

THE BLUSHING MACHINE: ANIMAL SHAME AND TECHNOLOGICAL LIFE

David Wills

At the very end of his 1997 conference suite on the animal, now published as *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, on its last page, Jacques Derrida, very much alive, indeed 'live,' extemporizing after time has run out for any more formal address, speaks of dying: "I can die, or simply leave the room" (Derrida, 160).¹

The immediate context of his words—if we can presume to know what is meant by that, or any of the other terms I've already presupposed in what I have just said—is a reference to what Heidegger says about the capacity of *Dasein*, in contradistinction to the animal, to let be, exist, or live. The animal supposedly doesn't: "If it is the case that the animal does not comport itself toward beings as such, then behaviour involves no *letting-be* of beings as such," Heidegger writes in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.² But Derrida wants to know whether the contrary can in fact be claimed for *Dasein*. Does *Dasein* indeed let be to the extent of being radically absent from, dead with respect to any 'vital design' whose mobilization would impinge upon another being? Quoting from Derrida now: "can one free the relation of *Dasein* (not to say 'man') to beings from every living, utilitarian, perspective-making project, from every vital design, such that man himself could 'let the being be'?" And he continues: "To relate to the thing such as it is in itself [his example is now the sun]—supposing that it were possible—means apprehending it such as it is, such as it would be even if I weren't there. I can die or simply leave the room; I know that it will be what it is and will remain what it is. That is why death is such an important demarcation line; it is starting from mortality and from the possibility of being dead that one can let things be such as they are, in my absence, in a way, and my presence is there only to reveal what the thing would be in my absence. So can the human do that, purely?" (Derrida, 160)

Having said that, almost at the very end of the tape of the informal session on Heidegger that closed the 1997 Cerisy conference on his work, Derrida effectively left the room, died, and let his words be. So the question I want to begin by posing today concerns what form of life or being that text, and his utterance have, and what they can tell us in more general terms about living. To do that I'll start within a familiar conceptual framework—about which Derrida taught us a great deal—that surrounds the text, its testamentary status as remainder or *restance*, as something that lives on in ways that are sometimes common knowledge and sometimes totally counterintuitive. But in using some of those ideas, familiar at least to readers of Derrida, as my background, I shall be orienting things toward a different point of inquiry, discussion or debate, namely the simple but insoluble question of what it is to live, of what lives, a question that Derrida persistently returned to in later work, but which we would have to recognize as being posed from the very beginning of his thinking.

I said that in July 1997 Derrida spoke, left the room, and died. I don't think I have the time here to unpack that statement in all its complexity, but certain points can easily be made. In summer 1997 Derrida was six years away from the diagnosis of the cancer that would carry him off. He was celebrating his 67th birthday, to all intents and purposes in good health, and indeed, he was to survive yet another Cerisy *décade* devoted to him five years after this one on "The Autobiographical Animal."³ However much he thought, lectured, indeed obsessed about dying, however much it had to happen, its semiophysiological horizon was some way off. Its time remained necessary yet unanticipatable. As a result, the taperecording of his words from that July session remained unexposed. Perhaps 75-100 people heard him then, and I imagine only a very small handful subsequently listened to the tape. Derrida himself, I feel sure, never listened to it again. Whenever I pestered him for the full manuscript of his text on the animal he systematically replied that the Heidegger section needed a great deal of work and he didn't know when he would find the time to get back to it. We now know that he didn't. And when the question of the posthumous publication of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* was raised, the status of the final chapter remained a serious limiting factor. So there is both the naïve and serious matter, regarding the words I am basing my discussion on, of authority, that precisely of an author. Naïve because a whole belle-lettrist tradition of textual genesis, revived most notably today in certain analyses that call themselves historicist, relies on the possibility of assigning a textual origin according to principles whose inspiration remains decidedly creationist. Serious however, because in spite of that naïve tradition, one cannot simply ignore the distinctions between, on the one hand, the three chapters of *The Animal that Therefore I Am* that were written and delivered in formal lecture sessions (and two of which were published during Derrida's lifetime), and, on the other, the final chapter. Nor can one ignore Derrida's intention to rework that chapter and produce a book that may well have had a quite different form from that of the posthumous volume. Derrida was careful to remind us that the death of the author was in many ways too reductive a concept, and that intention could never disappear from the field of differentiated utterances; it simply could no longer be presumed to control that field.

One of the operative distinctions in the text of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that we now have is thus the structural difference between those portions that Derrida prepared in written form, even if the writing was designed for *viva voce* address, and the transcribed taperecording that is the final chapter, unwritten but made 'writing' thanks to phonographic technology; between two types of orality that are also two types of writing. Writing and voice are divided, in more ways than one. Those of us who were familiar with the voice of Derrida hear that voice—its tone and timbre, its humor and pathos—in both the formal (written) portions of the extended Cerisy lecture and the informal (transcribed) portion. And whether it is a case of reading or listening, it is clear that the formal portion subdivides into various levels of formality (and informality), just as the informal portion divides into various levels of informality (and formality). Both contain a whole differential terrain of discursive registers within which any simple opposition between formal and informal becomes impossible to sustain. That would be the case, in fact, with any text: there cannot be any pure discursive homogeneity, any absolutely seamless equilibrium to the utterance. If there were, one could never even raise one's voice sufficient to utter anything at all. Those are all reasons why Derrida called all utterances 'writing', why he considered that anything that self-extended sufficiently to leave a trace consists of an uneven, ruptured and heterogeneous mark or *trait*.

THE BLUSHING MACHINE

Within the differential terrain of discursive registers that constitutes the final chapter of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the specific utterance “I can die, or simply leave the room,” is similarly hard to classify, but let’s try nevertheless. It could easily be heard functioning on the same level as various formulations from the earlier chapters, such as these: “I dreamed for a long time,” or “I love to watch them sleep” (Derrida, 62). It is arguably less formal, as well as much more homogeneous, than this: “the expression ‘I am living (that is to say as an animal) therefore I am’ is assured of no philosophical certitude” (Derrida, 86); and more formal than this: “caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example, the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment” (Derrida, 4).

The question of the utterance’s formality overlaps at a certain point with its performative status. “I can die, or simply leave the room” seems on the face of it to be uncomplicatedly constative, informing us of a matter of fact, or at least the possibility of that fact. Yet it performs in two obvious ways. In the first place, it has the rhetorical force of an example, an instantiation of “my not being there,” as indicated by the context, which I’ll here repeat: “To relate to the thing such as it is in itself...means apprehending it such as it is, such as it would be even if I weren’t there. I can die or simply leave the room.” One can almost hear “for example” being uttered between “even if I weren’t there” and “I can die, etc.” In that respect some other utterance could as well serve in its place—“I can be vaporized, or simply go out of perceptual reach”—which means that the precise information contained in the utterance is replaceable and hence inessential, which deprives it of its constative assurance. And that is not just because the semantic field of “my not being there” is broad enough to allow various synonymous formulations, but more precisely because of the rupture in the discursive surface that takes place at the end of the preceding sentence. For it is not only *for example* that one can hear inserted in the sentence break, signaling the opening of a paradigmatic set and the selection of two possibilities from within that set, so that we hear it like this: *even if I weren’t there could mean, for example, something as anodyne as leaving the room or something as absolute as death*. One can hear also in “I can die” the rhetorical effect of an apostrophe, something like this: “To relate to the thing such as it is in itself...means apprehending it such as it is, such as it would be even if I weren’t there. *Now listen carefully and be sure to understand the full consequence of that: I can die,*” as if Derrida were using his public philosophical discourse to convey a more or less private message, reminding whomever wanted to receive it as a type of warning that he wasn’t going to be around forever.

“I can die” is a performative utterance for a second reason, which will lead us to abandon this meager attempt to classify its status, its register or tone of voice (and as I have already suggested, the possibilities of hearing in it neutrality, irony, cynicism, anxiety, melancholy, and so on, constitute a whole other taxonomic cluster). That reason is the following, as explained early in chapter 1 of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, where Derrida recounts how it is, and how *one is*, indeed how *therefore I am* when I find myself naked before the eyes of my cat in the morning. In accordance with his gesture of refusing the massive totalization of millions of animal species that inheres in the opposition human/animal, Derrida wants the cat that looks at him in his animal nakedness and human shame to be recognized as “*this* irreplaceable living being...an existence that refuses to be conceptualized.” However, in so doing, he cannot avoid infecting the cat with mortality: “a mortal existence, for from the moment that it has a name, its name survives it. It signs its potential disappearance. Mine also, and that disappearance, from this moment to that...is announced each time that...one of us leaves the room” (Derrida, 9). In other words, not only does the subject who says “I can die” affirm its mortality, but so does the cat recognized as a singular existence, for example by being given a name; he/she/it receives that name and receives the status of a singular irreplaceable existence as the announcement of his/her/its own death. Mortality is performed each time one of us leaves the room, but it is also performed with each and every utterance, indeed by every means by which the singular existence of each of us animals is affirmed. Beginning, especially, therefore, when one of us says ‘I.’ Before adding “can die or simply leave the room,” ‘I’ have already performed the necessary possibility of my death; I have already left life and the room to the extent of opening the structure of my leaving. Leaving or dying is no longer just something to come in an unpredictable future, but something that already infects the present of my utterance. So the “I can die, or simply leave the room” of the final chapter of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* comes to be riven by the abyssal effect of a performance of mortality, and the announcement of death: *I, who not only can die, but who is dying at least a little by saying ‘I, can die,*

or simply leave the room, which is another way of dying.

Dying, indeed, is explicitly at stake in the next paragraph where Derrida continues, reinforcing the sense of shame in terms that I'll return to:

But I must immediately emphasize the fact that this shame that is ashamed of itself is more intense when I am not alone with the pussycat in the room. Then I am no longer sure before whom I am so numbed with shame...In such moments, on the edge of the thing, in the imminence of the best or the worst, when anything can happen, when *I can die* of shame or pleasure, I no longer know in whose or in what direction to throw myself. (Derrida, 9-10, my emphasis)

"Beyond" the instability of the discursive register, therefore, beyond the performance of the example, and the abyss of mortality and death, there also exists this uncanny repetition, in the opening pages of Derrida's text, of what is stated on its final page: *one of us can leave the room and I can die* ("[its] disappearance is announced each time that one of us leaves the room...In such moments...I can die of shame or pleasure"). Now that might simply suggest something as banal as a rhetorical tic whereby leaving the room is Derrida's everyday lifetime figure for dying. On the other hand, it necessarily reminds us of what functions as the basis of the whole performative apparatus I have been describing, namely the iterability of the utterance. And it is that disseminative citationality, the utterance's potential for being cited in a radically different context, that finally ruins the possibility of ascribing to the sentence "I can die, or simply leave the room" anything like taxonomic exactitude.

Now a repetition is not the same as iterability, which is the structure of repeatability that invades even the supposed single utterance. Similarly, it is not the chance of this fragmented repetition that loosens the utterance "I can die" from its moorings in the way I have described. Still, the fact of "I can die" being uttered twice, each time in its own context, necessarily creates an echo that has each instance heard in the other, and brings the perhaps casual remark of Derrida's improvised sketch of the final chapter back to the terms being developed in and from the beginning of his address, where the operative theme is not, as at the end, the letting-be that *Dasein* is supposedly capable of whereas the animal is not, but rather the sense of nakedness and concomitant shame specific to the human. "*In my more intense shame,*" Derrida writes, "*on the edge of the thing, I can die of shame or pleasure.*"

Furthermore, the repetition of the syntagm "I can die" enacts a more specific function of iterability, namely its technology or automaticity. Once an utterance is severed from its producer to the extent of being repeated in quite diverse contexts, such as is the case here, capable of being isolated for the simple effect of the repetition itself by being extracted from the larger syntagmatic chain or flow that surrounds and neutralizes it, then language begins to sound or look like a machine at work. It suddenly has inscribed within it a lifeless automatism, finds itself reduced to the smaller or larger syntagmatic elements that we know it to be constituted of: at base a small set of phonemes whose permutations are repeated ad infinitum, combining here to form the clause "I can die" like a tautological mantra no longer spoken by a Derrida referring either to how to really let things be or how intense his shame is, but instead intoned by the linguistic technology itself. By intoning "I can die," the linguistic machine would perhaps be repeating something Derrida wrote a long time ago, in "Freud and the Scene of Writing:" "The machine is dead. It is death. Not because we risk death in playing with machines, but because the origin of machines is the relation to death;"⁴ or perhaps, conversely, the linguistic machine would be declaring its mortality in order precisely to give itself a type of life, the type of life we might imagine to animate the machines we call biotechnologies. In one case, then, a lifeless origin, in the other, no clear indication of where or when it will grind to a halt.

◇

"I can die" echoes across the far from empty space of opening and closing pages of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. It echoes, and as it were *lives*, something of an animal of an utterance, even if it be a technological animal. If I am paying so much attention to the utterance here it is in the first place because the principal

ethical exhortation of Derrida's book is that we attend to the singularity and irreplaceability of whatever lives. Following that, the sentence also echoes through the question that Derrida raises, and critiques more than once, concerning philosophy's habit of again dividing between the human and every other animal species, this time according to a difference between reaction and response. Animals react, so the habit goes, whereas humans respond. Derrida finds that presumption repeated from Descartes, for whom a machine that "had the outward shape of a monkey or of some other animal" or that resembled "our bodies and imitated our actions as closely as possible for all practical purposes" might be able to utter words and even cry out that you are hurting it, "but it is not conceivable that such a machine should...give an appropriately meaningful answer [*répondre*] to whatever is said in its presence, as the dullest of men can do;"⁵ to Lacan, for whom a dancing bee may well accurately indicate to its fellows exactly where the honey is to be found but "its message remains fixed in its function as a relay of the action, from which no subject detaches it as a symbol of communication itself."⁶

The question of a recontextualized "I can die" is therefore also the question of reaction versus response. Does one version or context of the utterance react or respond to the other? I seemed to begin to answer that question in suggesting that there is more to the repetition than a simple repetition, and that what exceeds repetition does not reduce to the manipulation of a canny reader extracting three words from one context and relating them to another context any more than it reduces to the conscious or unconscious intent of an author prompting such a reader. The "I can die" of page 160 is not, to use Lacan's term from the passage just cited, simply a relay of what was said on page 10. The very principle of linguistic iteration, all by itself and before we come to accept a concept or principle of iterability, would seem to be posited on the basis of a type of response. Every time we read or hear a repetition in language, beginning with an alliteration, assonance or rhyme, and going all the way to rhetorical emphases and thematic motifs, we receive them as the text's responding to itself and so animating or livening itself, calling and responding to itself as though it were conversing with, singing or orating to itself. What iterability adds to that idea, transforming it in the process, as I have also argued, is to nevertheless insist on an irreducible automatism within such repeatability, rewriting what I have just called language's self-*response* as an auto*spontaneity*—language functioning *sua sponte*, of its own accord—which is a mode of the automotricity or autokinesis that we understand to be at work in every life form. Iterability means that language moves itself beyond itself at its very origin; that such movement or auto-displacement, such a rupture within the intact closed circuit of non-meaning, is what produces sense and gives to language its force of signification.

Now that is not to say that language is the same form of life as a protozoon on the one hand or a human being on the other, or that it lives in the same way as any of the millions of life forms that exist between the two. It is to insist, again, that criteria of distinction, such as react-ability or respons-ability, founder as means to divide animal from human once the repeatability of iterability is discovered disturbing the limits of one and the other. Derrida is astounded that "what never even crosses the mind of any of the thinkers...on the subject of response, from Descartes to Lacan, is the question of how an iterability that is essential to every response, and to the ideality of every response, can and cannot fail to introduce nonresponse, automatic reaction, mechanical reaction into the most alive, most 'authentic', and most responsible response" (Derrida, 112); or how a Lacan can ignore that "the logic of the unconscious is founded on a logic of repetition which...will always inscribe a destiny of iterability, hence some automaticity of the reaction in every response, however originary, free, critical [*décisive*] and a-reactional it might seem" (Derrida, 125).

The foundering of the reaction/response distinction as a means of separating human life from animal life also means a disturbance of the limits between life and so-called technological non-life. The idea of an autokinetic iterability insists on what Derrida explicitly called for in 1993 as part of the "bond" of a democracy to come, arguing that our dissatisfaction with the present state of the world also requires "at the same time, in the same gesture of thought, rethinking the limits between the human and the animal, the human and the natural, the human and the technical."⁷ Much of Derrida's writing, especially in the last ten years of his life, was explicitly involved in that rethinking. It is the arc of a trajectory that connects the animal of 1997 to the wheel of *Rogues* (2002)⁸ and the learning to live, finally, of the *Le Monde* interview from less than two months before his death.⁹ But, as he was wont to insist, there had never been any other question for him. In *For What Tomorrow*, a series

of interviews with Elisabeth Roudinesco from 2001, he begins his discussion of the ‘Politics of Difference’ by asking for a step to be taken back, reminding us that *differance* (with an ‘a’) was never about anything else than that rethinking: “What is universalizable about *differance* with regard to differences is that it allows one to think the process of differentiation beyond every kind of limit: whether it is a matter of cultural, national, linguistic, or even human limits. There is *differance* (with an ‘a’) as soon as there is a living trace, a relation of life/death or presence/absence.”¹⁰ There is *differance* as soon as there is a living trace, but as soon as there is *differance* or the trace, then the question of what lives, how it lives, or what life is, is irrevocably posed and interminably problematized. The trace of or as *differance* is a strange and complicated life form—if we can call it that—both a remainder, as with a footprint, of something that self-extends in autokinetic spontaneity, and an inanimate inscription such as could be stamped by a machine; both the chance mark whose producer is dead, lost, unidentifiable and irretrievable, and the minimal impulse that gives rise at the origin to the origin of all things. Without it, there could be nothing like what we call life; because of it, what we call life has from the beginning left something we would normally call dead behind it.

One would be hardpressed to decide, on that basis, which of the two versions of “I can die” has the most life in it: the earlier, formal, more ‘accidental’ version, which, on the surface, seems to have less of an authorial investment, less rhetorical force, and instead appears to have detachment inscribed within it and is as a result already living free of its source? or the later, vernacular, exemplary version, which, for being replete with familiar overtones—recognizable to a greater or lesser extent depending on the level of one’s familiarity—yawns like an emotive chasm in the wake of his disappearance and so speaks its own life as no less precarious than tenacious? But in each case the life of the utterance would be derived precisely from the radical letting-be of a type of death, a letting-be that is a letting-function-on-its-own, under its own steam as we say, in a type of technological automaticity.

Before or beyond anything else, therefore, it is that type of automatic self-generation of “I can die” that operates across the pages of Derrida’s text as the very structure, or force perhaps, that allows for the other forms of echo that one can hear in it. We can therefore recast what we were saying at the beginning about hearing the tone of Derrida’s voice. Before hearing any reminiscent voice of, for example, a departed friend or colleague, one hears, by definition, the death that attaches itself to every utterance the moment it leaves the mouth of its producer. The voice of Derrida that can be heard, with one tone in the formal lecture of chapter 1, another tone in the informal presentation of chapter 4, is necessarily overlaid with an affect or pathos that derives from its becoming the living voice of a dead man. And those effects make the text live on within a particular context of academic exchange and human friendship. But that form of living on, however emotive it be, is a function of the general structure of automatic iterability and of the machine of death at work in every sign whatsoever.

Hence this *retroversal* echo, in the early pages of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, of the seemingly offhand formulation of its last page, brings us thick into the nexus of animal life, death, and putatively inanimate technology. What mobilizes that nexus, its motor if you like, is shame, and what produces shame, its generator, is nakedness. In this Cerisy lecture, nakedness is Derrida’s subject, from the very beginning. First words: “In the beginning, I would like to entrust myself to words that, were it possible, would be naked. Naked in the first place—but this is in order to announce already that I plan to speak endlessly of nudity” (Derrida, 1). We aren’t made aware of our nakedness by every single protozoon, and not even necessarily by a snake encountered in a garden; but we are ashamed, as Derrida explains in the paragraphs where leaving the room and dying come up, in front of an animal who, by looking at us, tells us that he or she knows that we know that naked we all came into the world and naked we shall return, on the basis of which knowledge, once it becomes our own, we take that animal as a companion, name, feed, in some cases clothe, shelter, and eventually bury it.

Shame is precisely that complicated system of self-reflection that begins with consciousness of our nakedness. No animal knows it is naked. As Derrida says, it “is not naked because it is naked. It doesn’t feel its own nudity. There is no nudity ‘in nature’” (Derrida, 5). For the cat to tell us, by looking at us, that he or she knows that we know that we are naked, the cat would in fact have to be something of a snake. A real cat, not

THE BLUSHING MACHINE

having any idea about nakedness at all, not having such a concept, couldn't possibly tell us that. Nor, as the Genesis myth suggests, is consciousness of nakedness something that can arise spontaneously, as it were out of nature. Someone has to bring us to that point; someone, some animal, or some thing. Something *supernatural*. Imagine, after all, some prelapsarian and unadorned human animal taking a stroll through a pristine garden and deciding, on the basis of the good advice she seems to be getting, to think nakedness. She would have first to invent the concept out of whole cloth, not having any dialectical foundation for it, not knowing what nakedness was any more than non-nakedness. Which means inventing the concept *tout court*, to begin with, inventing the possibility of a dialectical opposition such as that between nakedness and non-nakedness where before there was only differential hirsuteness or pilosity, degrees of hair or fur. Presuming she got that far, however, she would have to clothe her non-nakedness in the concept of nakedness, to place nakedness like a covering over her originary nudity, which would require her at the same time to invent the concept of covering or clothing as a derivative of the concept of nakedness, itself, as I have just argued, a qualitative derivative leap from the state of the non-concept. No mean feat therefore; indeed a universal overturning to set in motion the dialectical conceptual apparatus itself, what we call knowledge. That sort of heavy industry or high technology is what we call the fall. Before we 'fall' into consciousness of nakedness, of good and evil, before we fall into shame and sin, nature has to have already fallen out of itself into non-nature, into a technology of conceptualization.

What shame therefore is, from this perspective, is the conceptual machinery itself, a machine set in motion by itself, always already on. Before being the automatism of blood rushing to the face, the pure life of spontaneous blush, shame is the originary technicity that is the origin of technology, for it is on the basis of it that we inaugurate the technological drive. Technology begins with a red face, hands covering the groin, a fig leaf quick please, better still sew me a loincloth but make it fast, and it only gets more complicated from there on: "Clothing derives from technics. We would therefore have to think shame and technicity together, as the same 'subject'" (Derrida, 5). To our shame and to our credit—try to hear those terms as neutrally as possible—the human reacts to knowledge of animal nakedness by developing for itself an infinitely expandable prosthetic technology, from clothes to cover that nakedness and shame all the way to, as Derrida will later emphasize, techniques of domestication and domination, agricultural industrialization, genetic and other experimentation, which finally risks adding up to something comparable to a genocidal technology of death to the animal (Derrida, 25-26).

Of course Derrida will also argue that shame and technology are no more pure dividing lines to distinguish the human on one side from the animal on the other, than are any of the other criteria to which philosophy has consistently had recourse in order to impose its reductive delineations. Can we rigorously determine, he asks, that the animal is deprived of language, clothing, laughter, mourning, boredom, deceit, music, hospitality, the gift, and so on (Derrida, 59-61). But more precisely, "if one takes into account...a seduction that is tenderly or violently appropriative, one can no longer dissociate the moment of sexual parade from an exhibition, or exhibition from a simulation, or simulation from a dissimulation, or the dissimulative ruse from some experience of nakedness, or nakedness from some type of modesty...or shame" (Derrida, 60). Thus it would be not only the human animal, but also many other animals, and potentially every sexed animal whose automotricity includes mating, that thereby defined itself as originally technological. Perhaps as soon as an animal no longer reproduces simply by, as it were, fucking whatever it bumps into, but by allowing itself to be seduced, to veer off track towards a mate, and even more obviously once it involves itself in any sort of mating game whatsoever, then that animal is clothing its habits in a type of technology; that mating becomes a technology, however natural we still might consider it to be. And no doubt the same could be said for any ruse whatsoever by which an animal does other essential things, such as obtain its food, however instinctual we might consider that to be.



"I can die." Anyone can say that; everyone has to say it. As Derrida was suggesting following Heidegger, unless one says it, nothing can really be *as such*, which makes a being strangely beholden to the possibility of being dead, not in the sense of recognizing its own mortality but in the sense of inhabiting the structure of death that comes from every other being having turned its back on it, having died or left the room. That would mean that

a being can only be once there exists what, in recent work, I have called dorsal space¹¹; the space that opens once another being has turned its back, left the room, or died. A being *is*, indeed, by virtue of inhabiting that dorsal space, by being behind the being that has left it behind in order that it might be. It *is* in the space of the unknown, of what cannot be known, for presumptive knowledge about how a being is is precisely what prevents a being from being as it is. Heidegger, Derrida suggests, should have been able to expand his understanding of that to the extent of better questioning his assurance that “the animal does not comport itself toward beings as such.” Dorsal space, because it implies what is unknown, is also the space of surprise and of threat. In letting be by turning one’s back, leaving the room or dying, in declining to presume how a being is, one allows a being to invent what it is as something that precisely cannot be foreseen or controlled. It is the space of our relation—a necessarily ethical relation—to radical otherness such as that represented by the inanimate, functioning outside the realm of our dominant senses. For those reasons—and others that I don’t have time to go into now—I have argued that it is in dorsal space, where a being starts being a being, that there is technology. Specifically, where the human starts being the human, there is technology. For example, where *homo* becomes *erectus*, and so reorients the whole space of and relation to what is behind, exposing a different corporeal configuration and concentrating thereafter on the work of the hands resolutely understood as the definers and manipulators of the frontal. Which is also, Derrida suggests, where shame begins—at least that related to the genital organs, properly human shame therefore—in “the experience of holding oneself upright, of uprightness as erection in general in the process of hominization.”¹² Before the shame of exposing one’s sexual organs in particular there would be the shame of a general exposure in the upright stance, perhaps the shame of abandoning one’s animal past, but perhaps also the shame of vertical or erectile ambition, the shame of a contrived realignment of corporeal articulations, of a technologically enhanced biped refusing to accept the quadruped lot dealt by nature, the autobioengineering back in the beginning that still has us blushing to this day, on cue, whenever we are caught thinking we know what and how we are ■

THE BLUSHING MACHINE

NOTES

1. This and all parenthetical references are taken from Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Trans. David Wills. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
2. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, 253.
3. Cf. *La démocratie à venir: autour de Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Marie-Louise Mallet. Paris: Galilée, 2004.
Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing" *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 227.
4. René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*. Trans. Robert Stoothoff, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 139-40.
5. Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977, 85.
6. Jacques Derrida, "Nietzsche and the Machine" *Negotiations*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 241.
7. Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
8. Jacques Derrida and Jean Birnbaum, *Learning to Live Finally: the Last Interview*. New York: Melville House Publishing, 2007.
9. Jacques Derrida and Élisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow...: A Dialogue*. Trans. Jeff Fort. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, 21.
10. Cf. David Wills, *Dorsality: Thinking Back through Technology and Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
11. Derrida, *Animal*, 61. I note Derrida's insistence on the frontality of nakedness and shame ("Nudity gets stripped to bare necessity only in that frontal exhibition" [11]). A longer discussion would be required to explain how the dorsal displaces at the same time as it recognizes the frontal, or how the face-to-face, particularly in Levinas, is articulated through dorsal effects; or how dorsality works precisely to counter the forgetting that, as Derrida recognizes in the same place, comes about as soon as the back is turned ("a cat that continues to see me, to watch me leave when I turn my back on it, a cat that, from that moment on...I therefore risk forgetting." *Ibid.*) See again *Dorsality*, especially chapter 2.