenment university (i.e., philosophy remains an irreducible part of that which it serves to establish and specify); or, as we shall see, of the departed stranger in Heidegger's reading of Trakl, who emerges as the uncanny figure of gathering itself. Rather than taking a binary form, the double figure of the gatherer/gathered therefore re-marks divisibility at the origin, exposing the intractable interplay of leaping and gathering in the specification of any series or group—the very problematic of *Geschlecht*.

Returning to Derrida's reading of Heidegger: on the way to the question of 'place; is the 'situation of the site' (46). The issue of the 'site', in other words, stems from this 'situation'. The German origin of 'site'—that to which we will need to 'orient' our 'situation'—connects it to the word '*Ort*', meaning place but also, more originally, 'the tip of a spear' or sword. If, as Derrida suggests, one always 'leaps' in the vicinity of a purported origin—'for the origin is itself a leap', he says—then this 'situation' is obviously hazardous. It risks a 'blow', 'glance' or 'strike'. Yet for Heidegger the instrumentalization or, as we might say today, weaponization of the meaning of '*Ort*' through the figure of arms is less of a focus than the idea of the 'tip' as an acute point of convergence, the site of a potent gathering of forces. Such gathering, then, is the essence of the 'site', where

gathering achieves the intense traversal of elements as much as the sharp demarcation of things. The 'site' opens as much as it confines or coheres. Through its very gathering it grants the prospect of passage. Gathering and leaping are not, from this perspective, the alternative 'situations' we might expect from the normative connotations of each term: gathering having to do with the concerted, purposeful and deliberate assemblage of elements in the interest of harmonization, as an expression of due care and consideration; leaping suggesting a sudden, erratic, disparate movement often without proper foresight, liable to chance outcomes and severe risk of harm, however 'willed' it may be. Instead, the traversal accomplished by gathering—recalling the double sense of comprehension as well as coherence—determines the original essence of '*Ort*' or 'place' as always already cross-cut by the possibility of open passage, and hence by something like the 'leap'. So that, indeed, 'the origin is a leap'. Later in the text, Derrida challenges what he sees as Heidegger's assumption of a basically uncontaminated distinction between a polysemic plurality which gathers and harmonises more or less recuperatively—Derrida describes this 'acceptable polysemy' as somewhat Aristotelian and ultimately rather Platonico-Christian—and a disseminal dispersion that Heidegger views as 'careless, vague', without place, ground, direction or determination; a distinction which dubiously implies, as Derrida puts it, that 'there can be no rigorous thinking or poetic writing of dissemination' (109) *à la* deconstruction. Derrida argues that Heidegger inadequately articulates or elaborates the difference between these two forms of difference—polysemy and dissemination—so that consequently the boundary between them appears fixed and static, organised by an implied and indeed self-evident hierarchy (dissemination here becomes either privative, extrinsic or accidental), whereas the movements or operations of each in regard to the other would imply a complex dynamics which absolutely calls for thought. Such a complicated interplay—in other words, just what 'strikes' between the two forms of difference, opening a path as much as setting a stamp (171)—would, in turn, significantly reframe questions of gathering and leaping from a more rigorously deconstructive—and less 'binarizable'—point of view. Not least, by exposing the privileging of a pluralizing polysemy that ultimately remains 'homeward bound', as it were, such a deconstruction makes possible the analysis of a certain geopolitical configuration within which nationalism and

cosmopolitanism appear not as opposed alternatives but instead as ‘two symmetrical and fundamentally indifferent versions of the same humanist metaphysics’ (140).

As Derrida notes, the tip or point is not only of the spear or sword but also of the quill or pen that marks by a certain ‘stroke’, just as the key to the ‘type’ (or typological signature) is a certain ‘strike’ or marking. If such marking gathers and marks what is gathered, once more its original opening to a family of terms and play of forces marked by traversal and difference situates its energies inextricably in regard to a certain ‘leaping’. Indeed, the leap traverses what is gathered at its very origin. A little later on, through a series of reflections on the spring and the source of water’s movement in the current or the wave, Derrida suggests that, for Heidegger, the double movement of emanation and return which traverses questions of gathering and leaping also determines or, perhaps better, ‘situates’ the essence of poetic rhythm above and beyond any technical ‘prosodic science’ which might make itself available to ‘metaphysico-aesthetic representational thinking’, as he puts it (53). From this point of view, rhythm itself—the essence of rhythm which connects poetry to thought—cannot forgo the leaps or jumps which common-sense might assume militate against it (just as the wave’s rhythm emanates from a source that suddenly springs or singularly gives rise [*donne lieu*] as much as it situates or puts in place); while, equally, as Derrida notes, ‘the moment of the leap’ is no guarantee of a break with circularity or circles, for instance of the hermeneutic type, even if it profoundly resituates the issue of a ‘logical circle’ as such.

Such insights on Derrida’s part constitute a ‘first step’ in the text, which, whether or not it intends to clear the ground in some fashion, is presented as ‘indicative’, and therefore liable to a change of rhythm where the ‘second part’ or ‘step’ is concerned, which in contrast to a level of close reading found in the first sixty or so pages of *Geschlecht III* will, so Derrida says, doubtless involve rapidly-made ‘violent moves and shortcuts’ that will be needed ‘to open up some perspective’ (61). Nevertheless, as much as it opens, the ‘first step’ or leap still ‘leads us’ toward a ‘gathering’ that itself prepares the ground for such an opening, however ‘violent’ it may be. Is this ‘first step’ essentially, or first of all, a ‘leap’? We have already asked: What is the relation of a ‘step’ to a ‘leap’? In his essay ‘Mochlos’, to which *Geschlecht III* also alludes, Derrida observes that in Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties* the division of the university into higher and lower faculties provides a way to resolve the

aporia of the institution's founding (and hence to address its near-perpetual crisis of legitimacy) by recasting this aporia in terms of an organised conflict waged in the setting of a 'faculty parliament'. However, if theology, law and medicine are to occupy the right bench in order to uphold and defend the statutes of government, with the 'lower' philosophy faculty situated on the left side in parliamentary terms, in order to pose 'rigorous examination and objections' in the name of truth, we are reminded by Derrida that in Kant's 'What is Orientation in Thinking?' left and right are not situated according to 'a conceptual or logical determination' but via 'a sensory topology that has to be referred to the subjective position of the human body', one that recognises—or misrecognises—the other's left as a right, one which therefore tends to repress the status of its own right as the other's left. From whose left and/or right, then, are 'parliamentary' positions identified? If, 'as Kant will have told us, the university will have to go on two feet, left and right, each foot having to support the other with each step to make the leap', the parliamentary two-left-footedness, as it were, noted by Derrida implies a certain disorientation even while it facilitates the leverage that allows a body—whether corporeal or parliamentary—to take steps. The left foot may step forward only because the right remains planted on the spot, but this idea that leverage is always received from the 'other' remains susceptible to a compounded risk of disorientation or displacement given the paradoxes arising from the highly unstable sensorial topology of left and right. Still, given that one foot stays rooted to the spot when one steps—so that every step is also a not-step (*pas*)—isn't a step different from a fully-fledged, two-footed 'leap'? Can we not distinguish them as such? Isn't Derrida slipshod with language, muddling together two distinct types of gait? Is he guilty of a *faux-pas* or false step where he speaks of 'each foot having to support the other with each step to make the leap'? Yes and no. As we have seen in *Geschlecht III*, the very possibility of leaping arises, springs up, from a ground opened by the traversals to which gathering gives rise—a ground that is, nevertheless, thereby situated as a place, point or spot. The very possibility of the leap, in other words, originates from the traversal of 'place' otherwise, in which its origin, essence or root is gathered. The leap thus also relies on a type of 'relation' to the ground, so that each leap—striking (out) on the spot—is indeed also a 'step' of sorts. Put the other way around, from the very first, the 'step'—for instance, Derrida's 'first step'—may be said to leap. (Such a leap may even constitute itself, in Derrida's own terms, as a different

form of the step/non-step or *pas*, given that the leap is neither here nor there exactly.)

The gathering which through traversals of difference opens ground or passage so as to invite leaping also invites the stranger. In Heidegger's reading of Trakl, the 'whole saying' of his poems is, for Heidegger, gathered in this enigmatic figure who is not merely placeless but is instead always 'on the way', in a transit 'situation' (the way or step, as we have just seen, struggling to achieve full separation from the idea of a leap). If the stranger is 'cast astray', denied self-reference in the very alienation from his own name or terminology—that is to say, alienated by the whole family of terms that surround him so as to render the strange somewhat more familiar—if he seems to be placed inside a language which does not fully translate all the while that his migration towards the gathering-site occurs, then ultimately Heidegger's response is, Derrida argues, to pose the question of the stranger exclusively in German. By excluding the other languages that traverse its discourse, Heidegger—says Derrida—converts and eliminates the nomadic qualities of the migrant-stranger through images of repatriation or return to the 'proper', through notions of the 'destination' and the 'home' for which this stranger's purpose is, henceforth, to search. This implies an internal or 'uncanny' strangeness of the stranger as the one who, like the returning prodigal son, appreciates the essence of 'place' (its opening, promise or call) perhaps more than any other. But at this point in his reading, as Derrida notes, Heidegger ventures another leap or 'metonymic transition' to a different Trakl poem in which the stranger's 'soul' is 'called into decline', a decline that is less 'a fall, a catastrophe or a collapse' than it is a 'sinking' into 'rest and silence'—a quiet 'sliding away' that for Derrida silently mimes the metonymic transition of the Heideggerian leap from one poem to another. It seems as if traversal by metonymy might be the slippery slope for 'proper' destination—that it may constitute the *unheimlich* counterpoint, the uncanny supplement which the 'proper' always bears within itself. The restriction of Heidegger's questioning—or questing—to 'proper' German is thereby somewhat countered by precisely those jerky and erratic metonymic possibilities which nonetheless facilitate the steps or leaps that seem most proper—or properly 'Heideggerian'—to it. It is they that gather in its essence, so to speak. And what they mark is decomposition, or rather the passing away of what is already effectively decomposed though precisely such metonymic operations, 'leaps' or 'jumps' that everywhere happen 'on the way' to a gathering-site. (As Derrida puts it elsewhere, place 'is not a spot... a place of

stability, it is a departure, already a difference' (142)—involving a dislocation but also a certain departedness inscribed within the very possibility of dwelling, abiding or gathering, just as we found in Derrida's *Glas* with regard to the 'de-parted' or 'excremental' transcendental.) And for Derrida this implies a human decomposition that in turn recasts the question of the animal that he addresses elsewhere in relation to Heidegger. All of this, of course, profoundly affects questions of *Geschlecht* since such human decomposition, deep degeneration or abiding departure of the journeying stranger strikes against the engendered or gathered specificity of the human species, even as it seems to mark its very possibility. Derrida traces the points of departure that lead from this constitutive 'decline' of specificity to the recasting of sexual difference in terms of division, separation, classification, organised conflict or, in other words, binary opposition. It is as if this re-differentiation or re-specification of sexual difference is both a forceful reaction to and the fateful outcome of the entire play of leaping and gathering that determines *Geschlecht* from the beginning. Furthermore, as Derrida shows later in the text, this decomposition of the human as a consequence of an essential uprootedness inscribed within the very question of 'place' is also the ultimate ground of every nationalism, the source of all its typical postures (173). The leap implanted within gathering always comes with risks, in other words, and they are far from just accidental or extrinsic.

To restore Marx's famous citation to its fuller context, in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* he writes tellingly of the particular type of movements which accompany proletarian revolt:

proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals – until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out: Hic Rhodus, hic salta!

Here, the defectiveness of proletarian revolution is characterized by a self-interruptive movement that is 'weak,' 'paltry,' half-cocked, a merely preliminary attempt or first step, thus eminently liable to

mis-fire or mis-hit its target. If such movement resonates with the type of leap which ‘those who speak in the name of competency or method’ typically deride as capricious and unsystematic, then its eventual recuperation in a leap ‘proper’ towards a worthy destination or goal equally recalls the justification and privileging of an ‘acceptable’ polysemy over wanton dissemination. Somewhat like the startled Freud who almost jumps out of his skin at the sight of a mirror-image he firstly misrecognizes, proletarian recoil from its own revolutionary destiny appears but a momentary lapse which in the end, perhaps, serves self-recognition all the better; albeit self-criticism, in Marx’s text, stalls rather than aids self-overcoming, giving rise to distortions which are nonetheless redolent of Freud’s first look in the mirror, distortions that feed the ‘cruel thoroughness’ of deep analysis which, for Marx, seems to inhibit as much as invite action. And yet the uncanny shadow that is cast over this Freudian ‘sprang auf’ also haunts ‘here is Rhodes, leap here’ just as it does the Heideggerian uncanny of a ‘leap onto the soil on which we really stand’—a place that is (land-) marked not only by a colossal opponent but also a colossal, all-consuming ultimate goal. Leaping neither exactly here nor there, ‘Hic Rhodus, hic saltus’ is perhaps not merely the liberating alternative to proletarian revolutionary self-interruption or recoil, nor even just its dialectical *aufhebung*, since it also sounds an *unheimlich* if distant echo of another powerful ‘strike’ or ‘stroke.’ A reverberation, perhaps, of the recuperative force of a gathered leap through which—in a different situation, but how different?—philosophical nationalism seeks to contain and convert disseminal energies for its own particular interests. Here, the impossibility of turning back is not just the rallying cry of revolutionary subjects on the cusp of a giant leap, since uncannily—even if by way of a leap—it also conjures another modern European spectre, that of the departed stranger.

Parting shots

1) In Hoffmann’s ‘The Sand Man’, as Freud observes, the ill-fated Nathaniel—unable to rally from his long illness, and suddenly driven by a new bout of madness—jumps from the parapet of the town hall to a terrible death. Brought to an ultimate crisis-point where there is nothing to do but leap, what makes him fling himself down is the sight of Coppelius, the Sand Man, who swiftly departs the scene like a stranger in the shadows. If it is the returning prospect of the uncanny that provokes this

dramatic turn, then Hoffmann's tale also concocts images of Coppélius screwing off the arms and legs of victims, as if they were semi-animate machines or living dolls,¹¹ in a fresh spectacle of the decomposition of the human paired—as uncanny disassemblage of the 'self' takes hold—with the delicious cruelty of limbless immobility.¹² Indeed, Nathaniel's leap is almost epileptic, spasmic, close to involuntary or automatic, perhaps more pre-programmed than it is active and spontaneous. The uncanny, of course, resists as much as it represents the coming to light—or the springing up—of repression. It represses the leap it provokes. Through a repetitiveness that mimics the hapless automatons it invents for itself, the uncanny risks entrapment within this double scene almost as much as its objects or victims. Fluctuating between blindness and insight—circling or orbiting their space like a spinning eye, or even an involuntarily returning step¹³—its best bet yet perhaps most troubling tendency is a quiet 'sliding away'¹⁴ that, for Derrida, ultimately awaits the metonymic transitions characteristic of the leaps of *Geschlecht* or '*Geschlecht*.' Caught on the hop.

2) Commenting on the Swiss modernist author—and inveterate walker—Robert Walser in 1929, the same year that the latter was committed to a mental asylum (as it turned out, permanently), Walter Benjamin nuances the now-common appreciation of the lightness of Walser's prose, claiming the writer's principal insight is that 'nothingness is weighty.'¹⁵ Excelling in the 'short form' style that is the vehicle for many 'hopeful butterflies' seeking refuge from the 'cliff-face of so-called great literature,'¹⁶ Walser's texts 'run wild' in a manner that seems 'totally unintentional,' albeit this 'letting go of form,' and his apparent determination to leave each text entirely uncorrected, is the product of concerted 'perseverance' on Walser's part (144). The paradoxically deliberate resistance of intentionality adds to a natural Swiss 'reticence' the virtuoso quality of a getting 'lost': 'a surge of words gushes forth in which each sentence only has the task of obliterating the previous one.' Indeed, if Walser turns the Schillerian axiom into prose form—"Through this sunken path must he come"—his own texts nevertheless artfully 'keep tripping him up' (145); thought 'staggers about in them' like the vagabond, indeed like the wandering stranger from the 'forests and valleys of Romantic Germany' of more than a century ago, whose 'homesickness' drives them on (146). And yet one should not be misled or tripped up by such easy comparisons; Walser's prose derives not in the least from his native meadows or mountains, insists Benjamin, but instead from 'madness' and the 'night' of the early

twentieth century. Benjamin suggests that it is the ‘uncanny’ quality of Walser’s writing—its cheery gentleness as much as its tearful sadness, its crazy insightfulness, and particularly its capacity to ‘cure’ the ailments of which it is presumably also a product, making its ‘atmosphere’ continually one of a lively ‘convalescence’—that marks him out as one of Kafka’s ‘favorites’ (146). In a letter to Pavel Eisner, responsible for producing some of the earliest Czech language editions of his own work, Kafka indeed acknowledges the literary emergence of Walser in the late years of the twentieth-century’s first decade.¹⁷ Simon, the protagonist of *The Tanners*, one of three major novels by Walser published at this time, simply ‘runs around everywhere’ (139) Kafka observes, albeit in an ultimately undistinguished fashion, coming to nothing in the end. He is, says Kafka without particular condemnation (since he counts himself among the ‘runners-around’), merely a ‘well-lit’ amusement for the times. Characters such as Simon—but presumably Walser, and Kafka, too—are ‘somewhat slower at emerging’ than their counterparts of previous generations. They do not ‘follow the regular leaps of time with equally regular leaps of their own.’ They leap, not ahead, but somehow behind (and thus, in a different sense, before) the times. Laggards all, quite incapable of ‘catching up with the marching column,’ their leap is unlikely to be of a colossal type; and, indeed, as Kafka puts it, the ‘step left behind soon acquires such an appearance that you would be willing to wager it is not a human step.’ But, he adds, ‘you would lose the wager.’ Instead, the view afforded by such ‘an appearance’ is like the one to be had while astride a racehorse that refuses the hurdle or falters mid-leap—a view that is strangely completed as its somewhat synthetic unity (‘the unity of the emerging stands... of the living spectators... of the surrounding region’) breaks apart into a fallen vision of human disarray (though man and animal fall together, in sync.) A ‘view’ of collapsing bystanders, flying bodies, swirling gaps in the crowd; a spectacle of ‘fleeting interrelationships’ (140) which is, paradoxically, as replete as it is transitory. If Walser’s prose has been described as having a proletarian quality,¹⁸ then Benjamin (not unlike Marx) ultimately detects in itinerant movements of the Walserian type—fallen, lagging, out of stride, and, at the very edge of ‘letting go,’ the most unleap-like of leaping—the ‘struggle’ to get ‘free’ from ‘suffering.’ The fallen leap of Heidegger’s departed stranger is, perhaps, much out of step with the emerging possibility of such ‘struggle.’

¹ See Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), esp. 90-97; and also *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985). For a good introduction to the topic of Kierkegaardian leaping, see M. Jamie Ferreira, 'Faith and the Kierkegaardian leap,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alistair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 207-34.

² In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard associates this letting-go with a certain passage beyond the limits of 'demonstration.' Unsurprisingly, just as the Kierkegaardian leap exceeds 'quantitative' or 'historical' transitions, the temporality of such a 'let-go' leap beyond 'demonstration' is not sequential or cumulative (and certainly not the route to a projected or constructable future), but is instead merely a 'diminutive moment,' perhaps even a 'very instant' that resists reinsertion in the temporal order: 'it does not have to be long, because it is a *leap*' (43).

³ Thus, perhaps, freeing the dialectic from the possibility of a bad infinity.

⁴ Other critics will argue that Kierkegaard not merely rejects Hegelianism but also reappropriates Hegelian sublation as providing the grounds for his own theory of the 'leap'. See for example Ronald R. Johnson, 'The Logic of leaping: Kierkegaard's Use of Hegelian Sublation,' *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 14.1 (1997): 155-70. Equally, in texts such as *Theory of the Subject* (London: Continuum, 2009), Alain Badiou will refer more than once to the Hegelian leap from the 'quantitative' to the 'qualitative.'

⁵ The epigram is given by Hegel in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, first in Greek then in Latin: 'Hic Rhodus, hic saltus!' He subsequently recasts the phrase in German: 'Hier ist die Rose, hier tanze,' meaning 'here is the rose, dance here.' This has been taken to make allusion to the rose in the cross of the Rosicrucians, who claimed to possess esoteric knowledge with which they could transform social life, Hegel therefore punning first on the Greek (*Rhodos* equalling Rhodes, *rhodon* meaning rose), then on the Latin (*saltus* meaning jump, *salta* meaning dance.) Marx quotes the maxim, first giving the Latin, in the form: 'Hic Rhodus, hic salta!' which muddles together Hegel's two versions. Nevertheless, Marx seems to have retained Hegel's meaning, namely that, when

intimidated by the enormity of a task, action is quelled until a situation arises that makes all turning back impossible.

⁶ Alain Badiou, *Polemics* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 291-321. This section also appears in *The Communist Hypothesis*, also published by Verso in 2010.

⁷ One might say, with a nod to Kierkegaard, that this leap displays characteristics that are as much existential as they are historical.

⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 327.

⁹ Of course, ‘The ‘Uncanny’’ concludes with an image of trap doors opening up beneath one’s feet, so that here the ground dropping away beneath you is less a matter of active leaping than it is the consequence of a certain lure. And it concerns the fleeing man, a figure not dissimilar to the departed stranger that Coppélius makes of himself once Nathaniel has leapt, whether involuntarily or not.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, ‘What is Called Thinking?’ 41-42 (16-17)

¹¹ Living doll might also be a way to describe fiction itself, which Freud spends much time in ‘The ‘Uncanny’’ comparing to reality in terms of the uncanny’s effects or prospects. Interestingly, however, amid these various interplays between the human and non-human, movement and non-movement, literary realism which tends to conceal its fictiveness is charged with ‘overstepping’ itself.

¹² Here, the hierarchy of hand over foot which privileges the former, whether in the domain of poetics or thought *à la* Heidegger, is of little consequence when, for Freud, both feature—paradoxically, as severed or separated parts—more or less indifferently in the same (castration) complex which ‘The ‘Uncanny’’ endeavors to illuminate.

¹³ I am thinking here of Freud’s embarrassment, while strolling in a provincial Italian town, at his recurring involuntary return to the red light district—if indeed that may be described as merely involuntary.

¹⁴ In Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, incidentally, Lessing, who provides the inspiration for Kierkegaard’s reflections on the leap, not only ‘parries ironically’ the criticisms of Jacobi but ‘slips away from Jacobi on his old legs—which are good enough to leap with’ (94).

Equally incidentally, at one point in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, Cartesian ideas are referred to in language that recalls the Freudian uncanny, and indeed which resonates with much of the material in the present essay: 'The whole thing is a sleight of hand, reminiscent of the Cartesian dolls. One wants the idea, standing on its legs, to stand on its head the moment one lets go of it... Or it may also be the result of the inability of human thought to stand on its legs at all (stand alone) and its need to stand on its head right away, but then it does not occur by way of a conclusion but by an immediate leap' (191).

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'Robert Walser' in *Robert Walser Rediscovered: Stories, Fairy-Tale Plays, and Critical Responses*, ed. Mark Harman (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1985), 144-47.

¹⁶ In Christopher Middleton's 'Postscript' to Robert Walser's *Selected Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 191-94, we are reminded that 'Walser eked out a living as a *feuilletonist*,' the *feuilleton* referring to 'the miniature impressions, gossipings, entertainments, anecdotes, parables, often with a lyrical twist, which since the 1820s—following French models—had been appearing under the main news items on the front page of newspapers' (192). Equally, albeit connected to this tradition, Walser's microscripts are heralded as a literary leap.

¹⁷ Franz Kafka, 'Letter to Director Eisner,' in *Robert Walser Rediscovered*, 139-40.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Middleton's 'Postscript' to *Selected Stories*, where, alongside his 'princely imagination,' the 'proletarian mode of life' adopted by Walser found in short prose its 'proper habitat' (192), according to the author.