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Beyond the Figure

The Notion of Mimetic Subject Formation in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's Philosophy and its Relevance to Digital Gameplay

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the notion of mimetic formation of the subject in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophical writing in relation to digital gameplay. The aim of the research is to provide an interpretation of Lacoue-Labarthe's thought, which is relevant to the notion of the subject of gamic action. The research materials consist of a selection of Lacoue-Labarthe's early texts and theories of digital games. Investigation of this material is conducted as a theoretical research through close reading and philosophical writing, which aims to demonstrate the implications of Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophy in relation to contemporary digital culture. The work is divided into three main parts: 1) the basis of Lacoue-Labarthe's thought, 2) the notion of the subject of gamic agency in digital gameplay and 3) Lacoue-Labarthean aspects of gamic mimesis. The first part explores Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophical background and main theses, and the second constructs a theoretically justified conception of digital gameplay. The final part introduces digital gameplay into readings of Lacoue-Labarthe. Lacoue-Labarthe characterizes the subject through a loss of its proper essence. When presenting its identity, the subject becomes doubled into the agent and the product of self-presentation. This is an incessant process of formation and deformation through voluntary and involuntary imitation of models, which Lacoue-Labarthe inspects as mimesis. On a fundamental level, mimesis functions unconsciously, and takes place before the emergence of a sense of self and conscious thought and imagery. In this study, games are considered as structures of goals and obstacles; digital games are examined as concealed algorithmic rule systems that are written in programming languages and executed by the computer's hardware. Digital gameplay is an interaction with such systems. It occurs as an agency within the gameworld, through which the player experiments with possibilities of gamic action. Discussing this conception of gameplay through Lacoue-Labarthe's writing produces four aspects of gamic mimesis: the struggle for mastery, the paradox of gameplay, gameplay as rhythm, and gameplay as the sublime. These openings to a Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of gameplay suggest that subject formation in gameplay occurs beyond the figure, on an imperceptible stage of gamic action, in which the subject is produced through the algorithmic system.

Keywords: Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, subject, mimesis, play, digital games

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä väitöskirjassa tutkitaan subjektin mimeettistä muodostumista Philippe Lacoue-Labarthen filosofiassa suhteessa digitaaliseen pelaamiseen. Tavoitteena on muodostaa Lacoue-Labarthen ajattelusta pelillisen toiminnan subjektin kannalta merkityksellinen tulkinta. Tutkimusmateriaali koostuu Lacoue-Labarthen varhaisista teksteistä ja digitaalista pelaamista käsittelevästä teoriakirjallisuudesta. Tutkimusmateriaalin analyysi toteutetaan teoreettisena tutkimuksena, jonka keskeisenä strategiana on lähiluku ja filosofinen kirjoittaminen. Väitöskirja on jaettu kolmeen päälukuun: 1) Lacoue-Labarthen ajattelun perusta, 2) pelillisen toimijuuden subjekti digitaalisessa pelaamisessa ja 3) Lacoue-Labartheen perustuvat pelillisen mimesiksen muodot. Ensimmäinen luku keskittyy Lacoue-Labarthen filosofiseen taustaan ja keskeisiin väitteisiin. Toisessa luvussa rakennetaan aikaisempaan teoriaan perustuva käsitys digitaalisesta pelaamisesta. Viimeisessä luvussa digitaalinen pelaaminen tuodaan kosketukseen Lacoue-Labarthen tekstien luentojen kanssa. Lacoue-Labarthe mukaan subjektia määrittää sen perusolemuksen menettäminen. Esittäessään identiteettinsä, subjekti monistuu tämän esityksen toteuttajaksi ja tuotteeksi. Tästä seuraa muodostumisen ja epämuodostumisen loputon liike, esikuvien tietoinen ja tiedostamaton jäljittely, jota Lacoue-Labarthe kutsuu mimesikseksi. Perustavanlaatuisella tasolla, mimesis toimii tiedostamattomasti; se muovaa subjektia ennen itsetietoisuuden ja käsitteellisen tai visuaalisen ajattelun ilmaantumista. Tässä tutkimuksessa pelejä tarkastellaan päämäärien ja esteiden järjestelminä, ja digitaalisia pelejä piilotettuina algoritmisina järjestelminä, jotka on kirjoitettu ohjelmointikielillä ja jotka tietokoneen laitteisto toteuttaa. Digitaalinen pelaaminen on vuorovaikutusta tämänkaltaisten järjestelmien kanssa. Se ilmenee toimijuutena pelimaailmassa, jonka kautta pelaaja kokeilee pelillisen toiminnan mahdollisuuksia. Tämän pelaamiskäsityksen tutkiminen Lacoue-Labarthen tekstien kautta johtaa neljään pelillisen mimesiksen muotoon: kamppailu hallinnasta, pelaamisen paradoksi, pelaaminen rytminä ja pelaamisen yhteys ylevään. Tämän perusteella voidaan väittää, että subjektin muodostuminen digitaalisessa pelaamisessa tapahtuu figuurin tuolla puolen, pelillisen toiminnan esityksenä piilotetulla näyttämöllä, jossa subjekti muodostuu osana peliä hallitsevaa järjestelmää.

Asiasanat: Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, subjekti, mimesis, pelaaminen, digitaaliset pelit

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ABBREVIATIONS

AL   L'absolu litteraire : theorie de la litterature du romantisme allemand

IM   L'imitation des modernes : typographies 2

LA   The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism

SP1   Le sujet de la philosophie : typographies 1

SP2   The subject of Philosophy

ST   Sublime Truth

TYP   Typographie

TYP2 Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics

VS   La vérité sublime

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the formation of the subject and its relation to digital gameplay within the context of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophical writing. The research objective is twofold: First, the aim is to produce an interpretation of Lacoue-Labarthe's thought that provides insight into the formation and deformation of the subject through mimesis. Second, this interpretation is elaborated through a theoretical inspection of digital gameplay. The purpose of this task is to bring Lacoue-Labarthe's thought into contact with digital culture and inspect gameplay from the perspective of self-formation.

The term *subject* refers to the self, the conscious agent of thought, action and enunciation. Lacoue-Labarthe examines the subject with the notions of *mimesis* and *figure*: mimesis refers to imitation, representation and dissimulated enunciation, while figure refers to others, exemplarity, imagery and fiction. Lacoue-Labarthe's core argument is that the subject does not have a proper self, because the self is produced through the endless production of different self-presentations, behind which there is no original individuality. The roles presented by the subject are never its own, but always copied from others; the subject comes into being through the conscious and unconscious imitation of a heterogeneous ensemble of models and figures, in an interminable process of *fictioning* and representation. Hence the fundamentally aesthetic determination of the subject's appearance oscillates between formation and deformation, appropriation and disappropriation.

Introducing digital culture to Lacoue-Labarthe's thought is experimental and challenging, because his writing is mostly focused on more traditional forms of art, such as theatre, poetry, and classical music. Lacoue-Labarthe also thematizes the subject as the subject of philosophy and the subject of writing, aiming his critique especially towards the voices of philosophical, theoretical and autobiographical texts. However, his main point is that the mode of the subject-formation is aesthetic, characterized by mimesis and representation. It should follow that self-formation is not restricted to any particular aesthetic activities but can be manifested through multiple different forms. Playing digital games is

one such action – through its interactive and conflictual nature, it foregrounds the notions of action and antagonism as the mode of subject formation.

With Lacoue-Labarthe, questions of subjectivity, self-education and aesthetics become joined in a way that gives an intriguing opening to understand the relation of digital culture to the formation of the self. However, this attempt is also experimental, and there are instances where Lacoue-Labarthe's themes are simply too distant to digital games. A motivation for this research is nevertheless a premise that philosophy should touch actual things and experiences, and not remain solely within obscure scriptures and complicated theoretical speculations. In fact, this is what Lacoue-Labarthe too strived for in his distrust of philosophical discourse.

1.1 Lacoue-Labarthe and the Problem of the Subject

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (1940–2007) was a French philosopher whose work focused on the relations between aesthetics, the self, community and the political. Lacoue-Labarthe's most important theme is the subject and its formation, which he claims to happen always on the basis of others, as a process which takes the mode of art. From this perspective, the subject means generally a self-consciousness that has a personal identity, which Lacoue-Labarthe examines as a product of writing: the agent of enunciation, the "I" that speaks. In literature studies, detaching the narrator of a text from the actual author is a common theoretical operation, because as a textual construction, the narrator never corresponds to the author, who arranges everything behind the scene of writing. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that this condition pertains to all acts of enunciation, even to those where the author should be identical to the narrator, such as confession, autobiography or philosophical writing, which are commonly interpreted as expressions of the proper and present thought of the writing/speaking/thinking subject. This concerns any act of enunciation, regardless of whether it is spoken in person, written, performed, or even just thought without communicating it to an audience, because all enunciation is always already a text, of which there is no outside. The existence of a subjective identity which characterizes the being of a person is inescapably a textual product, at least to the extent of conscious and conceptual thought, which must operate through the already constructed subject as the agent of that thought.

The expression *the subject of writing* (or of philosophy, autobiography, thought etc.) has a double genitive, because the subject can refer to both the agent and the content of writing. Lacoue-Labarthe's point is exactly this doubling: the subject who produces (itself) is always also itself produced (by someone else). Because textuality cannot be accessed from the outside, the subject as the agent of self-constituting thought is always already there as something whose production the person did not partake in. Lacoue-Labarthe says that the subject cannot assist in its own birth – we come into the world through means that are external to ourselves and which constitute us through completely unattainable

otherness. In Lacoue-Labarthe's view, the subject has nothing that would be substantial or proper to it because the voices of others begin to traverse it already in the womb.

This suggests that human existence as a conscious self does not have any stable ground that could be used as a foundation for creating a fixed identity. However, on the contrary, personal (and communal) identities often seem to be constructed as coherent narratives that rest upon stable ground, for instance a foundational myth or an exemplary figure. Lacoue-Labarthe's critique is aimed towards identification as mimetism, a construction of this kind of stable order, because mimesis, which is the basis of identification, is fundamentally unstable and tears down as much as it constructs. Attempts to grasp the origin of the self are futile, because the subject cannot constitute itself.

Interpreting human existence as presence is a fundamental philosophical problem that was encompassed also in the ideals of German Romanticism about poetic presence and the autoproduction of the subject. Following Jacques Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe insists that pure presence is impossible to experience because the subject can be characterized only through the traces and deferrals that are intrinsic to making meaning. The subject produces itself as a poetic or aesthetic work, but such presentations of the self fail to bring forth pure presence and result in representational doubling, copying and dissemination. The traces of others mark the subject's origin as a process of copying and imitation; the deferral intrinsic to generating meaning renders the subject's present inaccessible.

Lacoue-Labarthe inspects this instability of the subject with the notion of mimesis. In literary theory, mimesis has been defined, in opposition to diegesis, as showing, enactment or imitation, instead of narration. Plato used the term *haple diegesis*, straight narration, to describe a situation where the narrator speaks in their own voice. Mimesis, on the contrary, involves substitution and dissimulation, a situation where one speaks behind a mask, hides their true appearance and pretends to be someone else. If the subject can never be fully present to itself or others, straight narration is impossible. In a critique of Plato, Lacoue-Labarthe claims that the subject is a representation of itself, a degraded copy of an essence that is lost by definition. To denote this, he often writes *(re)presentation* instead of presentation.

In regard to the subject, mimesis functions in two ways. On the one hand, it refers to the fleeting sense of self, whose self-presentations are always late from the lived experience. On the other, mimesis refers to the otherness that constitutes the self from the moment of birth, as a product of imitation. The others through which the subject gains its identity are figures, models, and rivals that can be based on actual persons, such as parental figures and teachers, or products of fiction. However, all models can be considered fictional because they merge together into the heterogeneous and dispersed ground of self-identification. The subject is a singular point but cannot be fixed into one place; its ground is characterized by copying and its present can be grasped only through a further copy that already differs from the proper self. When representing itself, the subject also gives itself to be misinterpreted and copied by others.

Formally, this research belongs to the field of art education. In practice, it is more concerned with philosophical aesthetics and digital game theory. While I do not consider questions related directly to pedagogy, in the background of my writing is a question of self-education: individual practice of developing and forming oneself. Within art education, this turns into questions of practicing art as aesthetic self-formation. How and why does a person, or a community, become something by educating, developing or even cultivating themselves through artistic practice? These questions are gathered in the German notion of *Bildung*, which is untranslatable to English, but includes such meanings as formation, education, edification, learning, development and cultivation. *Bild* means image and picture and *Einbildungskraft* the faculty of imagination. As cultivation, *Bildung* points towards the concept of culture as development of the soul and as civilization. Within this German tradition, but not limited to it, art, aesthetics, education and formation are intertwined. Lacoue-Labarthe mentions *Bildung* throughout his texts, often with the Greek term *paideia* that has a similar meaning, especially in Plato's philosophy. In regard to the subject, which Lacoue-Labarthe inspects as a textual product, he usually prefers to employ (de)formation and (re)presentation. In essence, the question of subjectal self-presentation through mimesis is inseparably linked to the more general notion of formation, which is emphasized by Lacoue-Labarthe's insistence upon the intertwining of the subject, ethics and politics.

1.2   Formation through Gameplay

Paideia is connected to another Greek word, *paidia*, which means play (D'Angour 2013, see also Huizinga 1964, 30). In game studies, most famously by Roger Caillois (2001, 13; 27), *paidia* is considered an unstructured playful activity and is distinguished from explicitly structured rule-based activities and games, which are designated by Latin word *ludus*. In regard to the act of playing a digital game, both terms are needed. This research investigates a connection between aesthetic subject-formation and playing digital games from a Lacoue-Labarthean perspective, which puts emphasis on the activity of play as formation within the constraints of a rule-based system. The notion of play has been highlighted in philosophical discourse, for example in Kant's formulation of free play of imagination, Schiller's understanding of play as human nature, or Derrida's notion of free play. It is important to note that the German and French languages do not distinguish between the concepts of play and games, denoting both meanings with a same word, *Spiel* and *jeu*.

Digital games can be approached from various viewpoints with a wide range of different research questions. My focus is on the player's subjective experience of gameplay, which means that I do not examine games as artefacts detached from the act of playing, the status of games as commodities or the functioning of the cultural industry that produces digital games. Hence, instead of investigating the player as an empirical subject, I approach it as a theoretical

construction, a subject implied by the concept of gameplay. This means that I focus on gameplay as a site where the playing subject manifests its being. Self-formation through aesthetic activity is not a singular moment of decision but a continuous process that repeats the subject's being in different variations throughout life. I focus on the gameplay situation as a singular instance of this repetition in an attempt to characterize its significance in regard to subjective consciousness, identity and will.

Because this research is situated in art education, instead of game studies, priority is given to the theme of aesthetic formation of the subject in Lacoue-Labarthe's texts. This emphasis is reflected in the dissertation's structure, which first focuses on laying out the theoretical foundations of Lacoue-Labarthe's thought, before venturing into digital games. Theoretical perspectives of digital gameplay, investigated in Chapter Three, form a theoretical ground for connecting the interpretation of Lacoue-Labarthe to digital gameplay. This is carried out in Chapter Four, which transforms Lacoue-Labarthe's characterizations of mimesis into aspects of gamic mimesis.

Digital games were a cultural phenomenon already during the 1970s when Lacoue-Labarthe was publishing his early work (see e.g. Kirriemuir 2006, 22–27; Mäyrä 2008, 58–86); however, it is nevertheless unsurprising that a French philosopher did not explore the topic during 1970s and 1980s. Some of Lacoue-Labarthe's claims about the subject can be considered radical, but his examples feature conventional forms of art: poetry, theatre, classical music, opera, etc. As important as his examples are, they do not help to relate Lacoue-Labarthe's ideas to today's culture outside the traditional, institutionally designated domains of art. However, because Lacoue-Labarthe's writing claims a certain generality, mimesis should affect the subject through any kind of aesthetic form, including digital games. Introducing gameplay to Lacoue-Labarthe's texts demonstrates the wide reach of his critique of the subject. While this does not mean that Lacoue-Labarthe should be made a philosopher of gaming, I aim to demonstrate that his texts are surprisingly effective in understanding the relation between gameplay and the subject.

I approach digital gameplay from a theoretical perspective. As Lacoue-Labarthe is not a philosopher of games, let alone digital games, this perspective must be founded through other kinds of research literature. My intention is not to create a complete theory of digital gaming, but to explore the possibilities that Lacoue-Labarthe's writing provides for understanding gameplay with regard to subject formation. My argumentation is founded upon an understanding of the structure of the game artefact as an incomprehensible computational process, which is concealed by a representational surface, the gameworld, which consists of the interface for interacting with the computational system beneath it. By gameplay, I refer to the act of playing, which consists of both the player's and the computer's actions. The subject of gameplay is constituted by both the agency of the player and the procedure of the computer. As gamic mimesis, it refers to the subject's status as an empty potentiality, which the computer's otherness traverses.

1.3   Demarcating Research Materials: The Source Texts

The primary material of this research consists of Lacoue-Labarthe's early texts, most of which are published in the collections *Le sujet de la philosophie : typographies 1* (1979) and *L'imitation des modernes : typographies 2* (1986). English translations of these texts (*Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, 1989 and *The Subject of Philosophy*, 1993a) do not contain all texts from the French volumes, but instead they contain his lengthy and pivotal essay *Typographie* (1975), and the article *L'imprésentable* (1975), which I include in the research material. When exploring the philosophical basis of Lacoue-Labarthe's arguments, I inspect his and Jean-Luc Nancy's *L'absolu litteraire : theorie de la litterature du romantisme allemand* (1978) (*The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, 1988), which focuses on Kant's aesthetics and its implications in German Romanticism. In relation to this background, I inspect also Seyhan's (1992), Helfer's (1996) and Ross's (2007) interpretations. My investigation of Lacoue-Labarthe is centred around these texts, which present the foundations of his thought on the notions of subject and mimesis. In the last part of my investigation, I focus on the article *La vérité sublime* (1988) (*Sublime Truth*, 1993b), which I consider crucial to the relation between digital games and Lacoue-Labarthe. His other texts are included in the references, but the intensity of his writing does not allow me to focus on all of his texts to the same degree within the confines of this dissertation.

Lacoue-Labarthe is known for the complexity of his texts, and to read them with sufficient precision demands considerable effort (Chang 2006). Previous monographs about Lacoue-Labarthe by John Martis (2005) and John McKeane (2015) delimit their approach only to certain (albeit numerous) texts for the very same reasons. Martis's dissertation focuses heavily on the tension between the loss and return of the subject, searching for the possibility of the subject's return in Lacoue-Labarthe's texts. McKeane's book is not just a philosophical investigation but contains biographical elements and emphasizes that Lacoue-Labarthe's writings operate on the borders of philosophy, contaminated by literary styles, such as poetry, theatre and opera. McKeane criticises Martis for assuming that Lacoue-Labarthe is a philosopher, disregarding that he wrote also outside of the philosophical tradition and remained suspicious of the discourse of philosophy throughout his writings.

There are many publications about Lacoue-Labarthe, some of which have appeared in journal issues dedicated to his thought. These include *Revue Lignes* n°22 (2007) which contains homages to Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'Esprit Créateur* volume 57, number 4 (2017) and *MLN* volume 132, number 5 (2017). Éditions Linges has published also a collection of texts that were presented in a conference in Strasbourg, *Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe : la césure et l'impossible* (2010), edited by Jacob Rogozinski. *Subjects and Simulations: Between Baudrillard and Lacoue-Labarthe* (2015), edited by Anne O'Byrne and Hugh J. Silverman, focuses on the relation between the two thinkers. In Finnish there is also a collection of articles, *Mikä*

mimesis? Philippe Lacoue-Labarthen filosofinen teatteri [1] (2009), edited by Ari Hirvonen and Susanna Lindberg. Because the aim of this research is not to provide an all-encompassing investigation of Lacoue-Labarthe, a thorough review of all secondary sources is not relevant. I only refer to research literature when it is relevant to my readings of Lacoue-Labarthe. Susanna Lindberg's two articles (2010a; 2010b) are an exception because they provide important insight to support my argumentation.

The demarcation of research material concerning digital games is less straightforward because it is a very wide field of research. I approach digital games from the perspective of my research questions and Lacoue-Labarhte's thought. Hence, my focus is guided towards gameplay as mimesis, a representation of the subject. There is no existing digital games research that has focused on Lacoue-Labarthe. Kuivakari (2008) inspects subjectal désistance in relation to media art and Hansen (2000) includes Lacoue-Labarthe in his investigation of the notion of technology in postmodern philosophy, but these viewpoints on Lacoue-Labarthe differ from the focus of this research. There is already research that focuses on the subject of gameplay, or on the emotion and existential aspects of gameplay, for example by Leino (2010), Vella (2015) and M. Kania (2017). My intention is to elaborate Lacoue-Labarthe's thinking from a similar theoretical standpoint to digital games. While these studies are close to my perspective, they also utilize distinct theoretical frameworks, such as phenomenology and existentialism, to inspect gaming. To use these approaches as the basis for collating digital gaming with respect to Lacoue-Labarthe would require a comparison between Lacoue-Labarthe's thought and their theoretical foundations, which is not the aim of this research. I construct my view on digital gameplay with a framework that does not draw its insights distinctly from philosophical texts. This avoids the situation of comparing Lacoue-Labarthe's views with similar thinkers, which would require a different kind of study altogether[2].

I have constructed my conception of digital gameplay by reading established positions in digital culture research, including those of Jesper Juul, Espen Aarseth, Lev Manovich, Janet Murray, Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, Ian Bogost and Sherry Turkle. When inspecting gamic action as a craft, I take cues especially from Alexander Galloway and Colin Cremin. The objective of these readings is to create an understanding of the computer game as a site for the player's artistic action in which a struggle over the mastery of that action takes place.

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[1]   What Mimesis? The Philosophical Theatre of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe.
[2]   Lacoue-Labarthe has been explicitly compared to many thinkers, such as Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Luc Nancy (May 1993), Theodor Adorno (Jay 1998, Magun 2013), Maurice Blanchot (Martis 2005), René Girard (Lindberg 2008), Alain Badiou (Kacem 2010), John Sallis (Freydberg 2010), Jacques Derrida (Poiana 2013a), Gilles Deleuze (Lane 2011) and Jacques Lacan (Baas 2016). Additionally, it is almost impossible to produce any kind of reading of Lacoue-Labarthe without considering Nietzsche and Heidegger, whose texts are woven into his writing.

1.4   Theoretical Research: About and With Lacoue-Labarthe

This dissertation is entirely literature-based theoretical research that aims to advance the foundations of art education and game studies. As a philosophical investigation, which focuses primarily on philosophical and theoretical texts as its research material, its research strategy concerns the questions of reading, interpretation and writing. A crucial feature of the research task is the twofold nature of its material: Lacoue-Labarthe's writing and the theory of digital gameplay. This causes certain challenges: First, Lacoue-Labarthe's critical stance towards the notions of philosophy and theory and the elusive character of his texts must be addressed. Second, and consequently, his thought cannot be taken simply as a theory that could be applied to something. This causes difficulties in the attempt to do anything with readings of Lacoue-Labarthe. A central motivation for my research is the presumption that Lacoue-Labarthe's thought is highly relevant to contemporary culture, but this must be demonstrated by actually making the connection.

Lacoue-Labarthe does not proceed with argumentation that could be reproduced by a neat summary or a chart. His motifs, themes and central claims can be written down, but the evidence, the inference that leads to these propositions, is found in his readings and analyses of philosophical texts and artworks. Lacoue-Labarthe does not describe mimesis or try to capture it because this would lead to missing it the first place[3]. Therefore, he guides the reader's attention to the discourses and places where mimesis is at work and shows how the philosophical disputes about mimesis end up evading or misapprehending it. Lacoue-Labarthe's deconstructive strategy is not really deconstruction in the sense of Derrida. As both he himself and Derrida both have indicated, Lacoue-Labarthe's strategy is more positive than critical and rather affirms what others say instead of disputing it. However, similarly to the deconstructive idea that every text already contains its own deconstruction, Lacoue-Labarthe's "positive" readings often end up showing how his subjects are driven to contradictions, suspensions, renunciations, and even madness.

Lacoue-Labarthe's strategy causes difficulties in describing his thought because merely to introduce his claims and theses does not suffice. Grasping them requires examining how he exactly arrives at these statements and what are the arguments and justifications for them. The complexity of the operation of Lacoue-Labarthe's texts demands that their proceedings are examined in detail. My research strategy for producing knowledge about Lacoue-Labarthe could be characterized as employing a philosophical method. It aims at analysis, which is achieved through close reading and interpretation of Lacoue-Labarthe's texts. In this process, I develop theoretical insight into his philosophy, which is explicated in my own writing. The research process as a whole is manifested in the writing,

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3   Inversely, because mimesis actually does not have an essence, its essence can be captured only by losing it. If its essence is attempted to be defined, mimesis as such escapes interpretation.

which not only presents how the research was carried out and what outcomes it produced, but the process of theory formation itself.

Because Lacoue-Labarthe does not construct a theory, his views cannot be simply adopted and applied to something (see Kalmanlehto 2017). Even though the structure of this dissertation suggests a conventional approach, which first constructs a theoretical foundation, then introduces a research subject and applies the theory to it, such an interpretation would be inaccurate. That kind of operation would not do justice to Lacoue-Labarthe's writing, which reflects the claim about the subject's emptiness. His texts are almost hermetically sealed; the reader confronts a stupefying elusiveness that evades attempts to grasp their message as a theory. Lacoue-Labarthe's writing has been described as a dramatist's gesture (Lindberg 1998, 22–23) that brings different philosophical characters (e.g. Plato, Nietzsche and Heidegger) into an antagonistic scene, behind which Lacoue-Labarthe operates as an undetectable theatre director. At times, his identity is blurred into the voices of these others and dissimulated by them in a way that leaves the reader uncertain whether the text presents Lacoue-Labarthe's "own" thoughts at all.

This mimetic quality of Lacoue-Labarthe's writing obscures the difference between imitation and critique: by following closely the thoughts of others (which cannot be attained as such but only through (mis)interpretation), Lacoue-Labarthe affirms their message and lets his own writing fail with them. For this reason, he usually provides no conclusions and tends to finish his texts with citations or questions. To use writing that exhibits such distrust against theory itself as a theory would be naïve. To do something with Lacoue-Labarthe, his writing must be brought forward, disrupted and the limits of its philosophical context must be broken. Through this strategy, there is a possibility to find something about the relation between the subject and art that is not immediately available in Lacoue-Labarthe's texts. Hence, instead of taking ideas out of Lacoue-Labarthe's texts, I introduce a foreign element within them that results in an exchange between both areas. In practice, this means that I conduct readings of certain of his texts, adding my insight of digital gameplay and elaborating their content through the attempt to grasp the relation gameplay and the subject.

1.5   The Structure of this Research

In the first part of the investigation, I focus on the concepts of representation and subject. Concerning Lacoue-Labarthe's usage of these terms, their background is in Immanuel Kant's philosophy and its aftermath in German thought, especially Jena Romanticism. Next, I examine Lacoue-Labarthe's critique of Hegel's aesthetics through which the problematic relation between truth and representation is introduced. This text introduces also a critique of female and male roles in relation to truth, which becomes later an important part of Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of mimesis.

From Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Hegel, I proceed to his investigation of the subject of writing in the collection *Le sujet de la philosophie : Typographies 1* and the essay *Typographie*. Even though the very idea of a centre might be problematic in the context of Lacoue-Labarthe's poststructuralist background, *Typographie* presents the essential problematic, around which all his writings circulate. *Le sujet de la philosophie* focuses on the problem of the subject of philosophical writing, which I later interpret as a more general problem of autobiographical acts, such as gameplay. With the notion of writing, Lacoue-Labarthe refers to Derrida's understanding of writing as *écriture*, an interminable movement of delays and deferrals inherent in all acts of giving meaning. Lacoue-Labarthe's analyses of the writing subject begin with Nietzsche's criticism against the concept of truth and the ambiguous subject of Nietzschean texts. The focus is soon shifted to Heidegger and to the question of the relation between writing and thought. Following Heidegger's readings of Hegel and Nietzsche, Lacoue-Labarthe provides his formulation of the "(de)constitution of the subject", which refers to the loss of the subject as a loss of something that one has never actually had.

In *Typographie*, Lacoue-Labarthe presents his most central thought about the subject and mimesis, even though these are clarified through his subsequent writings where they are elaborated through different examples. Lacoue-Labarthe gives a new definition for the term "typography", referring to the act of giving meaning that interprets human existence through types. He coins the term "onto-typo-logy" to describe the typological tendency of Western thought, which takes subjectivity as a malleable matter, in which the characteristics of a person are stamped to form a figure. This interpretation sees subjectivity itself as a plastic matter that can be formed through identification with a type. Lacoue-Labarthe is critical towards the typographical formation of the self because figuration through imprint is categorical and totalizing, especially when it is applied to groups of people, either by themselves, as in national aestheticism, or by others, for example in racial discrimination. This works both in the way of identification with models and in the way of designating a group of people according to a certain type. Lacoue-Labarthe attempts to show that mimesis results in instability and deformation and that the question of mimesis is deeply tied to the question of the subject and its identity. I conclude the first part by examining the neologism *désistance*, which Derrida formed to describe Lacoue-Labarthean loss of the subject.

Whereas Chapter Two develops the theoretical ground concerning Lacoue-Labarthe's thought, in Chapter Three I construct a theoretical viewpoint on digital gaming. This is not a complete theory of gameplay and its aim is not to define or demarcate gaming as such. As a demarcation, it explicates my perspective on gaming and provides a basis for my claims about gameplay. Although I often characterize games as art and gameplay as artistic action, I do not intend to specifically defend the general status of digital games or the act of gameplay as art. My usage of the term art should be understood from a Lacoue-Labarthean viewpoint in which presentation of the self itself takes the form of art.

With art, I refer to a wide field of aesthetic activities from all areas of culture. However, this does not mean that all digital games should be considered as art – here art refers to the significance of aesthetically motivated action, instead of the qualities of an object of aesthetic appreciation.

Chapter Three explores perspectives on digital gameplay that are relevant with regard to the player as a subject. It constructs a conception of digital games and gameplay that will be useful within the Lacoue-Labarthean context. I begin by introducing two key characteristics of digital games that are relevant to this study: they are systems of rules that are driven by independently functioning computational procedures. I emphasize the autonomous functioning of the algorithm, which controls the rule-system with unconditional efficiency. Computers are able to produce much more complex gamic systems than traditional games that require humans to keep track of different variables. Through an interplay of freedom and restrictions, digital games provide a stage for reflecting the player's self. I base this observation on Sherry Turkle's notion of computers as an extension of the self. When playing digital games, the player's being is elaborated through the machine as the subject of gamic agency.

The second part of Chapter Three focuses on the appearance of a game, the graphical representation of the potentialities, the fictional site within which the gamic action takes place. I begin by explicating the notions of, interface, immersion and simulation, after which I focus on the notion of *being-in-the-gameworld*, which has been used to describe the experiential and existential aspect of gameplay. The gameworld is essential to gameplay – not primarily because it represents a fictional digital environment or a narrative, but because it veils the computational process that is the basis of everything that happens in the game. Lastly, drawing again form Turkle, I examine how gameplay occurs as a relation between opacity and transparency: the game gives itself to the player by concealing its functioning behind the representational surface. The truth of the game remains unattainable to the player, who can construct only an incomplete interpretation of its functioning by inhabiting its world and experimenting with different kinds of actions within it.

In the last part of Chapter Three, I focus on the notion of gamic agency, which I interpret through the notions of *interactivity*, *action* and *craft*. Gameplay is constituted by both the player's actions within the gameworld and the computer's actions, which are imperceptible, but can also be manifested through the gameworld. I begin by demarcating the notions of interactivity and agency, which are often used to describe the act of playing but are also difficult to define coherently. After elaborating my interpretation of these terms, I proceed to the notion of gamic action, which I take from Alexander Galloway. Lastly, I inspect Colin Cremin's interpretation of gameplay through the notions of affect, craft, master and apprentice. Cremin proceeds from Galloway's notion of gamic action but argues that affect is a more crucial term with regard to gameplay. Even though Cremin's Deleuze-Guattarian lexicon differs from my Lacoue-Labarthean perspective, his interpretation of gameplay is highly relevant to my viewpoint,

which attempts to inspect gameplay through the presubjective and nonconceptual conditions of the subject.

In Chapter Four, I engage with the main task of this research, namely introducing the notion of digital gameplay to Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of mimesis in an attempt to elaborate how playing digital games is related to the formation of the subject. This chapter is organized around four aspects of gamic mimesis; *struggle for mastery*, *paradox*, *rhythm* and *sublimity*, which are derived from readings of Lacoue-Labarthe's texts. These aspects do not comprise a complete theory of gameplay – rather, they should be viewed as connecting points between Lacoue-Labarthe's thought and digital gameplay and as an approach to gameplay in terms of subject formation.

As imitation of models, mimesis follows the logic of a *double bind*, according to which the subject's role model is at the same time a rival. This results in a contradictory double imperative, which on the one hand demands to imitate, and on the other denies it. Lacoue-Labarthe refers to the double bind in the sense René Girard gave it, but uses it in his own way rather than following Girard's theory. In fact, Lacoue-Labarthe exhibits usually a very critical stance against Girard's text. In *L'imitation des modernes*, Lacoue-Labarthe investigates the double bind and the antagonistic structure of mimesis in relation to national identities and historical formation through Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. The historical example concerns modern Germany's identity formation through ancient Greece, which already points toward the political significance of mimesis. In the case of Germany, Lacoue-Labarthe sees Nazism as a culmination of stabilized figuration, which he also claims to be fundamentally conflated to Heidegger's early thought. In digital gameplay, the struggle for mastery does not occur as a rivalry with a figural and exemplary model, but with the computer process and the gamic system inscribed in the code, which present themselves as machinations of an implied developer.

The logic of mimesis is characterized by the notions of *paradox* and *hyperbologic*, which Lacoue-Labarthe explores in Diderot's and Hölderlin's texts. Mimesis is paradoxical because it is the subject's attempt to resemble and imitate itself, resulting in duplication of the self through representation, which differs from the unattainable original self. The paradox of the subject is that the more it resembles itself, the more it differs. The paradox is heightened by its hyperbolic structure in which the contradiction between resemblance and difference is pushed to the extreme limit due to the subject's obsessive aspiration to maintain its identity. Because of this movement of exaggeration, Lacoue-Labarthe names the logic of mimesis hyperbologic. I connect this to the already established notion of the game playing the player as much as the player playing the game, which is definitive to the notion of mastery and the gamic double bind. From the Lacoue-Labarthean perspective, this kind of dissonance is fundamental to mimesis. Lacoue-Labarthe develops the notion of hyperbologic towards a differentiation between active and passive mimesis, which I use to inspect the possessive quality of gameplay.

A crucial term in Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of mimesis is *rhythm*, which thematizes mimesis through the motifs of improvisation and ephemerality, meaning that mimesis does not stagnate to the fixed forms of typographical identification. In onto-typology, mimetic identification is understood as an imprint of a fixed from, a repetition of the same. When mimesis is determined as rhythm, the repetition becomes irregular and differing. Rhythm is also linked to involuntary memory and a theme of musical reminiscence in which the subject's origin is determined through an echo rather than a mirror image. This is related to Lacoue-Labarthe's claim that mimesis functions prior to concepts, images, and conscious thought. The thematic of rhythm is introduced in a long essay, *L'écho du sujet*, which is a continuation of *Typographie*. Although Lacoue-Labarthe does not develop a complete theoretical construction about rhythm, it is continued by Susanna Lindberg in two articles that I will examine to explain the philosophical basis for Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of rhythm. Here gameplay is compared to a musical experience and to dance in an attempt to investigate gamic mimesis beyond the figural sphere of graphical representation.

The notion of hyperbologic is carried to Lacoue-Labarthe's examination of the concept of the *sublime* in *La vérité sublime*, published after the Typography-collections in the collection *Du sublime*, which contains articles on the topic from a variety of French scholars, such as Lyotard and Nancy. Even though it is detached from the typography-essays, I have included this particular text to my investigation because it continues the analysis of the concept of truth in relation to mimesis through the notions of veiling and unveiling, which was put forward in Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Hegel. It also brings forth the concepts *techne* and *physis*, which are an important component in Lacoue-Labarthe's description of the paradox of the subject. In relation to the sublime, Lacoue-Labarthe demonstrates a hyperbological exchange between these two terms. Regarding gameplay, the relation between *physis* and *techne* concerns the relation between the computer process and its visible appearance on the screen. In terms of the subject, these terms refer to the always lost original self and its necessary supplementation through mimesis. In gameplay, techne as both the player's skilful action and the graphical representation of the algorithmic system joins the player and the machine into a composite technologically determined self.

These Lacoue-Labarthean aspects of gamic mimesis construct a theoretical ground for understanding gameplay in terms of the mimetic formation of the subject. In this interpretation, mimesis functions beyond the figure, which means that gamic mimesis should primarily be located to the unseen aspects of gameplay instead of the playable figure or a graphical representation of a spatial environment. However, as Lacoue-Labarthe repeatedly notes, the figural is unavoidable and mimetic identification through the figure is ineluctable. Finally, without appearances, nothing at all could occur. The subject can come to being only through its appearance, which incessantly dissimulates its proper being through rhythmic modulation and improvisation. Digital gameplay reflects this condition of the subject, providing possibilities for exploring it through gamic agency.

2   (RE)PRESENTATION OF THE SUBJECT

In this chapter I examine the background of Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophy and explain the philosophico-historical background of essential concepts and problems pertaining to it. I introduce the main outlines of Lacoue-Labarthe's thinking, but reserve further analysis in the fourth chapter, where I connect digital gameplay to certain themes in Lacoue-Labarthe's texts.

I begin by exploring Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophico-historical context, where he derives the themes central to his writing. This serves also as a background for the central problems and questions of this research, which have enormous philosophical discourse behind them. Within this study, it is not possible to examine all Lacoue-Labarthe's influences and the Western discourse on the subject, mimesis, and representation in the detail they would require. Instead, my aim is to provide an outline for the continuum of thought on which Lacoue-Labarthe's criticism focuses and to ground my viewpoints on the aesthetic formation of the subject. Thus, I will not conduct a thorough examination of the concepts of the subject and representation through the history of philosophy but highlight certain moments in it that are relevant to Lacoue-Labarthe's writings. In this way, I also demarcate my viewpoint on these concepts, what I mean by them and what kind of problems are related to them.

German Idealism, especially Immanuel Kant's Transcendental Idealism and its legacy, form a crucial part of Lacoue-Labarthe's background. Even though Lacoue-Labarthe engages the texts of Plato and Aristotle directly on many occasions, they are always interpreted through the problematic that became emphasized through Kant's writing, and subsequent philosophical movements, which Lacoue-Labarthe often calls the speculative thought, culminating in Hegel. However, it is the Romanticism of Jena that provides Lacoue-Labarthe a cue for deconstructive criticism. Thus, rather than going all the way back to the philosophy of Antiquity, I will begin from classical German philosophy, on which a considerable amount of Lacoue-Labarthe's texts focus.

Much could be written about Lacoue-Labarthe's contemporaries and their influence on his thought but I do not focus on them in this introductory chapter, which is intended to provide an orientation on what is to come next. Derrida is

an exception in this regard, though his influence on Lacoue-Labarthe, especially on his early texts, cannot go unnoticed here. I begin this chapter by inspecting the notions of presentation and representation in classical German philosophy, focusing on Kant, Jena Romanticism, Hegel and Hölderlin through Lacoue-Labarthe's texts. Next, I inspect Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of Nietzsche and Heidegger in regard to the subject of writing. Then I undertake a reading of perhaps Lacoue-Labarhte's most challenging text, *Typographie*, in which he introduces the notion of *onto-typology*. In the concluding part, I return to Derrida with the term *désistance*, which he used to characterize Lacoue-Labarthean loss of the subject. I will also highlight Lacoue-Labarthe's strategy of writing and how it differs from Derrida's deconstruction.

2.1 Presentation and Representation

Schematically, representation means that something which is not present is rendered present again. It reproduces something by simulating it with something else. Presentation means display, the act of showing something at the present moment. The meanings of these terms are often overlapping and context-dependent. Lacoue-Labarthe uses the expression *(re)presentation* to denote that a simple presentation, a pure and inviolable presence, is impossible because it entails a deferral of presence, which is inevitably late from lived experience. Art is often considered as a representation, for instance reality, sentiment, idea, or a concept. It can also be understood as a presentation of its materiality with no reference to anything else – the capability for rendering something authentically present can also be used as a criterion for art. A human subjectivity that is conscious of its own existence as a singular and identifiable being, and conscious of the fact that it is conscious, should be able to present itself to itself. Theoretical problems pertaining to this claim are the basis of Lacoue-Labarthe's writings. In this section I inspect Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of classical German philosophy from which he tackles the problem of self-presentation.

Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that the appearance of the subject is always late from its experience of itself, which makes the attempt to create identity frustrating (SP, 257–259; TYP2, 126–128; Martis 2005, 57). Self-representation results in duplication of the self into the representing subject and the subject that is represented. Both are improper because the representing one cannot be reached without representation, which in turn is always only an imperfect copy of the original. If the represented subject is taken for the actual self then it invalidates the original agent of that representation and consequently the truth of the represented subject. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, this is the paradox of the subject, invoked especially by the Kantian problem of representation and later German philosophy. He names this abyssal logic, claiming it to be the basis for the functioning of mimesis, where the emptiness of the subject is at the same time its potential to become anything. (IM, 26–29; 62–63; TYP, 257–260; 230–231; Martis 2005, 48–51; 96–97.) The Kantian problematic was developed further by

the German Romantics who connected it with the idea of the aesthetic representation of philosophy – this is another important theme occupying Lacoue-Labarthe; the border between literature and philosophy. This problematic concerns adequate philosophical self-presentation and the question of style in philosophical writing.

In Lacoue-Labarthe's usage, (re)presentation translates the German word *Darstellung*, which carries the meanings of sensible presentation, exhibition, and performance. The word can be translated literally as *setting there* because *Stellung* means positing or setting and the *Dar*-prefix means there. The field of meaning of *Darstellung* overlaps with another word, *Vorstellung*, which is usually translated as representation or a mental image. The *Vor*-prefix designates *in front of* something, thus the literal translation of *Vorstellung* is *setting before*, and with regard to human action, *setting before oneself*. *Darstellung* refers to material or sensible presentation, to exhibit something in a material setting, whereas *Vorstellung* refers to intellectual action, setting something before consciousness. These distinctions are conceptual and the two terms cannot be completely detached from each other. Because *Darstellung* has no direct equivalent in French or English it is mostly translated as both presentation and representation according to the Latin *repraesentatio*, though the latter form is used in a sense that differs from representation as *Vorstellung*. All forms or *repraesentatio* only approximate *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung* and are often ambiguous in their meaning – in the German language, representation can be denoted directly with *Repräsentation*.

Representation in its modern interpretation (as *Vorstellung*) is epitomized by René Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* -argument, which Martin Heidegger has characterized as the interweaving of the world as a picture and the human being as a subject. By this Heidegger meant that the world is grasped as a picture: "Beings as a whole are now taken in such a way that a being is first and only in being insofar as it is set in place by representing-producing humanity"[4]; the being of beings is in their "representedness [*Vorgestelltheit*]" (Heidegger 1977a, 89–90; 2002, 67–68). Heidegger says:

> Representation here means: to bring the present-at-hand before one as something standing over-and-against, to relate it to oneself, the representer, and, in this relation, to force it back to oneself as the norm-giving domain[5] (Heidegger 2002, 69).

But when representation occurs, humans place themselves in the picture and become the representative of beings in general. In this way, humans gain mastery over beings and become the subject, to which representations are objects. *To be* is an object for representing; thus, the subject sets *that which is* before oneself as an object. Heidegger was critical about the idea of the world picture because he

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[4] "Das Seiende im Ganzen wird jetzt so genommen, daß es erst und nur seiend ist, sofern es durch den vorstellend-herstellenden Menschen gestellt ist" (Heidegger 1977a, 89).

[5] "Vorstellen bedeutet hier: das Vorhandene als ein Entgegenstehendes vor sich bringen, auf sich, den Vorstellenden zu, beziehen und in diesen Bezug zu sich als den maßgebenden Bereich zurückzwingen" (Heidegger 1977a, 91).

thought that human existence as *Dasein*, being-there, is always already in the world. Being-in-the-world is a state that precedes subjectivity and subject-object relations.

According to Azade Seyhan (1992, 4), the crisis of representation coincides with the awareness of difference and the recognition of otherness. It arises from the problematic status of language as a mediator between concepts and the world of experience, i.e. subject and object, concept and image or meaning and word: "Representation always aims to make the subject or presence present to itself," says Seyhan. The problem is that if representation would achieve this, re-present presence, it would become the represented object and would thus negate itself. Hence, the aim can be achieved only by the mediation of symbolic, formal and material techniques: words and images, which always duplicate what they are representing to something that it is not. Seyhan infers that due to its repetitive nature, representation always begins with a duplication of identity, which results in a split between subjectivity and identity. In presentation there is always a recognition of some primary presence that is inaccessible to consciousness.

The crisis of representation developed into a shift from poetic mimesis to critical poiesis. It was affected not only by Kant's philosophy but by the cultural and moral crises that followed the French Revolution. Walter Benjamin noted that the terms critique, criticism and critical are the most frequently used in the writings of German Romantics, followed by *Darstellung*. In Romantic Idealism, representation was designated by *Darstellung*, *Vorstellung* or *Repräsentation*, but Darstellung differs from the two others in that it defines mimesis in terms of poetic presence, rather than imitation. (Seyhan 1992, 5–7.)

2.1.1 Presentation in Kant's Philosophy

This is not intended to be an in-depth examination of Kant, but rather an explanation how Kant is related to Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of the subject. Lacoue-Labarthe has explored the Kantian problem of subjectivity with Jean-Luc Nancy in *L'absolu litteraire : theorie de la litterature du romantisme allemand*.[6] Martha Helfer's *The Retreat of Representation: The Concept of Darstellung in German Critical Discourse* (1996) provides insight into Lacoue-Labarthe's and Nancys' interpretation of Kant and Jena Romanticism. John Martis (2005, 75) claims that Helfer opens Kant in relation to Lacoue-Labarthe better than Lacoue-Labarthe himself. This claim can be justified because Lacoue-Labarthe's elaborations of Kant's thought are reticent. The notion of the subject, as it is known in contemporary philosophical discourse, does not appear in Kant's philosophy because the term has since then accumulated considerable theoretical weight. Here the notion of presentation is more important than the notion of the subject.

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[6] By the literary absolute, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy refer to theoretical Romanticism, which sought theoretical institutionalization of the literary genre, that is to say, of literature as absolute (AL, 20–21; LA, 11).

The Kantian conception of representation refers to schematizing powers of the subject, whereas presentation suspends the use of these formal powers over the material forms of nature (Ross 2007, 3). In presentation, the forms of nature extend to the subject as enjoyable favours. Alison Ross distinguishes two patterns of thinking of aesthetic presentation in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*: the dislocation of the aesthetic judgment from practical and cognitive fields, and differentiation between the presentation of material content and the presentation of the *relation* taken to this content. The first pattern has been embraced especially by the Frankfurt school, whereas the second type finds a parallel in Heidegger's claim that of our way of relating to objects determines how they are. Ross seizes upon the tension between the contingent forms of nature and the ideas of reason in Kant's work, which has often been ignored or seen as a failure that must be fixed. Giving privilege to presentation as a means to access pure ideas means that the idea behind presentation becomes secondary, which causes the erosion of classical metaphysical categories. This is the source of the proximity between Kant's third critique and twentieth-century philosophy. Ross claims that it is a result of Kant's foregrounding of the question of presentation (Ross 2007, 15–18).

According to Helfer, in German eighteenth-century aesthetic theory *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung* have generally corresponded to presentation and representation, but their semantic fields also overlap in many instances and sometimes they are used as synonyms. Before Kant, *Vorstellung* encompassed also the meaning of *Darstellung* as sensible presentation and rendering present. When the distinction between the terms begun to develop, especially in Kant's philosophy, *Darstellung* received more attention. The etymological background of Kant's usage of *Darstellung* comes from the Latin *exhibitio* and Greek *hypotyposis*. In Aristotelian usage, *hypotyposis* refers to something that molds and sketches itself, and in rhetorical tradition to visual presentation, to place before one's eyes. According to Helfer, Kant's definition relates to both meanings, but ultimately adopts the visual dimension of the rhetorical tradition, although against rhetoric (Helfer 1996, 22–23).

In Kant's definition of *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung*, the object is thought through representation, which is the concept of the object, but the concept must relate to actual or possible experience, i.e. it must be presented immediately in intuition. For Kant, cognition is not possible without this sensibilization of concepts, because the concept is only an empty representation in the mind and not yet made sensibly present. Therefore, *Vorstellung* is something already in the mind (*a priori*), whereas *Darstellung* brings the objective reality present to the mind, without which there would not be cognition. (Helfer 1996, 24–25.) Kant thought that *a priori Darstellung* is possible only in mathematics, whereas philosophy is always limited by the innate ambiguity of verbal language. Helfer (1996, 31) points out that Kant's work itself confused different semantic fields, such as the stylistic and critical meanings of *Darstellung*. At the limit of Kant's transcendental critique, art entered his philosophy. Philosophy cannot be mathematics because of the limits of language, but at the same time, language provokes to present philosophy as *poiesis*. Eventually the rhetorical and critical

definitions of *Darstellung* merged, which brought an aesthetic notion to Kant's philosophy.

In Transcendental Idealism, the synthetic function of human knowledge is composed of both representation and presentation by combining conceptual knowledge and sensible perception. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant explained *Darstellung* only in terms of philosophical style, but in *The Critique of Practical Reason* and *The Critique of Judgment*, the pure concepts or reason, i.e. ideas of God, freedom and immortality, which are not in the range of human cognition because there is no *Darstellung* corresponding to them, are explained to have partial presentation in practical reason, which becomes fully concretized in aesthetic judgements (Helfer 1996, 25–28). Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy consider Kant's aesthetics as an attempt to bridge the gap between the transcendental Ego of *The Critique of Pure Reason* and the moral subject of *The Critique of Practical Reason*. They explain that transcendental aesthetics does not concern a division between the sensible and the intelligible, but a division between two *a priori* forms within the sensible (intuitive). The fundamental result of Kant's operation is that there is no originary intuition of the self, and that the subject is only an empty "I". The subject is unpresentable to itself and becomes emptied of all substance, remaining only as a transcendental unity of apperception, a self-consciousness to which human thoughts belong[7]. Kant says in *The Critique of Pure Reason*:

> The consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in internal perception is merely empirical, forever variable; it can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearances, and is customarily called inner sense or empirical apperception.[8] (Kant 1998, 232 [A107].)

And:

> Now no cognitions can occur in us, no connection and unity among them, without that unity of consciousness that precedes all data of the intuitions, and in relation to which all representation of objects is alone possible. This pure, original, unchanging consciousness I will now name transcendental apperception. That it deserves this name is already obvious from this, that even the purest objective unity, namely that of the a priori concepts (space and time) is possible only through the relation of the intuitions to it.[9] (Kant 1998, 232 [A107].)

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7   See also Carr (1991, 34–45) for a differentiation between transcendental and empirical self-consciousness in Kant's philosophy.

8   "Das Bewußtsein seiner selbst, nach den Bestimmungen unseres Zustandes, bei der inneren Wahrnehmung ist bloß empirisch, jederzeit wandelbar, es kann kein stehendes oder bleibendes Selbst in diesem Flusse innerer Erscheinungen geben, und wird gewöhnlich der innere Sinn genannt, oder die empirische Apperzeption." (Kant 1956, A107.)

9   "Nun können keine Erkenntnisse in uns stattfinden, keine Verknüpfung und Einheit derselben untereinander, ohne diejenige Einheit des Bewußtseins, welche vor dien Datis der Anschauungen vorhergeht, und, worauf in Beziehung, alle Vorstellung von Gegenständen allein möglich ist. Dieses reine ursprüngliche, unwandelbare Bewußtsein will ich nun die transzendentale Apperzeption nennen. Daß sie diesen Namen verdiene, erhellt schon daraus: daß selbst die reinste objektive Einheit, nämlich die der Begriffe a priori (Raum und Zeit) mir durch Beziehung der Anschauungen auf sie möglich sein." (Kant 1956, A107.)

The cognition of oneself concerns only an appearance, not the self as it is, and conversely, to be conscious of oneself concerns only the fact that "I" am, not the appearance or the substance.

> In the transcendental synthesis of the manifold of representations in general, on the contrary, hence in the synthetic original unity of apperception, I am conscious of myself not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am. This representation is a thinking, not an intuiting. Now since for the cognition of ourselves, in addition to the action of thinking that brings the manifold of every possible intuition to the unity of apperception, a determinate sort of intuition, through which this manifold is given, is also required, my own existence is not indeed appearance (let alone mere illusion), but the determination of my existence can only occur in correspondence with the form of inner sense, according to the particular way in which the manifold that I combine is given in inner intuition, and I therefore have no cognition of myself as I am, but only as I appear to myself. The consciousness of oneself is therefore far from being a cognition of oneself, regardless of all the categories that constitute the thinking of an object in general through combination of the manifold in an apperception.[10] (Kant 1998, 259–260 [B157–B158].)

The subject as an empty cogito is a function of a unity, which is formed by transcendental imagination as a representation (picture). This results in a cognition that will restore the subject only as a subject of appearances. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy regard Kant's introduction of the moral subject only as a reintroduction of the problem. In *The Critique of Judgment*, there are two ways to solve this problematic: the reflection of the synthetic function of the subject and the *Darstellung* of the subject. (AL, 43–44; LA, 30–31.)

The synthetic functions of the subject are judgment and transcendental imagination, but their reflection does not refer to any kind of mirror stage or speculation in a way that would produce self-awareness. Reflection in the judgment of taste operates as a free play of imagination and produces the unity of the subject as an image without a concept or an end. The *Darstellung* of the never substantial substance of the subject, on the other hand, occurs by means of the beautiful in the works of art (through *Bilder* that present liberty and morality), by means of the formative power (*bildende Kraft*) in nature, and by means of the *Bildung* of humanity (through history and culture). But because the Kantian usage of *Darstellung* has a purely analogical character, it creates a double tension

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[10]   "Dagegen bin ich mir meiner selbst in der transzendentalen Synthesis des Mannigfaltigen der Vorstellungen überhaupt, mithin in der synthetischen ursprünglichen Einheit der Apperzeption, bewußt, nicht wie ich mir erscheine, noch wie ich an mir selbst bin, sondern nur d aß ich bin. Diese Vorstellung ist ein Denken, nicht ein Anschauen. Da nun zum Erkenntnis unserer selbst außer der Handlung des Denkens, die das Mannigfaltige einer jeden möglichen Anschauung zur Einheit der Apperzeption bringt, noch eine bestimmte Art der Anschauung, dadurch dieses Mannigfaltige gegeben wird, erforderlich ist, so ist zwar mein eigenes Dasein nicht Erscheinung (vielweniger bloßer Schein), aber die Bestimmung meines Daseins kann nur der Form des inneren Sinnes gemäß nach der besonderen Art, wie das Mannigfaltige, das ich verbinde, in der inneren Anschauung gegeben wird, geschehen, und ich habe also demnach keine Erkenntnis von mir wi e i ch b i n, sondern bloß wie ich mir selbst er scheine. Das Bewußtsein seiner selbst ist also noch lange nicht ein Erkenntnis seiner selbst, unerachtet aller Kategorien, welche das Denken eines Objekts überhaupt durch Verbindung des Mannigfaltigen in einer Apperzeption ausmachen." (Kant 1956, B157–B158.)

regarding the formative power, which has no *analogon*, and *Bildung*, which is a view of history that refers its *telos* to infinity. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy conclude that for Kant, the idea of the subject in its unpresentable form is a regulatory idea, which renders the totality of knowledge and system as such continuously lacking. Because the subject's self-presence cannot be guaranteed by originary intuition, the totality of knowledge, knowledge of the world in terms of prioristic science, is lacking. (AL, 45–46; LA, 31–32.)

Here, *Darstellung* gains a more prominent role than before and is defined as setting (*exhibitio*) an intuition that corresponds to the concept of an object. The rhetorical background of the term is diminished and its scope is expanded to the areas of art and nature, with the notions of natural beauty and natural purposes, corresponding to the distinction of critiques of aesthetic and teleological judgement. Now *darstellen* means to represent aesthetically and to demonstrate, to show, or to exhibit. It corresponds to *hypotyposis* (in this context a picturesque description that represents as present something that is not present), *exhibition* (display), and *subjectio sub adspectum* (to submit under the gaze) (Helfer 1996, 36–37). Kant made also a differentiation between schematic and symbolic presentations. In the former type, an intuition corresponding to a concept is given *a priori*. In the latter, an intuition is supplied to a concept to which no sensible intuition is adequate, but in a way that the analogy concerns the rule of the procedure of judgement and the form of reflection. The symbolic presentation is more complex and crucial because it functions as a connection between pure and practical reason.

Schematic presentations do not bridge the gap between nature and freedom, nor do they explain how transcendental ideas can be presentable. Kant intended to achieve this with the symbolic presentation of the aesthetic idea. An aesthetic idea is a *representation of the imagination* (intuition), to which no *definite thought* (concept) can be adequate and which cannot be made intelligible by language. It is a counterpart to a rational idea, which is a concept with no adequate intuition. Aesthetic ideas animate cognitive faculties and enable symbolic presentations of transcendental ideas. (Helfer 1996, 38–39.) According to Helfer, Kant gives more importance to the sublime with regard to *Darstellung* because the term is discussed in much greater detail in the section concerning the sublime, whereas its appearance is minimal in relation to beauty. The beautiful concerns only the form of the objects that have boundaries, whereas the sublime extends to objects with no form and thus is able to represent boundlessness. The dialectical relation between limitation and limitlessness is essential to *Darstellung*. (Helfer 1996, 40–41.) Through negative *Darstellung*, the sublime transcends the limits of schematic presentation and awakens a supersensible faculty, the idea of humanity in the subject. Negative *Darstellung* of the sublime produces the moral subject (Helfer 1996, 42). Helfer summarizes: "Negative *Darstellung* forces the subject to think the supersensible — the idea — without actually producing an objective presentation of this idea. Thus, it presents nothing except the process — the striving or effort (*die Bestrebung*) — of *Darstellung* itself" (Helfer 1996, 45). This is self-presentation in the Romantic sense, which

explains the importance of negativity to Idealism and Romanticism. Kant suppressed the possibility of these kinds of conclusions and attempted to assign negative *Darstellung* as a safeguard that keeps reason within its limits. The idea of freedom cannot be presented positively, and thus negative *Darstellung* is an analogue of pure mathematical presentation. Romantics concluded that pure negative philosophical presentation would be poetic (Helfer 1996, 45–46).

Kant's transcendental critique defined the subject as a transcendental apperception, the empty cogito, and as empirical self-consciousness, an internal intuition of the self. Neither allow access to the subject as such because the transcendental ego is empty and the internal intuition is only an object of representation. Kant's attempt to solve the unpresentability of the subject through aesthetics opened a possibility for diffusing the border between philosophy and literature. Lacoue-Labarthe calls this "the Kantian crisis," a "wound still open in the tissue of philosophy, a wound that does not heal and that reopens constantly under the hand that would close it," characterizing all subsequent philosophy as an impossibility of covering the "loss of everything this crisis swept with it beyond any power of legislating, deciding, and criticizing" (IM, 44; TYP2, 212). Lacoue-Labarthe draws his theoretical background more from the response and continuation to Kantian philosophy than from the Kantian text itself. To Lacoue-Labarthe, the most important movements of that era are Jena Romanticism and Speculative Idealism, which I inspect in the next parts of this chapter.

2.1.2 The Romantic Subject as a Literary Work

The Kantian problematic of representation had a wide influence on subsequent philosophical movements. In *L'absolu littéraire*, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy explain that the lack in the core of the subject that was opened by Kant brought about a "will to system". Jena Romanticism is one of the movements that proceeded from this crisis – it was an entirely new kind of articulation of the philosophical, which cannot be derived genealogically from the Enlightenment.[11] It was a sudden appearance of something different that was not just a literary movement; it did not have any predecessors and could not be directly related to any previous movements, such as *Sturm und Drang* or the eighteenth-century discussion on aesthetics. (AL, 42–43; LA, 29–30.) The Jena Romantics embraced

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[11] According to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, early Romanticism corresponded to the profound economic, social, political and moral crisis of the eighteenth century. The Romantic genre recognized in the *Sturm und Drang* movement could be seen as an invention of a new literature that would emerge as a counterreaction against the Enlightenment and its uncritical stance against economic, social, political and moral progress. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy describe a *triple crise* in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century: the social and moral crisis that resulted from the bourgeoisie's access to the new "romanesque romanticism" literature, the disturbing and fascinating effects of the French Revolution and the critical philosophy of Kant. The Jena Romantics participated in this crisis, but not with a literary project or as a crisis in literature, but as a general crisis and critique towards the aforementioned aspects, for which literature and literary theory were the privileged site of expression. (AL, 13–14; LA, 5–6.)

imitation, repetition and intertextuality, contrary to earlier humanist notions of originality and authenticity, and thus did not claim any originality in their own thoughts either that would have cut them off from what had been previously. Nevertheless, this radically changed the way of reading and writing; the Jena texts have remained interesting because they maintain the tension resulting from the impossibility of representing the absolute (Seyhan 1992, 1–3). Although *L'absolu littéraire* presents French translations of Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Schelling and Novalis, it must be understood as a reading, a repetition in an interminable chain of reiterations that brings completion (Bernstein 1995). Hence, Jena Romanticism does not function as a distinct point in a chronological succession of theories, but as a moment of writing that opens the epoch in which Lacoue-Labarthe's writing operates.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy state that as the first avant-garde group in history, Athenaeum is the site of our birth (AL, 16–17; LA, 7–8), by which they refer to the avant-garde movements of their own time. John McKeane (2015, 23–24) interprets this as a reference to *Tel Quel*, to which Lacoue-Labarthe reacted with hesitation. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy think that there is a "romantic unconscious" in many central motifs of our modernity. The literary absolute infinitizes the thinking of totality and the subject, maintaining its ambiguity. This indefinable character of Romanticism has allowed modernity to distinguish itself from it but by doing this, our time has merely repeated Romanticism (unconsciously or deliberately suppressing it). The imprecision of the work of Jena Romantics functions as a trap into which all attempts to recognize Romanticism in our time fall. (AL, 26; LA, 15.) Helfer points out that if Nancy's and Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of Romanticism as the definitive paradigm also for our modernity is correct, then Heidegger's critique of Cartesian subjectivity and representation in terms of *Darstellung* is redundant, or at least only a repetition of the German Romantic tradition. Helfer sees Heidegger's notion of the nothingness of being as an adaption of Kantian sublime and negative *Darstellung*, which has also been recognized in contemporary philosophy. (Helfer 1996, 3–4.)

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy state that early Romanticism (*Frühromantik*) should not be called Romanticism in the first place (although they still do for practical reasons, but not without irony) because early Romantics never used the name themselves, and moreover, the term "Romanticism" invokes an inadequate aesthetic category. This denomination tries to set apart a conception of a school or a style that would belong to a certain past. (AL, 8–9; LA, 1.) Instead of a literary category, the Romanticism of Jena was a properly indefinite programme of texts, accompanied by an ironical notion of an absence of definition, which formed a symbol for the whole project of the Romantics (AL, 15; LA, 6). Proceeding from the Kantian crisis, it forged a unique, but often nearly imperceptible path between Speculative Idealism and Hölderlinian "poetry of poetry", which Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy claim to have given birth to the concept of literature. The fundamental text of Jena Romantics, *The Earliest System Programme of German Romanticism*, has the same tendency to Speculative Idealism with all post-Kantianism, i.e. the aim to justify the possibility "of the auto-recognition of the

Ideal as the subject's own form." Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy state that this must be called "the will to System", which reserves a special ontological position for the Idea in general and for the idea of the subject as self-consciousness, connected to the idea of a subject being able to present to itself the true form of the world (LA, 46–47; AL, 32–33).

This movement presupposed a reversal of Kant in a manner that would simultaneously fulfil and perverse Kantian teleology. The Kantian moral subject was converted to an absolutely free and self-conscious subject, which is a corollary or a possibility of the system. As a result, the world becomes a corollary of the subject, the subject's work and creation, which is organized in terms of absolute freedom and morality. All elements of the metaphysics of German Idealism delimit and constitute the horizon of Romanticism, but also distinguish it from Hegel and Fichte. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy find the decisive character that allows Romanticism to specify itself within Idealism in the proposition "the philosophy of the Spirit is an aesthetic philosophy." It designated the philosophy of the subject in its absoluteness and ideality: the "System-Subject". But this would be an organic, living system that would not belong to the registers of dead philosophy. While this view is very close to Hegel, it has one difference: the life of the System is beautiful, and the organism is a work of art. This view unifies truth and goodness in beauty, which was Kant's aim in *The Critique of Judgment*. The idea of the subject as a fundamental principle for the system of ideas is organized by beauty, which is the very generality and ideality of the idea and which sublates the opposition between the system and freedom. Beauty as the ideality of the Idea results in a demand that philosophy is presented aesthetically, in a work of art. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy state that the sublation takes place as *Darstellung*. AL, 48–50; LA, 33–35.) Here, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy elaborate how Romanticism connected the formation of the subject to the presentability of the idea through aesthetic creation.

> That the idea of beauty should be the ideality of the Idea implies that the Idea itself be determined as the *beautiful Idea*. And if the being-idea in general is the presentation of the thing of which there is an idea—if the idea, in consequence, fundamentally remains the *eidos*—then the idea of the Idea, as the beautiful Idea, is the very "presentability" of presentation (as beautiful presentation). It is the *bildende Kraft* as *aesthetische Kraft*: formative power *is* aesthetic power. This explains why the aim of the Idea should be an act (which implies both power or will and the subject) and how the aim of the idea of beauty, the aesthetic act, can be called "*the highest act of Reason.*" It is a question here of effectivity and of effectuation—of *Wirklichkeit* and *Verwirklichung*.[12] (LA, 35–36.)

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[12] "Que l'idée de la beauté soit l'idéalité de l'Idée implique en effet que l'Idée soit en elle-même déterminée comme l'*Idée belle*. Et si l'être-idée, en général, est la présentation de la chose dont il y a idée — si l'idée, par conséquent, reste toujours fondamentalement l'*eidos* —, l'idée de l'Idée, comme Idée belle, est la « présentabilité » même de la présentation (comme belle présentation). C'est la *bildende Kraft* comme *aesthetische Kraft* : la force formatrice *est* la force esthétique. Par là s'explique d'ailleurs que la visée de l'Idée soit un acte (ce qui suppose à la fois la force, voire la volonté, et le sujet) et que la visée de l'idée de beauté, l'acte esthétique, puisse être dit *l'acte suprême de la raison*. Il y va, ici, de l'effectivité et de l'effectuation — de la *Wirklichkeit* et de la *Verwirklichung*." (AL, 50.)

Yet the notion of *Darstellung* was not explicitly discussed in the *System-Programme*. When poetry replaces philosophy, it gains pedagogical and political implications that belong to *Bildung*, but in the most general sense, encompassing "shaping and molding, art and culture, education and sociality, and ultimately history and figuration." The obsession to efficacity turns *organon* to *organization*. The *System-Programme* tried also to replace religion with a new mythology of reason that would conjoin the monotheism of Christianity with the polytheism of paganism. Through the exchange of the philosophical and the mythological, Ideas could become accessible to people. This "mankind-subject" was characterized as the "privileged locus of the mythological", which would be the possibility of exemplarity and the figural, formative power and determinate language. The subject as self-consciousness and knowledge could come into being through people. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy claim that this represents Western eidetics in its final repetition. Platonic eidetics can thus shift to aesthetics, or "eidaesthetics", as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy refer to it. Within the landscape of Idealism in general, this term traces the proper horizon of Romanticism, which both Hegel and Hölderlin tried to overcome. (AL, 51–52; LA 36–37.) With the notion of subject-work, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy refer to the model of the auto-production of the Romantic subject in a literary work. The fulfilment of self-cultivation is analogous to the perfection of a work of art, where the self is both the work and the artist, both a complete *Bild* and its beholder. The disposition of the subject-work is fragmentary because it points towards a perfection that lies beyond it and underlies its activity.

The Jena Romantics defined literature as an aesthetic representation of philosophy and considered it capable of producing its own truth and representing the absolute that could fulfil the incompleteness of Kant's operation in *The Critique of Judgment* (Seyhan 1992, 8). The notion of literature was supposed to create a completely new genre that would surpass previous divisions, a genericity and a generativity which would produce new work infinitely. This is what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy refer to with the absolute of literature. It was not only poetry, but poesy as production; not only the production of a literary thing, but production of production itself. Romantic poetry aimed to reveal the essence of *poïesis* and the truth of production itself. Because this auto-production would later constitute the closure of the speculative absolute in a Hegelian sense, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy conclude that Jena Romanticism is the inauguration of the literary absolute, which does not mean only the absolute of literature, but literature itself as absolute. Hence, Romanticism was not just a theory of literature, but theory as literature, literature that produces itself by producing its own theory, an "absolute *literary operation*". In short, this means the unification of poetry and philosophy. (AL, 21–22; LA, 11–12.) Lacoue-Labarthe highlights this theme throughout his writings, in which the border between literature and philosophical discourse is destabilized. It touches upon the problematic of the subject through Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of subject of philosophy and subject of writing, which not only refer to the subject of written texts, but to the subject itself

as a self-theorizing and self-forming literary product whose manner of being is constituted through aesthetic acts.

Martis (2005, 69–71) reconstructs Lacoue-Labarthe's and Nancy's argument: The Romantics sought to overcome the Kantian untheorizability of the subject with the notion of literature as an adequate presentation of what is. However, this means understanding literature as being absolute, which reverts to the traditional account of subjectivity as an "ersatz substantiality" and frames also our own present. The subject lost by Kant was found by the Jena Romantics as the Work, which refers to a simultaneously produced and producing subject. The free subject was replaced with an organic and infinitized one, which employs a spiral between chaos and system and infinitizes the thinking subject as a totality (Martis 2005, 73).

The Romantic notions of infinitization and absolutization of the subject have similarities to Hegelian thought, but Lacoue-Labarthe considers Hegel's stance towards the Romantic idea of literature completely different. Next, I will inspect how Lacoue-Labarthe elaborates this difference and what Hegel's philosophy provides for the notion of presentation.

2.1.3 Hegel's Abortion of Literature

With Speculative Idealism, Lacoue-Labarthe usually refers to Hegelian thought, which he differentiates from the ideals of Romanticism. I will not begin to scrutinize Hegel's philosophy directly, because it does not connect to the paradox of the subject as crucially as Kant does, even though Hegel's influence on the notion of subject formation on a more general level is incontestable. While Hegel appears in Lacoue-Labarthe's writings on many occasions, he does not conduct many direct readings of Hegel, except for *L'imprésentable* (*The Unpresentable*), published originally in 1975 and translated to English in 1993 in *The subject of Philosophy*. It focuses on Hegel's relation to Romanticism by examining his reaction to Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde* (published in 1799), an experimental novel that combined philosophical and literary presentation and provided a new kind of understanding of love and marriage, causing moral disapproval. Hegel's idea of marriage is based on a division between the male and female roles, which are connected to the spiritual and the sensuous. Lacoue-Labarthe finds in it a mechanism that is foundational to the speculative thought itself and touches finally upon the question of what truth is. In the end, the reading focuses on the nature of truth as unconcealment, which foreshadows Heidegger's interpretation of truth as *aletheia*, which in Lacoue-Labarthe's context is first of all the truth about the nature of the subject.

According to Hegel, the only proper quality of Romanticism was its dissolution, where art turns its principle of destruction against itself. However, Romanticism was not unaware that this was its essence – Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that here the relation between literature and philosophy was determined and carried to its point of rupture (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 54; SP2, 116–117). Hegel refused to consider the relation between literature and philosophy and opposed Romanticism with the idea of a philosophical

accomplishment of philosophy, not only to save philosophy from the danger literature poses, but also to reprimand the beginning of literature, whose logic of dissolution he pushed to its limits. Lacoue-Labarthe interprets Hegel's attempt to dismiss literature before it was even properly born as an abortion of literature[13], an attempt of dissolution which produced a residue. Lacoue-Labarthe borrows the word *désoeuvrement* from Maurice Blanchot, which can be translated as worklessness and inoperativeness, to denominate the incompletion of the process of dissolution. The undiscoverable essence of that which cannot anymore be called neither philosophy nor literature can be found in this worklessness. (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 54–55; SP2, 117–119.)

Hegel did not criticize *Lucinde* directly and mentioned it only in marginal notes. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that while this discretion might not have been systematic, it was not completely accidental either, but connected to the avoidance of the question of literature. For Hegel, Romanticism took satire too far in its nihilism, of which *Lucinde* was a perfect example because it exemplified the profound scandalousness of Romanticism, contrary to what Schiller represented to Hegel. He associated Romantic irony with immorality and thought that the shaping, figuration and fictioning (*fictionnement*, *Gestaltung*, *Bildung*), that occurs in the work of a Romantic artist, is a sacrilege that betrays the perversity of its author. *Lucinde* opposed the idea that marriage as an affective and sexual union is ethically constituted only after the ceremonial pact. It was not merely an amoral and licentious book but raised dishonesty to the level of the sacred by justifying the absolute completion of love outside of marriage. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that the problem for Hegel was not only the reinterpretation of marriage, but the genre of the novel in general, the genre of the dissolution of art and the function and finality that *Lucinde* attributed to it.

The importance of marriage is closely connected to the Hegelian system of thought, which *Lucinde* managed to destabilize through both its scandalous content and experimental form. For Hegel, the difference between the sexes was a distribution of roles and characters. In this scheme, the substantiality of marriage is the intellectual and ethical assignment of both sexes to their roles, which sublates, cancels, preserves, elevates and spiritualizes their natural difference in a living unity. The distribution of the roles is the speculative distribution itself, between activity and passivity and duplicity and unity. The role of man is active and self-sufficient – he belongs to the outside by his conflictual and projective character. Man is difference, opposition and the negative, whereas woman is indivisible and without difference. A man *ex-sists*, but woman *in-sists*, she is the inside, the substantial inwardness of marriage, pregnant with the difference of man. The union of the spiritual and sensuous within subjective individuality is accomplished in this "crypt". A "phallogocentrism" can be recognized in Hegel's thought, in which man represents the very force of the concept: the force of sublation, the rectification, stiffening and erection of the speculative. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that the very possibility of the philosophical as such is at stake in Hegel's differentiation

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[13]   See also *The Abortion of Literature* (Lacoue-Labarthe, 2015a).

between the sexes, which functions as a "speculative coitus". A "sexual symbolic" is constitutive to the speculative: the emerging knowledge must (re)present itself as masculine activity: "The concept is the (protruding and salient) *protrusion* of the figure"[14] (SP2, 134).

In the Romantic interpretation, marriage corresponded to a work of art because both concern the mutual formation of the rational and the sensuous. Lacoue-Labarthe states that the significance of marriage is not a union or a fusion. Marriage sanctions difference, which is bestowed to man, and thus man comes out of marriage. Union and fusion belong to the feminine: woman represents the law of the chthonic realm, the night and the ancient, out of which man must raise himself (*se relève*). The union of the spiritual and the sensuous, which defines the work of art and beauty, is embodied by femininity, which in turn is sublated by ethical masculinity. While woman is not beauty, beauty is feminine – Hegel approved a strong, symbolic analogy between woman and art.

For Hegel, actualizing love before marriage meant impudence and shamelessness. Emancipating women from the domestication and enclosure of marriage would have disturbed or even reversed the roles of marriage and caused a return to animality or bestiality, which marriage was supposed to inhibit. The displacement of the woman would have been "*an offense against decency*" ("un *attentat à la pudeur*") (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 70; SP2, 137), which would have overturned the decency of the speculative order by sacralizing the femininity of aesthetics, which Hegel tried to undermine as best he could. Lacoue-Labarthe emphasizes that for Hegel, the sense of shame and decency, *pudeur*, was the essence of art. Hegel's elaborations of the necessity of shame in women develop into an aesthetic question in relation to nude and clothed figures in Greek sculpture. In these analyses, femininity is only beautiful when veiled; the woman can express the spiritual only by concealing her sensuous body. The male body, on the contrary, (re)presents humanity as such. The sense of shame is the refusal of animality and the emergence of consciousness, the spiritual nature of man, which differentiates him from animals. But woman is destined to animality and hence must be veiled. Lacoue-Labarthe interprets animality as such as desire, which explains why there were considerably more nude male than female statues in ancient Greece: male nudity expresses indifference to *sensual* desire. Only woman arouses sensual desire, because male homosexual, or *hommosexuel*[15] desire is *spiritual*: "The phallus is the 'organ' of the Spirit" ("le phallus est l' « organe » de l'Esprit"). (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 70–73; SP2, 138–141.) The speculative understanding of nudity was based on the differentiation between the sensual and the spiritual, which corresponded to female and male roles. In Hegel's interpretation of Antiquity, it was organized also around the division between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. At this point, Lacoue-

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14   "Le concept est la *saillie* (saillissante et saillante) de la figure." (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 68.)

15   Lacoue-Labarthe alludes to Lacan's word play, which joins the French word *homme*, man, with *homo* (Lacan 1975, 107–108; 1999, 84–86).

Labarthe's reading of Hegel approaches its focal point and becomes increasingly complex.

In *Aesthetics*, Hegel explained the nudity of Aphrodite as the expression of her main feature: the sensuous charm of a woman. Lacoue-Labarthe interprets: the nude statue of Aphrodite expresses proper desire, and femininity in its essence. It (re)presents the pure sensuous, and consequently, nothing related to the spiritual. But if beauty is the veiling of that which arouses desire in the sensuous, and thus the unveiling of the spiritual, then beauty (and the work of art) is defined through female modesty: the classical idea of the beautiful is veiled immodesty. If man is always already spiritual, and woman always yet sensuous, then a veiled female figure expresses the beautiful unity of the spiritual and the sensuous. *Modesty* is the figuration of the figure (of a work of art) itself, it negates the negation of the spiritual. Consequently, the male figure is a figure only when feminized because man expresses the predomination of the spiritual over the sensuous. He (re)presents the boundary of the figural, where the figure is being sublated by the spiritual. In masculinity, the figure unveils itself by lifting the veil of the sensuous, but instead of revealing the sensuous, male nudity unveils the spiritual. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that this logic leads to a determination of truth as castration[16], where sensual desire is cut off by spiritual knowledge. The knowledge of desire engenders the desire for truth in the gesture of unveiling. In this unveiling of the figure, says Lacoue-Labarthe, lies the whole history of truth, and the necessity of *Darstellung*, the question of form and manifestation. And it is determined through the relationship to art in terms of femininity, the veil, and modesty, to which the immodesty of *Lucinde* was the opposite. This is the relationship between philosophy and poetry in Hegel's thought. (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 73–75; 141–143.) In this deconstruction of the dialectical structure between the sensuous and the spiritual, Lacoue-Labarthe shows how the understanding of the beautiful as modesty and as the veiling of the sensuous causes truth to be determined as cutting off the sensuous. In Lacoue-Labarthe's view, this is impossible because figural representation is inevitable and perhaps even all there can be.

2.1.4 *Bilden* and Fictioning

The question of the relation between philosophy and poetry concerns the presentation of thought and the possibility of thought to appear in its own element. The problem is whether there is a necessary presentation by which that which is presented differentiates itself. Through giving itself as a presentation,

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16   Lacoue-Labarthe's formulation is rather difficult: "Besides, we know exactly where this logic leads: well beyond the philosophy of art — but allowing itself to be supported by the philosophy of art at least as much as the philosophy of art is supported by it (and this is true also of psychoanalysis) — to some determination of truth as truth-castration and truth of (truth-) castration" (SP2, 142). ("On sait bien du reste où mène exactement cette logique : bien au-delà de la philosophie de l'art — mais se laissant soutenir par elle au moins autant qu'elle la soutient (et cela est aussi vrai de la psychanalyse...) — , à quelque détermination de la vérité comme vérité-castration et vérité de la (vérité) castration" (1975a, 74)).

thought loses itself; the necessity of manifestation entails the necessity of loss. Philosophical (re)presentation (*Darstellung*) of philosophy is a problem of transfiguration. Hegel's answer was that appearance is itself essential to essence; truth is truth only when it appears as truth for someone and for itself. Truth becomes actualized in its manifestation, without which there is nothing to think. In manifestation, the thing itself gives itself to be thought. Philosophy is the manifestation and (re)presentation of thought in its own element. (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 75–76; SP2, 143–144.) The answer is simple and seems to bypass the problem of presentation altogether by determining truth through its appearance.

Despite the clarity of Hegel's idea, Lacoue-Labarthe locates certain anxiety in it, especially when Hegel discusses poetry. Philosophical (re)presentation resists transfiguration, which forced Hegel to engage in long procedures to circumvent the difficulty. For Hegel, poetry expressed the spirituality of inner life. It was the locus of the dissolution of art, the point of transition to the prose of scientific thought and represents art in general. Poetry is in proximity to the speculative thought, because the formation and expression of the subject matter remain purely theoretical in it. In poetry, imagery (*Bilden*) and speech (*Reden*), formation (again *Bilden*) of the expression are more important than mere enunciation and the content. (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 76–78; SP2, 145–146.)

Lacoue-Labarthe says that Hegel's notion of poetic *Bilden* is untranslatable. It can be understood as the formation ("*le façonner, le Gestalten*") of the figure or fiction in general: a formation of fiction. It is the imaging of the image or the rhetorical figure and corresponds to the classical sense of *Dichten* (poetizing), plastic and fictional (*plassein* and *plattein* in Greek, *fingere* in Latin). Finally, the term has its background in the Platonic notion of *poiein*. Lacoue-Labarthe utilizes the term *fictioning* to gather these senses of poetic imagery, fiction, figuration, forming, molding, shaping and even feigning or dissembling. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, when Hegel proposes that speech is the most malleable material and the direct property of the spirit, he resorted to this notion of fictioning and all its philosophico-historical background. Hegel's understanding of fictioning is completely spiritual, and consequently, purely theoretical; it is theoretical fiction, not to be confused with fictional theory. Hegel thought that poetry does not express the thinking subject in an external artistic mode, such as visual shapes or melodies, but gives shape to the subject matter within the spirit. Even though a poet molds the actual audible words of speech, Hegel believed that the words are only signs of ideas, which means that the origin of poetic speech is representation. Poetic form mediates manifestation and the speculative, because it does not rely on external visual shapes or melodies but gives shape to the subject matter within the spirit as a representation (*Vorstellung*). Poetry occupies a zero space between the external and the internal, between manifestation and thought. It is plastic and fictioned but turned towards the inside and affects only the signified: a graphic, figurative (*imagée*) representation, which is separated from the concept, i.e. presentation, by the distinction of proper and improper. While Hegel could not avoid taking recourse to language, he

could leave the figure and the effects of the signifier, the use of language in its material aspect, outside. (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 78–80; SP2, 147–149.)

Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that the logic of this transfiguration (the internalization, spiritualization, appropriation and sublation of the figure to a speculative figure) follows the logic of revelation and unveiling. Hegel repeated the operation performed on Greek sculpture with poetry in order to identify the figure and phenomenality in general with veiling. Something in the figure and fiction was so threatening that Hegel could consider it only as veiled. If the figure is defined by its classical conception as fiction, in opposition to the discourse of truth, there is nothing threatening in it. But in this definition, the figure is divided into good and bad fiction; the good leads to truth but effaces itself before it, while the bad resists effacement. This results in two kinds of veils, which Lacoue-Labarthe describes as transparency and obstacle. This means that fiction and figures are always used in philosophical discourse as a supplement to evidence, but preferably under the control of the philosophical truth. Fiction and figure belong to philosophy as its other, which is discernible for instance in the oppositions of the sensuous and the intelligible, particular and universal, and the veiled and the unveiled. However, Lacoue-Labarthe claims that there is a certain displacement that posited the fictional in a different relation to truth and dissociated it from the problematic of veiling and unveiling. It occurred in the general discourse on aesthetics during the 18th century (against which Hegel's *Aesthetics* can be interpreted as an attack). In this context, aesthetics is the theory of fiction, the locus where the fictional becomes worthy of theory. Its contagious effect threatens the integrity and validity of the theoretical, which should be the discourse of truth (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 80–82; SP2, 150–151). The domain that aesthetics constituted as a theoretical domain had previously been the nontheoretical domain of sensuous discourse and sensuous knowledge – the domain of "veri-similitude", where knowledge is only uncertain and probable, bearing mere resemblance to truth.

In 18th century aesthetics, Lacoue-Labarthe detects the intrusion of the sensuous on the theoretical in Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* and *Aesthetica*. While Baumgarten did not overturn the Platonic and Cartesian hierarchy of the sensuous and the intelligible and was far from prefiguring the Nietzschean overturning of Platonism, a kind of revalorization of the sensuous begun to emerge in his text, a hesitation that awakened Hegel's anxiety. Precisely because it was not a direct overturning that would devalorize the theoretical, it had the power to quietly introduce the sensuous to the domain of the theoretical. Aesthetics requires the faculty of *ars fingendi*, the art of fiction, of figuration and of fictioning, on which Baumgarten's idea of aesthetic truth, verisimilitude, relies. Baumgarten thought that the elegance of thought, aesthetics as an art of thinking beautifully, of perceiving the similar and making good metaphors, which is a natural inclination of humans, is revealed in schema, which Lacoue-Labarthe identifies with the figure. (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 82–83; SP2, 152–153.)

Lacoue-Labarthe says that it would be easy to show that everything in Baumgarten and in the aesthetics of that era remains encompassed by the traditional determination of truth. Fiction is only able to veil the truth, but this capacity entails a duty of heightening it. However, it is precisely this duty that begins to displace truth itself. The idea of heightening truth with fiction requires an artistic practice of philosophy and gives the philosopher a "duty to perfect himself as an artist". At first glance, there is nothing else in this idea than the old stylistic concern for beautiful representation, for speaking or writing well. But there is also a novelty, a threatening affirmation of the poetic, figural and fictional. In this affirmation, aesthetics claims that philosophy can be art, and that truth can be figured. It emphasizes that truth must be veiled, and in this way, perverts the logic of truth as unveiling. It displaces the *aletheic* play itself and prepares "the paradoxical locus of where truth could be *revealed* as undiscoverable, unrepresentable: *un-(re)presentable, undarstellbar*"[17] (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 83–84; SP2, 153–155). The main claim of Lacoue-Labarthe here is that aesthetics as the theory of fiction allowed to understand that the theoretical itself can be dependent of the fictional. That truth can be revealed as unrepresentable means that instead of unveiling, *aletheia*, truth must be veiled, because it cannot be discovered as such, and can only be seen through the sensuous. Lacoue-Labarthe returns to this problem with greater emphasis on Kant's and Heidegger's philosophy in the article *Sublime Truth*, which I inspect later in relation to digital gameplay. However, at this moment it is useful to elaborate the significance of the sublime to Hegelian thought. In *Sublime Truth*, Lacoue-Labarthe says:

> [F]rom the moment when the *Idea* of the beautiful is defined in terms of the figural *adequation* of (spiritual) content to (sensible) form–the Ideal of art–and from the moment when adequation ("reconciliation," as the *Aesthetics* puts it) is posited as the very need of philosophical Spirit, the sublime, that is, the inadequation of form to spiritual content, is inevitably conceived as a moment which precedes the moment of the beautiful or art properly speaking.[18] (ST, 85.)

For Hegel, the relation between the beautiful and the sublime is conceivable only through this adequation between the sensible and the super-sensible, which presupposes an eidetic determination of being[19] and is the explicit truth of such determination. Sublimity is the relation between infinite subject and the world; through it the Idea manifests itself in exteriority. Lacoue-Labarthe stresses that this is not simply a dialectical version, or the Hegelian truth of the sublime, but

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[17]   "…le lieu paradoxal où la vérité pourrait s'*avérer* indévoilable, irreprésentable : *im-(re)présentable, undarstellbar*" (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1975a, 84).

[18]   "La raison en est très simple : du moment où *l'idée* du beau se définit par l'*adéquation*, figurale, du contenu (spirituel) et de la forme (sensible) — c'est l'Idéal de l'art — et du moment où l'adéquation (la « conciliation » comme dit l'*Esthétique*) et posée comme le besoin même du philosopher et de l'Esprit, le sublime, c'est-à-dire l'in-adéquation de la forme au contenu spirituel, est forcément pensé comme un moment qui précède le moment du beau ou de l'art proprement dit." (VS, 116–117.)

[19]   By eidetic determination of being, Lacoue-Labarthe means that the presence of an entity is determined through its visual appearance, which gives form (*eidos*) to its otherwise inconceivable content. It is connected to the conception of knowledge as looking at a mental image.

the truth of the sublime itself. The sublime has always been thought of in terms of beauty, which is interpreted through the eidetic conception of being. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, the formula of Hegel's *Aesthetics* is not only the metaphysical truth of the sublime, but the sublime truth of metaphysics, which constitutes Hegelian dialectics. (VS, 116–118; ST, 86.) If the figural can manifest truth only by being veiled, there is a possibility that truth cannot be presented at all without the figural, or even that there is nothing to present than the figural and the sensuous. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that Hegelian dialectics rests upon the presupposition that the spiritual can manifest itself through the sensible as sublime art.

2.1.5 The Truth of the Sensuous

Hegel could not allow the interpretation of truth as unrepresentable and opposed poetry to philosophy. In this philosophical struggle, everything depends on the role of the woman, which Lacoue-Labarthe exemplifies through the emblematic figure of Venus, rather than Aphrodite. Through this figure, the woman does not represent the sensuous in opposition to the spiritual (or sublated by it under the veil), but the sensuous in its truth, which is the truth of the figure and the fictional. This truth of the sensuous is not verified by the transfiguration of Hegelian logic. Aphrodite as a figure of fiction is not the Aphrodite who is unveiled to exhibit the sensuous desire or animality and the lack of the spiritual, but an Aphrodite who "slips" away (*se « dérobe »*) from the opposition of the sensuous and the spiritual. The logic of veiling and unveiling does not pertain to this Aphrodite because she is a figure figuring only her own plasticity (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 85; SP2, 155–156). If the art of fictioning, in which the aesthetic truth is gathered, is sustained by the Venusian genius (in Baumgarten's terms gift, natural talent and wit, an inborn and natural disposition to imagination and fantasy), then this figure is the tutelary goddess of aesthetics:

> A figure figuring only the figure or its own plasticity and thereby, in fact, the tutelary goddess of aesthetics, if it is true that the *ars fingendi* itself, in which the entire *veritas aesthetica* is gathered, is sustained by what Baumgarten calls the *ingenium venustum* (*ingenium venustum et elegans connatum*), or, as we are compelled to say, the *Venusian* genius, gift, or nature (*phusis, natura, euphuia . . . dispositio naturalis animae totius . . . quacum nascitur*).[20] (SP2, 156.)

However, in his plot against aesthetics and literature, Hegel remained completely silent about Baumgarten. Lacoue-Labarthe calls Hegel's "surreptitious covering up of Aphrodite" a subornation, which is also the subornation of aesthetics, "the buying of its silence". In this way, the ethical scandal of *Lucinde* was an aesthetic scandal, the scandal of the aesthetic, which revealed that there might be nothing

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[20]   "Figure ne figurant que la figure ou sa propre plasticité et par là, en effet, déesse tu-télaire de l'esthétique, s'il est vrai que l'*ars fingendi* lui-même en quoi se rassemble tout entière la *veritas aesthetica* se soutient de ce que Baumgarten appelle l'*ingenium venustum* (*ingenium venustum et elegans connatum*), le génie ou le don, la nature (φύσις, natura, εὐφυΐα... *dispositio naturalis animae totius, quacum nascitur*), on est bien con-traint de dire — vénusiens." (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 85.)

to unveil. Venus shows herself as having nothing to hide, and that it is sufficient for beauty. If shamelessness is defined as a refusal to give oneself to sublation, then in this figure of Venus, aesthetics gives the figural to shamelessness. Lacoue-Labarthe states that a woman who refuses appropriation is always accused of shamelessness, or is more brutally called a whore, a reaction specific to male paranoia and to speculative absolutism. The speculative cannot tolerate the claim that the sensuous could give itself as an end in itself. "The abscission [of the sensuous, JK] is intolerable [to the speculative, JK]. And Venus, no doubt, is the name for the abscission." Everything that shows this abscission, must be veiled, beginning with literature, if it is the case that literature (re)presents itself in the figure of instinctive female nature, such as in the features of *Lucinde*, Lacoue-Labarthe concludes. (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 85–86; SP2, 156–157.)

Lacoue-Labarthe criticizes constantly the discourse that puts rigidity and rectitude before instability and change and its tendency to assign these attribures to male and female roles. Of course, it is not that the sensuous would in fact be feminine, or vice versa – such distinctions as sensible and intelligible, or male and female, are not even credible from the deconstructive perspective. Moreover, it is precisely through these kinds of dichotomies that male and female roles are constructed. It is important to note that Lacoue-Labarthe does not defend the femininity of mimesis as something constitutive to it but criticizes how mimesis has often been denigrated because of the aspects that are also used to depreciate women.

Finally, Lacoue-Labarthe's analysis of Hegel can be understood as a critique of the patriarchal biases of the speculative thought, which shadow the whole opposition between the spiritual and the sensuous, and consequently the idea of truth itself within that discourse. A critique of the interpretation of mimesis as the immodest feminine side of aletheia is revisited most notably in *Typographie*, and in *Le Paradoxe et la mimésis*. Lacoue-Labarthe's examination of the relation between speculative thought and Jena Romanticism shows the wide-ranging consequences of the problematic of *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung*. The idea that truth could be presented as sensuous, and that there would be nothing else, is a departure from the Kantian problematic of self-representation. Before moving on to Nietzsche and Heidegger, I will inspect the place Hölderlin occupies in Lacoue-Labarthe's thought. This explains also why Lacoue-Labarhe thematizes mimesis in terms of theatre.

2.1.6   Tragedy as the Structure of Mimesis

Lacoue-Labarthe claims that dialectical thought has its origin in the philosophical interpretation of tragedy (IM, 41–42; TYP2, 209). In this system, contradiction and its sublation (*Aufhebung*) are the movement of the auto-conception of truth, the subject and absolute thought. By turning the negative into work, the dialectical operation presupposes a theatre: a disclosed space of representation, where the

negative, death in general, can contemplate, reflect and interiorize "itself"[21] (IM, 39–40; TYP2, 208). Lacoue-Labarthe claims that the speculative operation followed the Aristotelian concept of catharsis, the purifying effect of tragedy and ritual. This is based on his investigation of Hölderlin's relationship to speculative philosophy, especially to Hegel and Schelling and their Heideggerian reinterpretation. From Hölderlin's work, Heidegger found an interpretation of truth that he considered unreducible into the speculative-dialectical re-elaboration of the Platonico-Cartesian conception of truth. However, whereas previous interpretations have focused on Hölderlin's poetry, Lacoue-Labarthe examines his disregarded dramaturgical work in order to understand how Hölderlin simultaneously deconstructed the matrix of speculative-dialectic thought, which he himself helped to create, and how he in this deconstruction could not finally find any other way of thinking. (IM, 40–43; TYP2, 209–212.) Hölderlin takes a similar position in relation to Jena Romanticism, interrupting the dialectical subject (Bittner 2016, 781–782). For Lacoue-Labarthe, Hölderlin's fundamental indecisiveness becomes an exemplary of the paradoxical and undecidable character of mimesis and thus he gives the German poet a special status (McKeane 2015, 87).

Lacoue-Labarthe tries to describe an impossible situation where escaping the logic of opposition leads back to it and how its construction deconstitutes it. Escaping from the logic of opposition only reinforces the idea of differentiation. The question of how Hölderlin's break (*démarque*) from the speculative functions simultaneously as its marking (*marque*), or how its constitution as a system is simultaneously its deconstitution, is unanswerable. Lacoue-Labarthe situates Hölderlin at the limit of the speculative system, where he occupies a deconstructive position, exploring the limit without passing over it to alternative language; the term *démarque* means also a marking-down, such as reducing the price of a product (McKeane 2015, 97). Lacoue-Labarthe claims that the whole programme of philosophy until speculative thought rests upon the question of self-identity, out of which philosophy itself has initially unfolded. This is the question of "one differing in itself", a notion which Hölderlin took from Heraclitus (*en diapheron heauto*)[22] and made the motif of his questioning of the essence of beauty and art. Speculative thought sought the end of philosophy by closing the gap that the Kantian question of identity and difference opened. Even though Hölderlin took part in the speculative attempt to overcome this crisis, he represented the impossibility of covering it. Lacoue-Labarthe describes the problem of identity and difference as a wound that constantly opens under the hand that closes it. (IM, 44–45; TYP2, 212–213.)

Lacoue-Labarthe traces the birth of the speculative thought to the question of art in general inherited from Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in terms of *Dichtung* and to the relation between literature and philosophy. The problematic is complex, involving Schiller's and Hegel's aesthetics, the absolute work as a self-

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[21]   Lacoue-Labarthe uses the reflexive form in quotations: "« se » contempler, « se » réfléchir et « s' » intérioriser" (IM, 40).
[22]   See also Derrida 1972, 23; Hölderlin 1990, 67; Plato 1997, 471 [*Symposium* 187a].

engendering subject, literature as its own theory, the debate between the Ancients and the Moderns and the whole German discussion on aesthetics at the end of the eighteenth century. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, this whole problematic is preoccupied and guided by the question of mimesis, regardless of if it is interpreted as imitation or *poïesis*. He takes this as an indication of why speculative idealism became the theory of the Subject, Art and History in its attempt to overcome mimetism. (IM, 45–46; TYP2, 214–215.) Lacoue-Labarthe argues that speculative philosophy was organized upon a theatrical structure because since Aristotle, Oedipus has been the explicit representative hero of philosophy, the incarnation of self-consciousness and of the desire to know. In the contradiction between human freedom and the force of the objective world of nature, a mortal must fall in front of destiny, but freedom manifests itself as a struggle against this inevitable fate. The struggle results in a punishment and expiation of the crime that was committed because of fate. The presentation of the tragic contradiction offers a possibility of resolution to the philosophic contradiction between the subjective and the objective, which in Kantian and Fichtean terminology is the opposition between the "absolute I" and the "absolute Object" (the Not-I), or between liberty and natural necessity. By provoking the punishment through the act of revolt, the hero manifests his own liberty, turning the negative into positive. In other words, the subject manifests its liberty by the loss of it. Lacoue-Labarthe notes that according to Schelling, this pattern of conciliation "operates according to the very logic of the 'identity of identity and difference.'" Hence, sublation is implicated by the Oedipal scenario. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that here everything is prepared for the "absolutization" or "paradoxical infinization" of the subject, which means also the completion of philosophy. (IM, 47–49; TYP2, 215–217.) In its paradoxicality, this logic of conciliation comes close to Lacoue-Labarthean subjectal loss, but its solution through *Aufhebung* restores the subject (Martis 2005, 99).

According to Lacoue-Labarthe, this model constrained every idealistic interpretation of the tragic, including Hölderlin's attempts to create a modern tragedy[23]. While the Oedipal scenario was transposed and translated into the ontological language of metaphysics, it still does not remarkably differ from the Aristotelian construction of the effect of catharsis of fear and pity. Both formulations contain the same question of the capacity for the unbearable (death, contradiction, suffering, injustice), which governs the whole interpretation (IM, 49–50; TYP2, 217–218). Martis emphasizes that this capacity for tolerance or bearability is the link between Schelling's resolving mechanism and Aristotelian catharsis. For both, tragedy was a way to externalize the contradictions intrinsic to the subject by supporting their reconciliation; by purging its self-difference, the subject retains its identity (Martis 2005, 99). In Schelling's formulation it is also a question of how Greek reason could bear the contradiction of its tragedy,

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[23]   These include an uncomplete manuscript, *The Death of Empedocles*, and violent trans-
         lations of Sophocles' *Oedipus* and *Antigone*. Lacoue-Labarthe found Hölderlin's at-
         tempt to deconstruct and rewrite these definitive tragedies into modernity extremely
         important and translated them from German to French (Lacoue-Labarthe 2000;
         McKeane 2015, 88–90).

which turns into the question of how philosophy could purify itself from the tragic contradiction. Lacoue-Labarthe states that tragedy is then the mechanism of (re)presentation and the structure of mimesis because mimesis enables the unbearable to be faced by turning it into a spectacle. It is connected to Aristotelian catharsis, in which the pleasure comes from the purifying effect of the horrible – purging the spirit from fear, madness and pity. In the relation between speculative philosophy and theatrical structure, Lacoue-Labarthe sees an echo of the ancient ritual and sacrifice, of which the Aristotelian catharsis is a justification, or even a logical verification. (IM, 50–51; TYP2, 218–219.) I return to the notions of ritual and sacrifice in section 4.1.1 in relation to mimetic desire.

Kant, Jena Romanticism, Hegel and Hölderlin are part of the layers through which the notions of the subject and mimesis are carried into Lacoue-Labarthe's writing. Romanticism was one of the reactions to Kant's philosophy, but also inseparable from Hegel and Hölderlin (Bittner 2016). However, these threads of German thought do not represent the basis of Lacoue-Labarthe's thought as such but alongside his readings of Nietzsche and Heidegger, which occupy a distinct place in his texts.

2.2   The Subject of Writing

In this chapter, I focus on Lacoue-Labarthe's texts that revolve around the question of the subject of philosophy, the writing subject. This question is pursued in the collection of essays *Le sujet de la philosophie : Typographies 1*. This work focuses on the question of philosophical writing, in which the writing subject cannot be neither an objective no-one of scientific discourse, nor an expression of unitary and stable identity of the writer's proper persona. Here the question of style is foregrounded, as it is the style of writing that determines its subject and simultaneously betrays its instability. An important theme, rising from the Romantic idea of the literary accomplishment of philosophy, is the relation between philosophy and poetry (or truth and fiction), and the blurring of the boundaries between the two. The question of mimesis is also pursued here as it is linked closely to the problematic of the subject, though most of these texts take theoretical writing as their starting point, rather than art.

Even though self-formation through and as art is not always in the foreground of these texts, reading them is indispensable for understanding how Lacoue-Labarthe deconstructs the concept of the subject. When the notion of writing is extended to a wider sphere of meaning-making in general, it is possible to connect these texts to the problematic of the relation between the self and art in a more general level. Moreover, if we understand the self as a story that a person tells her- or himself, it follows that the subject of writing refers also to autobiography in general, regardless of the way and to who it is performed or told. Lacoue-Labarthe plays with the double genitive of the "subject of writing" (*le sujet de l'écriture*), which can refer both to the one who writes and to that which is written (SP, 119–222; SP2, 139–141). In this way, writing is always self-

production: "… the subject that writes itself: that writes about the subject, that is written about, that is written-in short, the subject that is one, 'one' only insofar as it is in some way or other inscribed."[24] (SP2, 141.) The subject both writes and is written: this corresponds to the problematic status of self-presentation, in which the presented self is always a representation of the "original" agent of that presentation, which cannot refer to itself without the use of a representation of itself: a mask, role, figure, i.e. as a product of mimesis.

At this point it will become inevitable to explore the notion of writing in greater detail. When Lacoue-Labarthe employs the term, it carries the sense that Jacques Derrida has given it with the notion of *écriture*. We can translate this term literally as writing, as long as we remember that it does not refer only to "writing" in the sense of inscribing words on paper or to a text editing program, but to a process of giving meaning that is destabilized to the delays and deferrals intrinsic to the use of language. McKeane (2015, 58–60) distinguishes two orientations of *écriture* emerging from Lacoue-Labarthe's critique of Plato. The first is *écriture* as a synonym for literature, opposed to philosophy, as Plato defines it in *The Republic*. To simply praise literature against philosophy would retain the Platonic order and only invert the hierarchy between the two, whereas deconstructive interpretation of *écriture* emphasizes that the heterogeneity and deferral of meaning can work through all kinds of texts, including both poetical and theoretical ones. The second orientation sees writing as a supplement to voice and memory, and condemns it as a degradation of natural memory, a dead letter that is susceptible to misinterpretations. In the light of these interpretations, Plato excluded literature and writing from the state. Derrida's understanding of writing as *écriture* emphasizes that in both cases, language escapes our control, whether spoken or written, fictional or theoretical.

In *De la grammatologie*, Derrida criticized Western thought for privileging human consciousness as the proper locus of meaning, which was supposed to be superior to representative writing. Derrida's notion of writing (*écriture*) comprehends not only inscription, but everything that makes inscription possible, all actions of giving meaning in general (Derrida 1967a, 18–20). Western thought had the tendency to debase writing as delayed, artificial and exterior, whereas speech was considered immediate and present and would guarantee the self-presence of the subject. The existence of human consciousness would carry within itself a writing of the divine law, whereas the external and sensible writing is condemned as a finite technique that pertains to the urges of the body in opposition to the conscience of the soul (Derrida 1967a, 26–27, 30). Writing is not merely a technique of inscription, but the very condition of human existence. Derrida writes "*L'être écrit*", which denotes written being, but can also be read as being written (Derrida 1967a, 31). Derrida's conception of writing concerns all acts of enunciation and giving meaning. Most urgently, it touches upon the meaning of being, to which Lacoue-Labarthe's subject of writing refers. Being as a subject is written through different acts, which can include traditional writing,

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24   "… sujet qui s'écrit : qui écrit sur lui, dont on écrit, qui est écrit — bref, qui n'est tel, ou « tel », qu'à être d'une manière ou d'une autre *inscrit*" (SP, 221).

but also simply thought itself. Lacoue-Labarthe's attention is focused towards aesthetic acts, and the production and appreciation of art. The subject gives meaning to its own existence through everyday acts, which can often be inconspicuous, such as manners and styles. In fact, the style of writing can be more crucial to the subject than what is written.

2.2.1 The Text Has No Shores

Whereas Lacoue-Labarthe's critique of German Idealism and Romanticism deconstructed the opposition between philosophy and literature, his readings of Nietzsche and Heidegger question the subject of philosophical and literary texts. Here the authority of the author becomes contested, and while the examples are still located at the border between philosophical and poetic writing, it becomes increasingly evident that we are dealing with the subject of all thought and enunciation, which is the very self that constitutes an experience of personality in general.

Lacoue-Labarthe's starting point is the doubt against the possibility of a pure saying and transparent discourse, within the limits of textual presentation. Philosophical discourse has always had to rely on textual strategies that it considers improper, such as dialogue. The fact that thought must be presented textually in order to be communicated in the first place, introduces an instability in the attempt to install truth. This has been recognized especially after Nietzsche, who Lacoue-Labarthe takes as a focal point of his investigation, with the support of Heidegger and Derrida. The main point of *Le sujet de la philosophie* is to examine the borders of philosophy and literature, and to show how mimesis weakens them and deprives from the subject of philosophy the status of a spokesperson of truth.

According to Lacoue-Labarthe, the problematic of the concept of subject means to deconstruct the area of greatest resistance, which is the philosophical discourse itself, constantly preoccupated towards its own subject. Even the discourses that announce the dissolution of the subject produce within them its reinforcement. In the same way as myths, the mechanism of exemplarity and the fascination with biography continue to function, even where they were thought to be inoperative (SP, 222–225; SP2, 141–144).

Even though with these texts Lacoue-Labarthe moves within the problem of the textual presentation of philosophy, the problem of the subject arises here. This is not only a problem for philosophy and theoretical thought, but for personal identity in general because it touches upon the notion of self-consciousness, theorization upon one's own self and its identity. A clue for linking the subject of philosophy and writing to a more mundane everyday experience of being a self-conscious person that can be distinguished from all others is to think self-identity through writing. "I" am a story, a fiction and a theory of myself, which is inescapably a textual presentation. Whatever name we will give to this, i.e., an autobiography, performance, or role, the situation is analogous to the problem of the philosophical presentation of thought: if the use

of language constitutes a lack and a difference, how can the presented being coincide with the experienced self?

In regard to Nietzsche, Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of literature is focused on *fiction* [25]. He questions how far one can go with a critique of metaphysics that relies on a distinction that metaphysics itself uses against the discourses it cannot master, i.e. literature and fiction. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that the discourse of metaphysics is not different from that of literature. This question means the completion of metaphysics; it cannot be asked from outside of metaphysics because this would entail that there is an outside that could be accessed, revealed and exposed in a properly metaphysical presentation. Thus, the question cannot be unfolded and brought to the end either because to consider literature as ideology would lead to a dialectical operation. Lacoue-Labarthe states that not only is this question impossible to deal with, but it is even impossible to ask if it can be legitimately posed. Because Lacoue-Labarthe wants to evade the transcendental types of questioning that concern the possibility of this enterprise, he "can only become involved in it to see what it involves" (SP, 9–12; SP2, 1–3). This demonstrates Lacoue-Labarthe's practice in general, which means always engaging mimesis without attempting to control or define it. This means that Lacoue-Labarthe actively withdraws "himself" from the stage of the text and accepts the instability introduced by mimesis. In practice, this can be seen in his meticulous readings of philosophical texts, in which it is not always easy to distinguish Lacoue-Labarthe's message from the texts he deconstructs. He often lets others speak through his voice than proposes his own statements.

In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche says that Parmenides formulated the inaugural problem of philosophy by stating that only what is can be thought and that there is no thought for that which is not: "ce qui est — est pensable ou, plus exactement, on ne pense que ce qui est et il n'y a pas de pensée de ce qui n'est pas." From Parmenides to Hegel, all philosophy has been a commentary of this proposition. Lacoue-Labarthe interprets Nietzsche's conception of history as follows: Parmenides desired and affirmed the identity of being and thought, and all subsequent philosophy is the pursuit of this desire. It is a history of lacking, withdrawal, repetition and alterity, because from the beginning there is a difference that startles this identity. In Hegel's philosophy, when history completes itself in the Absolute Knowledge, the originary difference ceases and is subordinated to absolute identity. But Nietzsche pursues an alterity that is not dialectical: he rejects the notions of origin and end, and the possibility for a consciousness of consciousness (the Hegelian "we"). The annulment of identity is not a reversal or Hegelian *Aufhebung*, and the concept of fiction is not included in the discourse of truth because it escapes conceptuality itself. (SP, 12–14; SP2,

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[25] Alison Ross (2007, 114) distinguishes two uses of fiction in Lacoue-Labarthe: a generic and a specific sense. In the former, fiction encompasses all meaning, rendering also truth a fiction. The latter sense is Nietzschean, where fiction works against truth. We should also keep in mind that Lacoue-Labarthe uses the term "fiction" separately from "fictioning", which refers to process of creating identities (see McKeane 2015, 45–46; 62).

3–4.) Lacoue-Labarthe focuses on the last remark, the concept of fiction, which touches on the question of literature.

The question concerning fiction is a question of its truth. A metaphysical question: is it real, or is it something that is not? With Nietzsche, we are at the opposite of Parmenides: that which can be thought is fictive and thus *not* real. Being and thought in their metaphysical designation are a pure fiction, and the metaphysical discourse itself is not the discourse of truth, but of fiction. But neither fiction can affirm itself without a reference to truth. In his constant invocation of fiction, Nietzsche cannot escape this, Lacoue-Labarthe says. According to the common interpretation, Nietzsche ultimately remains within the Platonic interruption between appearance and reality. By this, Lacoue-Labarthe means that Nietzsche remained within the Platonic economy of truth and fiction because the reversal of Platonism did not efface the binary structure. Lacoue-Labarthe seeks in Nietzsche's *The Twilight of the Idols* a possibility to escape the naive anti-Platonism that Nietzsche has been accused of. In this interpretation, Nietzsche does not refer with fiction to the opposition between appearance and reality but goes beyond it and thinks of the world as a fable. (SP, 14–16; SP2, 4–5.) Lacoue-Labarthe's readings of Nietzsche are aimed towards this kind of deconstruction of the Platonic structure, which evades the economy of truth and fiction that would result from simply reversing Platonism.

Lacoue-Labarthe's point is that if the world is a fable, then *being* itself, history and reason must be forgotten. Language loses its relation to truth and creation is abolished: the discourse that constituted being and the world was already a fable. In other words, the discourse of reason is nothing else than the very discourse of *mythos* (*fabula*) against which reason has always constituted itself. This corresponds to the opposition between reality and appearance, i.e. between truth and fiction. Lacoue-Labarthe quotes Heidegger, who recognized that *mythos* was destroyed by *logos* in modern rationality, but for the Greeks (for Parmenides, more accurately) they did not oppose each other; the religious is destroyed only by God's withdrawal and never by logic and reason. (SP, 17–18; SP2, 6–7.)

According to Lacoue-Labarthe, Heidegger's belief to pre-Platonic proper origin and his accusation towards historians and philologists carries a Nietzschean resonance. But Nietzsche's thought belongs to the metaphysics of presence and tries to make *logos* and *mythos* identical in a different way than Heidegger. For Nietzsche, *logos* is the truth of *mythos* in a dialectical sense, but both belong to the same fable. Therefore, the world, and what is said or thought of it, are all fiction, and the metaphysical becoming-*logos* of the world (in the sense of Hegelian logic) is in fact a becoming-*myth*. This means that the history of the reconstitution of truth is, in fact, the history of its corruption. Nietzsche refused to promote the appearance of truth to the level of epiphanic pure appearing; true thought creates an appearance as its necessary guarantee, but the appearance ceaselessly abolishes itself. Although the question of truth must henceforth be asked in a different manner, this does not mean that there would be any radical change. The thought has never left its ground, but the ground itself

has become lacking. Lacoue-Labarthe says that only equality reigns, as a blinding whiteness: "il règne une égale, éblouissante blancheur que d'ailleurs les yeux ne supportent pas." When the truth of a saying is not opposed to fiction, truth is no longer transcendent and something that would be outside of the saying and could function as its origin. Lacoue-Labarthe's fable is an eternal saying that has no beginning or end and evades the metaphysical error of desiring an origin. (SP, 18–22; SP2, 7–9.)

This forms the basis for Lacoue-Labarthe to investigate the relation between philosophy and literature, in which literature is called fiction, myth or writing. He distinguishes two tasks: to turn against metaphysics with literature, against which metaphysics itself is designated and constitutes itself, and to displace the separation of literature and philosophy. Here we must be careful to understand that this is not a reversal because the conception of literature is different from literature as the opposite of philosophy. Lacoue-Labarthe's point is not to say that all truth is fiction from the viewpoint that distinguishes truth and fiction, but to define fiction in a way that is not opposed to truth. Again, the outside of text does not exist, there is no writing that could determine the truth of writing from the outside. It cannot judge itself in terms of verity and falsity. While this viewpoint displaces truth in the traditional sense, it also does not determine fiction as un-truth. John McKeane (2015, 63–64) elaborates that Lacoue-Labarthe's strategy involves inverting hierarchies, which is necessary to depart from the perspective of metaphysics. However, the process of reversal must be continued endlessly because every reversal constitutes a new hierarchy, which must be again reversed. This results in a spiralling movement, in which a secure hold cannot be established.

Lacoue-Labarthe locates in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* a break concerning Nietzsche's thinking, which separates post-Hegelian metaphysical language from the language of deconstruction. It is a suspicion towards philosophical text as a repression of art, though Lacoue-Labarthe considers it too superficial for commentary. What he wishes to show is that everything comes down to the desire of presence, to the belief in origins and to the will to truth, which necessarily have their exposition in a narrative, a text. (SP, 22–25; SP2, 9–11.)

The text must be repeated, even though it contains the risk of succumbing to the same dialectical master-slave relation between philosophy and literature that should be exceeded. But even though the mastery of reason cannot be escaped, because even literature is nothing outside it, Lacoue-Labarthe thinks that there is an obscure, uncontrollable resistance occurring in the act of writing. He describes it as a fatigue, confusion in thought, a paralyzed experience or failure of experience, which flees the consciousness. In writing, the experience itself is undone and the radical alterity of force reveals itself. (SP, 25–27; SP2, 11–12.)

One cannot come to the text, because we are already in there; the text has no shores and thus one can only come ashore where he already has walked before. This is a return to an outside, which is already our inside, a place where outside

and inside are no longer separable and where we sense our own intimacy; a blinding alterity always beyond ourselves. Lacoue-Labarthe names this a deficiency to which we are destined: death. Finally, the question is whether we can anymore believe what is in books, not being disappointed by the lie, and stop being pious (SP, 27–28; SP2, 12–13). At the basis of Lacoue-Labarthe's analyses is acknowledgement of the fictional nature of language. As Derrida has said, there is no outside-text[26], and Lacoue-Labarthe too confirms that the text has no shores. When we attempt to use language or to think of the world, we are always already approaching it from a text. When Lacoue-Labarthe begins to examine the subject, it is clear that this restraint is still at play and that the subject cannot come to itself from the outside but is already determined by an intrinsic alterity.

2.2.2   Nietzsche's Conception of Language

The subject comes into being by enunciating its identity, by presenting itself to itself and to others. From the outset, the self is a simulation, a duplication that is inevitable caused by representation. The subject of enunciation emerges as style, as the aesthetic dimension of language. In other words, the subject presents itself through art. Rhetoric is an important theme in Lacoue-Labarthe's texts because rhetorical writing aims to persuade the reader to agree with its message. From Nietzsche, Lacoue-Labarte finds the claim that all language, including that of philosophy, aims to persuade instead of simply revealing truth. This of course weakens the differentiation between philosophical and fictional texts, but rhetoric guides us to a more interesting observation: that the use of language is artistic. Nietzsche's conception of rhetoric is organized around the differentiation between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, but Lacoue-Labarthe aims to show that when Nietzsche defines rhetoric and language through rhythm, the distinction does not hold.

In turning myth against philosophy – the myth against which philosophy has attempted to erect itself – Nietzsche had to define language as originally figurative. This means that Nietzsche defined language as always being affected by rhetoric, style, and aesthetic factors, which the scientific use of language usually attempts to eliminate in favour of a logical and unambiguous presentation. Lacoue-Labarthe notes that Nietzsche ultimately abandoned his thoughts about rhetoric, leaving them as a detour. Nietzsche's focus on rhetoric was initially an accident, and in addition to not completing it, he did not even write anything publishable about it. In this almost unnoticeable and "subterranean" breaking up of Nietzsche's work, Lacoue-Labarthe recognizes a *worklessness* or *inoperativeness*. [27] (SP, 33–40; SP2, 14–18.) This should be understood as a compliment of Nietzsche, even though the inoperativeness seems to have occurred unintentionally. This means that his work did not

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[26]   "Il n'ya pas de hors-texte" (Derrida 1967a, 227). Heidegger also famously declared that "Language is the house of being [Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins]" (Heidegger 1976, 313; 1998, 239).

[27]   The term is also employed by Jean-Luc Nancy, most notably in *La communauté dé-soeuvrée* (Nancy 1999).

complete itself as a "work", as a fixed structure, but was left in an ambiguous state of becoming and withdrawing. This is Lacoue-Labarthe's usual strategy of reading: he often affirms what his subjects argue rather than criticize it, but simultaneously brings forth subtle undertones and inconspicuous trains of thought that have perhaps been unnoticeable for the writers. Then, without really claiming anything contrary to the message of the texts, he arrives at new conclusions through reading them. It is often, as is the case with Nietzsche here, failure and abandonment of philosophical projects that stir up Lacoue-Labarthe's interest.

Nietzsche understood rhetoric as something that reveals the essence of language, but at the same time as only a certain usage of language. Therefore, to access the concept of rhetoric would require recasting the whole analysis of language. Nietzsche thought that speech was essential to the Greeks and to their language; even when degraded to writing, the oratory skill had maintained its power. The Greeks had a playful relation to language as art because the Greek language was naturally rhetorical and thus itself an art. Their relation to language was special because of the rhetoric, which was Greek art *par excellence*, even more than poetry, because it revealed the essence of language. Therefore, language itself, determined rhetorically, became the exemplar of art. (SP, 42–46; SP2, 19–22.) Lacoue-Labarthe (SP, 41; SP2, 18) notes that Nietzsche derived his conception of rhetoric from the Romantic tradition, as well as his understanding of Greek tragedy and the theory of language.

But here Lacoue-Labarthe recognizes a circle: if rhetoric as art (i.e. the language of the ancient Greeks) reveals the essence of language and determines language itself as art, then the concept of rhetoric becomes generalized and loses its meaning because it should be anterior to itself. Nietzsche explains the rhetorical predetermination of language with the unconscious: the artistic means are already in the language in the form of an unconscious art, of which the conscious rhetorical art is a further development. Rhetoric as an origin of language is unthinkable because it means that language is a product of unconscious artistic instinct. Nietzsche adopts from the Aristotelian definition of rhetoric the concepts of persuasion and *dynamis*, which he coins in the notion of persuasive force (*Kraft*). Consequently, rhetoric as the essence of language means that language is not originally created for speaking the truth, but for persuading others to accept a copy of one's sensations. Language is disconnected from the thing itself because it is a transposition of a copy of a sensation, which is only a nerve stimulus and its external presentation through an image, represented by a "sound-image". These gaps between language and the thing itself are passages between completely heterogeneous spheres, which means that language must force itself over the gap by identifying the non-identical. Thus, language's relation to things is subjective and posited by imitation. Where the thing itself disappears in language, a mark substitutes it as a word-figure or a trope. This means that language is originally metaphorical and that the gap of representation must be traversed by artistic means because metaphor is the artistic (mimetic) force itself. (SP, 46–50; SP2, 22–24.) This understanding of language as being cut

off from things as they are is of course well known today, especially after Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of the arbitrariness of the relation between the signifier and the signified, and more radically after Derrida's critique of signification as a stabilized structure. However, Derrida's views are also inspired by Nietzsche, and we must understand Lacoue-Labarthe through both thinkers.

Nietzsche detached language from the thing in itself, i.e. from the reality of the world and of inner sensations. It bears no relation to truth but is aimed towards persuading others to accept a copy of one's sensations. First, there are nerve stimuli, which are experienced as sensations. These are presented as images, which in turn are represented by sound-images communicated to others. But these transitions happen between areas that are completely disconnected, and language must force itself over them. The identity between sensations, mental images, and language is created arbitrarily through subjective imagination. When the linguistic harmony of signs makes language function, it substitutes the thing in itself.

Lacoue-Labarthe says that this radicalization and reduction of Kant to language remains in the sphere of the metaphysics of presence, subjectivity, and the will. Moreover, Nietzsche's usage of the concept of metaphor is itself metaphorical and runs the risk of infinite regression. The solution to this problem is an idea of an originary power, which is the art of dissimulation (*Verstellung*), a perversion of representation (*Vorstellung*). (For Lacoue-Labarthe, representation always entails dissimulation.) In the substitutive and dissimulative character of language, human beings compensate their weakness and finitude by forgetting; the force of illusion deceives itself by taking itself as a force of truth. Thus, the unconscious artistic instinct is an aesthetic response to the breakdown of meaning. (SP, 50–52; SP2, 25.) By its dissimulative nature, language allows humans to forget the void of meaning and the indifference of nature. It is a force of illusion that deceives even itself to be the force of truth, convincing us that there is a force of truth to begin with. The unconscious artistic instinct is in fact the forgetting of the abyss of meaning.

The conception of rhetoric breaks Nietzsche's previous theory of language because the inclusion of rhetoric eliminates music from language, which is not properly linguistic. Music provides the power of expression for language, its "sonorous essence" and accentuation. Rhetoric is not equivalent to music but can correspond in the signified to what the musical counterparts represent in the order of the signifier. However, this is thwarted by the ambiguity of the concepts Nietzsche used to determine music. This concerns especially the term symbol and its German equivalents, which are connected to metaphor, resemblance, image, figure or copy, and finally to verisimilitude. The linguistic symbol, the concept, is a reduction of force and feeling that can be communicated only in sound and gesture. Mimicry expresses the will in rhythm, which is a dynamism contrary to the harmony of linguistics. Lacoue-Labarthe interprets Nietzsche's work on tragedy as a justification of an original lyricism against a subordination of music to language. (SP 55–59; SP2, 27–30.) Nietzsche supports a Schopenhauerian view, according to which music differs from other arts because it does not copy mere

phenomena but is an immediate copy of the will itself. His conception of music rests on an ambiguity that causes difficulties with substituting music with rhetoric as the essence of language.

Lacoue-Labarthe explains Nietzsche's passage through rhetoric as a reduction of the ambiguity concerning music and symbolism. While Nietzsche does not abandon the musical aspect of language, the attempt to reconcile rhetoric and music reduces the musical aspect to rhythm, to the detriment of melody and harmony. But Nietzsche thought that rhythm is the Apollonian, plastic and almost visible side of music, a formative power whose purpose is the representation of Apollonian states. On the contrary, tone, melody and harmony comprise the Dionysian essence of music. When Nietzsche defines language through rhetoric, rhythm becomes its inexplicable essence that remains between the plastic domain of appearances and the musical domain of presence. (SP, 59–61; SP2, 30–31.)

Because rhetoric foregrounds language, it forces us to think of art on the basis of language and transforms both at the same time. Rhetoric breaks apart the distinction between Dionysian and Apollonian and reverses the order of the structure of transposition; Dionysus was the father who died by engendering his son Apollo, but now the son comes before the father – Apollo gives birth to Dionysus, which means that Dionysus has become Apollo (SP, 61–64; SP2, 31–33). In other words: because music leads to images, Dionysus engenders Apollo. It has led to his displacement, but Dionysus was resuscitated in modernity.

Rhetoric is thus in Lacoue-Labarthe's terms a monstrosity or an aberration, where language is born unnaturally: the son comes before the father. It is more than a reversal, because in this order, the origin is not originary. Language precedes that of which it is a representation and so truth as such cannot never be revealed. Dionysus dies in rhetoric, but it is a death without disappearance, where "…the 'dead' god continues to inhabit the language that has 'killed' him…"[28] (SP2, 33). Because myth is rhetorical, philosophy cannot imagine a myth that is prior to itself. This also means that it is impossible to turn against philosophy from the outside, from any originary musicality or myth. A return to myth is only a return to allegory, which is a philosophical interpretation of myths. Myth is rhetorical and is thus caught in language which does not speak truth but believes itself to do so (SP, 66; SP2, 34). Lacoue-Labarthe notes that this is not directly readable in the Nietzschean text because rhetoric destroys the possibility of speaking its language. Yet he recognizes, precisely through this, that rhetoric led Nietzsche to a point where it contaminated everything and made it impossible to turn against philosophy from the outside.

The Nietzschean interpretation of the musical essence of language is not explored further by Lacoue-Labarthe within this context, though it returns in *L'écho du sujet*, in which musical signification as rhythm is explained in greater detail. I will explore this theme in section 4.3, but for now, I follow Lacoue-Labarthe's investigation of the subject of writing in regard to Nietzsche and Heidegger.

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[28]   "…le dieu « mort » continue d'habiter le langage qui l'a fait « mourir »…" (SP, 64–65).

2.2.3   The Apocryphal and Dissimilated Author

The first two essays of *Le sujet de la philosophie*, *La fable* and *Le détour* are followed by *Nietzsche Apocryphe*, which shifts the focus to Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche. McKeane (2015, 65) remarks that this text was first named *La Dissimulation* when Lacoue-Labarthe presented it at a conference. He interprets the act of renaming as an emphasis on Zarathustra as a figure of the prophet-philosopher, through which Nietzsche rehabilitated the term apocryphal, which was denigrated by Plato. The act of creating a fictional character as the spokesperson of a text not only *dissimulates* the original author, but *dissimilates* it, underlying that the original author is already apocryphal (McKeane 2015, 68). Nietzsche challenges the question of the border between philosophical and literary, which we are still constrained to ask, says Lacoue-Labarthe. We also inevitably face the Heideggerian answer, according to which Nietzsche is the last philosopher and the conclusion of metaphysics (SP, 78; SP2, 37–38).

Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche is unavoidable because Heidegger was the only one who took Nietzsche seriously and showed that the question of overcoming philosophy can be philosophical only as a question. But to repeat the Heideggerian reading requires a complex strategy in which Heideggerian repetition itself is repeated and separated from itself and brought back to intersect with itself. Lacoue-Labarthe calls this strategy deconstruction, whose terrain is not the concepts, but the text of philosophy, in which the philosophical discourse resists completion. It is Nietzsche's text itself that has led to the emergence of the question of the text. The position to read Nietzsche is thus very different from Heidegger, because Heidegger deliberately refused to take into account Nietzsche's text, form or style. (SP, 78–81; SP2, 38–39.) Lacoue-Labarthe focuses on this refusal to consider the literary aspect of Nietzsche's writing.

Heidegger made a difference between thoughtful poetry (*denkerisch Dichterwerk*) and poetic (*dichterisch*) philosophy: a work of poetry can be thoughtful, but that does not make it philosophy – on the contrary, all philosophy is in itself poetic, but that does not make it a work of art. All philosophy is "thoughtful-poetic" (*denkerisch-dichterisch*) and thus does not conform to the distinction between the theoretical and poetical. Philosophical *Darstellung* is poetic (or *poïetic*), which refers especially to *dichterisch*, and must be distinguished from poetical (*poetisch*). (SP, 82–84; SP2, 40–41.) In *The Origin of Work of Art*, Heidegger followed a Platonic connection between artwork and truth. Nietzsche's anti-Platonism was carried out at the limit of Platonic aesthetics, to which Heidegger contrasted his view on the reciprocality of *aletheia* and the artwork, determined in terms of *Dichtung* and *poïesis* as the basis of language itself. (SP, 85–87; SP2, 42–44.) For this operation, Heidegger had to justify the dissymmetry between *Dichtung* and the philosophical through a reading of Hölderlin. This also entailed the exclusion of all Nietzsche's writings, except *The Will to Power* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* which prefigures it. The incompletion of Nietzsche's great work, *The Will to Power*, keeps it on the threshold of *Dichtung*. However, the most important requisition for Heidegger's operation is that the

question of art in its modern metaphysical determination becomes questioned. Here, Lacoue-Labarthe presents a compressed and rudimentary formulation of what the article *Typographie* will explicate in greater detail.

The metaphysical or philosophical determination of art refers to "art of aesthetics", which emerges when the art of Greece and great philosophy come to an end, concurrently to Platonism, where the mythical era is no longer understood properly. This fall of *muthos* must be understood according to a conception of *muthos* that is not opposed to *logos*, but belongs to a pre-Platonic exteriority, which only Hölderlin accessed, while Nietzsche could not go beyond the post-Kantian culmination of metaphysics. Art, thought within the horizon of Platonism, is what keeps metaphysics together. Within the horizon of Platonism, even if against it, this determination of art through the categories of the physiological, creativity, productivity, lived experience, sensibility, energy, desire, and the Dionysian, does not consist of what is essential. For Heidegger, it was the relation between Being and humanity, *aletheia* and language, to which *Dichtung* and myth (*Sage*) point. To dismiss the poetic and subordinate *poïesis* to *techne* means losing this connection. (SP, 89–91; SP2, 45.)

Lacoue-Labarthe notes how Heidegger's commentary of Plato and Nietzsche circulates and traverses textually the question of philosophical text in general. In the deconstructive attempt to follow the trace of the question of the text in Nietzsche's text, the problem concerns detaching *Dichtung* from textuality. Either Heidegger was right that Nietzsche's writing is philosophy, or he did not see how radically *Zarathustra* departed from philosophy because he did not recognize that writing and fictioning are contained by the concept of *Dichtung*. A third possibility is that *Zarathustra* is not the privileged site of Nietzsche's writing, and Nietzschean text is no more privileged than any other philosophical text. Lacoue-Labarthe says that everything gathers to: "…not, Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra? but, What is Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*?"[29] (SP, 91–93; SP2, 46–47.)

Lacoue-Labarthe traces Nietzsche's opposition between the Apollonian and the Dionysian to Jena Romanticism, of which Heidegger remains silent. He criticizes Heidegger for emphasizing the relation that the notion of will to power has to Hegel and Schelling, without considering the differences between the two, assimilating Schelling into Hegelian thought. The Romantics utilized the concept of *Dichtung*, which Hegel tried to sever from speculative thought. The Romantic ideal of returning to myth as a fulfilment of philosophy takes place through *Dichtung* (this was examined in *L'absolu littéraire*). The idea of new mythology transforms *Dicthung* into a narrative, a grand philosophical story or a speculative epos, which competes with the idea of a philosophical novel, of which *Lucinde* is an example. Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* carried out this philosophico-literary programme of Romanticism, the motif of a new mythology and a philosophical epic, but without the speculative discipline. (SP, 93–99; SP2, 47–51.)

While the Romantics were haunted by the Platonic model of dialogue, with Nietzsche, the relation is more complex. Nietzsche's resentment of Plato's texts

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29   "…non pas : qui est le Zarathoustra de Nietzsche ? ; mais : le Zarathoustra de Nietzsche, qu'est-ce que c'est ?" (SP, 93.)

was organized around the differentiation between literature intended to be read (*Leselitteratur*) and literature that is meant to be read aloud (*Sprachlitteratur*), of which Plato's novelistic style represents the former. But the problem is that the figure of "Plato" that appears in Nietzsche's text is ambiguous. Moreover, the distinction between read and spoken literature begins to blur when the notion of artistic prose (*Kunstprosa*) arises. By this term, Nietzsche referred to fundamentally rhythmic writing, which gains its rhythm not from the conventional metrics of poetry, but from a *meter in itself*, which is an intrinsic quality of spoken discourse[30]. This notion is gained from Aristotle, who described it as a non-genre, in which language alone carries out mimesis. Lacoue-Labarthe recognizes this as the locus of the foundation and ruin of the modern conception of literature. Nietzsche thought that by practicing this style that occurs between prose and poetry, Plato wrote against his own restrictions concerning poetic genres and carried *Dicthung* to its culmination (SP, 100–104; SP2, 51–53.)

Lacoue-Labarthe finally states that everything in the relation between Nietzsche and Plato remains on the level of nominal analogy – the relevant point is that the Platonic model consists of the dissimulation of the author as a character, as he does not speak in his own name in the dialogues. Lacoue-Labarthe uses the word *dissimulation* to remind us that Plato condemned the apocryphal author when he proposed a likeness (*homoïosis*) between "the speaking subject and the subject of speech" (*sujet de l'énonciation et le sujet de l'énoncê*). While this view caused Plato to denigrate mimesis, for Nietzsche it was the criterion for the decline of philosophical writing: in Plato the grand philosophical style is weakened, but in the Aristotelian mode of writing, where the author writes in his own name, it is completely lost, and the "scientific" style of philosophy is born. Platonic presentation (*Darstellung*) consists of a dissimulation of the author, where Plato speaks through the mask of Socrates. If the problematic of presentation assumes the determination of truth as likeness and adequation (*homoïosis*), then Heidegger's attempt to find a break that intervenes Plato's interpretation of truth forced him to reduce the status of *Darstellung* to a stylistic question. (SP, 105–107; SP2, 54–55.)

If withdrawal (*le retrait*) and dissimilarity (*la dissemblance*), to which Lacoue-Labarthe refers with *dissimilation*, are at play in textual dissimulation – if truth as *aletheia* and truth as *homoïosis* are intertwined, and if '"truth itself"' starts to unwind, then Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, in which he spoke in his own name, causes confusion. Nietzsche declared to have published the book to prevent becoming sanctified, wishing rather to be a buffoon. Lacoue-Labarthe thinks that the purpose of this gesture was to "never finish exhausting the inexhaustible content, the inexhaustible lack of content of what we still call, so naïvely, the 'subject of writing.'"[31] When dissimulation is engaged, it never ends. It is called madness (which Lacoue-Labarthe addresses in greater detail in *Typographie*), even when it

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30   As the earlier remark about the musicality of language, this notion meter in itself is revisited in section 4.3.

31   "… n'en plus finir d'épuiser l'inépuisable contenu, l'inépuisable absence de contenu de ce que nous appelons encore, si naïvement, le « sujet de l'écriture »" (SP, 108).

is simulated, and no writer has been unaware of it. (SP, 107–108; SP2, 56.) The dissimulative character of language dissimilates the subject of enunciation and deprives it of authorial authenticity. This is an ineluctable condition of any act of self-identification, which Nietzsche's gesture of writing through a figure celebrated, in opposition to Plato's attempt to secure the speaking subject.

2.2.4 *É-loignement*: (De)constitution of the Subject

Before moving on to the theme of onto-typology, I investigate one text in *Le sujet de la philosophie*. In *Obliteration*, Lacoue-Labarthe pursues the relation between thought and philosophy through Heidegger's relation to Hegel and Nietzsche. In this text, the notion of the loss of the subject is explicitly stated. The focus is on Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, which was published in four volumes. These retrospective and systematic syntheses of Heidegger's earlier writings on Nietzsche were untimely because a certain interpretation of Nietzsche had already been established through Heidegger's previous writings (SP, 113–116; SP2, 57–59). Lacoue-Labarthe uses the term obliteration (erasure of the letter) to describe Heidegger's strategy of thought that portrays a deep suspicion against writing; the becoming-letter of thought loses the unthinkable essence of being. In Lacoue-Labarthe's view, even though writing entails such forgetting, there is no other way to give meaning.

Lacoue-Labarthe argues that to accuse Heidegger for not giving enough space for Nietzsche himself would assume that there is "a truth of Nietzschean doctrine" prior to any reading, which would function as the basis of a proper interpretation. The question of being cannot be done with and moved aside, and for that reason, one cannot avoid going through Heidegger. Lacoue-Labarthe stresses that Nietzsche is not accessible without following the path of Heidegger's interpretation, without which Nietzsche's philosophy would never have been taken into account to the extent that it has. He approaches Heidegger by asking how, and on what basis, can Nietzsche be taken as a philosopher and included in metaphysics. (SP, 117–121; SP2, 60–62.) From the point of view of self-formation, especially in digital gameplay, Heidegger's relation to Nietzsche is not interesting as such. However, the notions of *é-loignement* and *(de)constitution* of the subject that emerge from Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation, are necessary for understanding the notion of the loss of the subject.

Lacoue-Labarthe calls Heidegger's strategy of thought "the stratagem of *é-loignement*". *É-loignement* is a French translation of Heidegger's term *Ent-fernung*, which means bringing close what is far and letting its nearness emerge. The stem *fern-* means far and distant, and usually the privative prefix *Ent-* intensifies this meaning. Heidegger separated the prefix with a hyphen in order to convert the meaning into a negation of distance. Spatiality belongs to *Dasein* only because of its *Being-in* (*In-Sein*). This spatiality is not an occurrence in the world but has the characters of *de-severance* (*Ent-fernung*) and *directionality* (*Ausricthung*). *Ent-fernung* is the way of Being that *Dasein* has with regard to its *Being-in-the-world*. It does not refer to remoteness (*Entferntheit*), closeness (*Nähe*) or measurable distance (*Abstand*), but to making farness vanish. *Ent-fernung* means that *Dasein*

lets entities be encountered close by as what they are. Only through this can their remoteness be discovered in the first place. Heidegger thought that, for example, by the invention of the radio, *Dasein* has expanded its everyday environment to bringing near the whole world. (Heidegger 1967, 104–110; 2001, 145–153.) There is no English equivalent, and although *de-severance* and *dis-distancing* are possible translations, I prefer to use the German and French words.

Lacoue-Labarthe applies the notion of *Ent-fernung* to Heidegger's own thought, arguing that Heidegger paradoxically distances himself from the thoughts of others by bringing them close. The translation to *é-loignement* transitions also the meaning of the term by taking it away from how Heidegger uses it in *Being and Time*. This operation is difficult because the concept of thought is in the core of Heidegger's thinking. To have access to Heidegger's thought means that one must subscribe to what "Heidegger himself" is for Heidegger himself. Here, the difference between *thinking* and *philosophizing*, which organizes Heidegger's strategy against metaphysics, is at stake. Lacoue-Labarthe notes that speaking of Heidegger's thought forces us to accredit this difference and to ratify his entire interpretation of metaphysics, Nietzsche included. There is no outside of this difference and no other "Nietzsche" that could be opposed to Heidegger's interpretation. If the access to Heidegger is dictated by Heidegger himself, the problem of whether Heidegger himself remains the same is left intact. Moreover, what Heidegger calls thought is unassignable because the difference between thought and philosophy is not clearly determined. Thought is elusive, fleeting, and in withdrawal; this causes yet another difficulty of reading Heidegger. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that the difficulty of thought is at the same time the matter and resource of thought itself. (SP, 122–125; SP2, 62–64.)

The difference between thought and philosophy separates Heidegger's step back (*Schritt zurück*) from Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*) on which every philosophical conversation with the earlier history of philosophy relies. But Heidegger also said that for Hegel, "the matter of thinking" is thinking as such, which makes the difference between thought and Hegelian thought difficult. The difficulty of having access to Heidegger is thus the difficulty of the outside (excess) of Hegel. Heidegger separated his thinking from Hegel, for whom the matter of thinking was the idea as the absolute concept, whereas for Heidegger it was difference. Hegel sought the force of earlier thinkers from what they have thought, whereas Heidegger attempted to find it from what has not been thought. Hegel's conversation with earlier thinking is characterized by sublation, but for Heidegger its character is a step back. (SP, 126– 129; SP2, 64–67.)

Because thinking cannot come to a definite conclusion, which would be Hegelian sublation, it risks being nothing. The answers to the questions of what is thinking or being are necessarily deferred because only the question that does not allow itself to be sublated by an answer can be authentic. Thus, the step back, the separation of (Heidegger's) thought from philosophy (i.e. from Hegel and metaphysics), is empty, always yet to be taken or already taken, and might not appear at all. But if thinking, to not be the same thing as philosophy, must necessarily think the unthought of thought and nothing else, the difference must

appear to some extent. There must be a decision about the difference, which must present itself somehow. But if the difference is not objectifiable or representable, the position does not differ from a philosophical position. The difference is constituted by oblivion, a veiling, which in turn has always already withdrawn.

Heidegger defined difference and oblivion as belonging to each other, as a circular movement of the impossible. But Lacoue-Labarthe claims that the circularity is also always stopped, and that the veiling, despite its abyssality, functions also positively. This means that the difference must also differ from itself as *nondifference*, in order to be properly the oblivion of difference. The appearance of beings as such is an arrival that keeps itself concealed in unconcealedness. Lacoue-Labarthe characterizes Heidegger's attempt to describe this as "mad laboring of language", "almost unreadable forcing of syntax", and a "dislocation of the semantic", which strives to name the fleeting essence of being. The movement between presence and absence is interminable – Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that thinking consists of this between without consistency, that which is between the already thought and its other. In its ambiguity and open-endedness, Heidegger's operation risks the proximity to Hegelian sublation, from which it strives to separate itself. The more thinking separates itself from the philosophical, the more it resembles it[32]; this is what Lacoue-Labarthe calls the stratagem of *é-loignement*. (SP, 131–138; SP2, 68–72.) When Heidegger attempted to detach his thought from what had previously constituted philosophical thought, he ended up in an interminable and paradoxical movement between what is already thought and the unthought that lies beneath it.

Lacoue-Labarthe claims that the stratagem of *é-loignement* does not function in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche because Nietzsche's text introduces the subject in a disconcerting manner. Heidegger's strategy against metaphysics involved all alliances with Kant, who repeated the unthought of the Greeks, and Hölderlin, who clarified it. Both were too close to Hegel for him to recognize their importance in regard to this. Nietzsche became the (last) victim of metaphysics, but he recognized and witnessed its threat, indicating it to Heidegger. Nietzsche fought against the nihilism that resulted from metaphysics and from the forgetting of being but became enclosed within it because he used the same arms as his opponent. Lacoue-Labarthe interprets Heidegger's destruction of the history of ontology as a corrective repetition of Nietzsche's ambiguity. Lacoue-Labarthe finds it odd that there are so few references to Nietzsche in *Being and Time*, given his decisive influence on its setting. (SP, 138–143; SP2, 73–76.)

It is not a question of whether Heidegger had actually read Nietzsche, which Lacoue-Labarthe does not doubt. The essential question concerns Nietzsche's belated entry to Heidegger's texts, which happened in the company of Hölderlin and with the question of art, immediately taking place *against* Nietzsche. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that Nietzsche represented a threat of proximity, which, unlike Hegel's proximity, might not be contained by the

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[32] This oscillation between two extremities is later defined as *hyperbologic*, which I elaborate in section 4.2.

stratagem of *é-loignement*. Heidegger argued that contrary to Hegel, Nietzsche did not challenge *thoughtfully* the history of thought; his relation to the history was not thoughtful but *living*. It focused more on the personalities of thinkers than their thoughts. However, Heidegger's strategy of thought was in proximity to Hegel but also against him, the thoughtful relation to the history of thought. Only the thoughtful relation allows the stratagem of *é-loignement* to function. This means that Heidegger refused to take the author, i.e. any historico-psychological relation to the history of philosophy, into account. Philosophies are traces of the history of thought, where Being gives itself for us to think. Thought is anonymous – philosophy has no author. Here the only difference to Hegelian absolute is reflexivity, says Lacoue-Labarthe. (SP, 143–146; SP2, 76–78.) The way Nietzsche emphasized the subject of writing did not conform to Heidegger's understanding of thought.

While a historico-psychological relation to the history of philosophy can be justifiably disregarded as a Nietzschean reversal of metaphysics and an effort to turn rhetoric against philosophy, Lacoue-Labarthe finds another, hidden refusal beneath Heidegger's refusal to take the author into account. In the introduction of Heidegger's habilitation thesis, before *Being and Time*, the question of the subject of philosophy appears as a question of living personality, life-value, and a personal stand taken. Nietzsche is mentioned explicitly as an example of a philosopher who expressed through his style how philosophy is determined by the subject. Even though Heidegger's distrust against subjectivity is well-known, with Nietzsche, the question of the subject of philosophy emerged and became joined with the question of the author. In *Nietzsche 1: Will to Power as Art*, Heidegger states that it is not possible to determine who Nietzsche is by examining the story of his life or the presentation of the contents of his writings, and furthermore, that it is not even desirable to know Nietzsche as a historical figure or as a personality. Even Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* is not a demonstration of his erupting madness because it is not a biography. Behind the ambiguous figure of Nietzsche, it tells the destiny of modern times: important is the trace made into the history of Being by the thought-path towards the will to power, not the creator of the work or the work as an expression of humanity. According to Heidegger, each thinker thinks a single thought that is always about beings as a whole. (SP, 146–150; SP2, 78–81.)

Lacoue-Labarthe does not criticize Heidegger, oppose his view, or search for a way to refute it, because a return to the subject and psychology would only mask the absence of thought. The point is not in the subject-author, nor in its other; not in anything reducible to personal subjectivity. It is rather what in the subject has always already deserted the subject itself, that which is the dissolution and defeat of the subject before any self-possession. Lacoue-Labarthe is attempting to describe a loss of something that was never part of the self, a constitutive lack, without which the subject cannot come to be. The whole paragraph should be quoted:

> As one might already have surmised, what interests us here is neither the subject nor the author. Nor is it the "other" — whatever this may come to mean — of the subject or

the author. Rather (and to limit ourselves for the time being to the question of the subject alone), what interests us is what is also at stake in the subject, while remaining absolutely irreducible to any subjectivity (that is, to any objectivity); that which, in the subject, deserts (has always already deserted) the subject itself and which, prior to any "self-possession" (and in a mode other than that of dispossession), is the dissolution, the defeat of the subject in the subject or as the subject: the (de)constitution of the subject or the "loss" of the subject— if indeed one can think the loss of what one has never had, a kind of "originary" and "constitutive" loss (of "self").[33] (SP2, 81–82.)

This dense paragraph reveals the determination of *Le sujet de la philosophie*. The loss of the subject is something that does not submit to the logic of self and other, because it is prior to any constitution of self. The concept of the subject is thus constituted by this loss, which has always already happened and predetermines the subject. But if it is a loss of something that one never had, can it really be spoken of? Lacoue-Labarthe seems to hint that what is lost should be crossed out in a manner similar to Heidegger and Derrida. But even though Heidegger's text touches upon the loss of the subject, Lacoue-Labarthe notes that it is immediately taken back and sublated as thought. The subject is threatening because the concept of the subject itself contains the loss of the subject, a madness that must be exorcised. (SP, 152; SP2, 82.)

Lacoue-Labarthe says that although psychiatric and medical discourses are correct, they would be insufficient to describe Nietzsche's or Hölderlin's madness, because representation is incapable of explaining thought as such. Medical representation of madness presupposes presentation itself, which is the certainty and consciousness of thought as a subjective thought. This relies on the predetermined concept of the subject as being-oneself, being-proper, something that can adequately represent itself by acts and discourse, or inversely as being-other, alienated, dispossessed, unrepresentable. The sublation of madness is pre-included in the operation of medical discourse, which would reduce the whole operation into nothing. But excluding madness presupposes thought, which in turn cannot be represented as such. This denial of madness in advance has only an authority of the following argument: "a *thinker* could not possibly be *mad*" ("un *penseur* ne saurait être *fou*") (SP, 153–154; SP2, 83–84).

Heidegger evaded Nietzsche's madness by introducing the concept of the essence of thought as a totality, but by this operation, the singularity of a single thinker is effaced. Taking a single thought as a constitutive of each thinker would still make every singular case as an example of thought in its generality, which concerns only being in its totality. The sublation of madness assumes interpretation of thought, which this sublation must authorize. Heidegger pulled

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33   "Ce qui nous intéresse ici, on s'en sera déjà douté, ce n'est ni le sujet ni l'auteur. Ce n'est pas davantage l'« autre », quoi qu'on mette là-dessous, du sujet ou de l'auteur. Ce serait plutôt (pour nous en tenir, provisoirement, à la seule question du sujet) ce qui est aussi en jeu dans le sujet, tout en étant absolument irréductible à quelque subjectivité (c'est-à-dire à quelque objectivité que ce soit) ; ce qui, dans le sujet, déserte (a toujours déjà déserté) le sujet lui-même et qui, antérieurement à toute « possession de soi » (et sur un autre mode que celui de la dépossession), est la dissolution, la défaite du sujet dans le sujet ou comme le sujet : la (dé)constitution du sujet ou la « perte » du sujet, — si du moins l'on pouvait penser la perte de ce qu'on n'a jamais eu, une sorte de perte (de « soi ») « originaire » et « constitutive »." (SP, 151.)

the "say-I" (*dire-je*), as Lacoue-Labarthe describes the I that speaks in the text, of Nietzsche's text from egocentrism and subjectivism. He interpreted Nietzsche's destiny as the destiny of thought, which is something that escapes the conscious thought of the thinker and transcends in thought the thought itself. Heidegger said that this is the historiality of the thinker, the history of Being, by which the thinker exceeds his internal limit; that what is most of his own is not in his possession because it is the property of Being (the sayable word receives its determination from the unsayable). Lacoue-Labarthe notes that in this movement, the essence of thought must be the unthought itself. To ward of the threat of madness, i.e. the (de)constitution of the subject, the (de)constitution of thought has to be interpreted as the unthought. This is how Heidegger separated himself from Hegel, through the stratagem of *é-loignement*. (SP, 155–157; SP2, 84–85.)

In *What is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger portrayed loss as the unthought. In order to access the unthought of Nietzsche, one must first lose what his thinking has thought. And this is more complicated than simply abandoning it and leaving it behind. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that Heidegger's notion of "losing" Nietzsche corresponds to Hegelian *Aufhebung*, where the exigency of loss is the exigency of sublation of thought in the unthought. Loss is thus appropriation:

> The exigency of "loss" is thus the exigency of the *sublation* of thought in the unthought, that is, in that which, not yet being thought, results in our not yet thinking, but which for that very reason we are called upon to think. And, as it is clearly stated in the end, "loss" is nothing other than *appropriation* itself, the *Verwindung* of the unthought. In the same way as in the debate (*Streit*) with Hegel, and perhaps for the same reasons, the movement of *Verwindung* and that of *Aufhebung* are so alike that it is difficult to tell them apart.[34] (SP2, 87.)

The terminology should be explained here. *Verwindung*, as it appears in Heidegger's lexicon, can be translated as overcoming or recovery, but in the sense that what is overcome is still maintained. Simply overcoming would be *Überwindung* instead. *Verwindung* refers to recovery of a forgotten or lost essence and is not something that is accomplished by human subjectivity. *Verwindung der Metaphysik*, overcoming of metaphysics, means that metaphysics itself recovers its essence. As Lacoue-Labarthe notes, this definition is very close to Hegelian *Aufhebung* as simultaneous preserving and changing. *Verwindung* also carries a sense of torsion or distortion, which has a slightly different nuance from Heidegger's usage of the term. The movement of loss as *Verwindung* of unthought is a difficult notion because it is at the same time the sublation of thought in the unthought and the preserving overcoming of the unthought. An

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[34]   "L'exigence de la « perte » est donc l'exigence de la *relève* de la pensée dans l'im-pensé, c'est-à-dire dans ce qui, n'étant pas encore pensé, fait que nous ne pensons pas encore, mais que nous sommes par là même appelés à penser. Et comme cela finit par se dire clairement, la « perte », ce n'est rien d'autre que l'*appropriation* elle-même, la *Verwindung* de l'impensé. De la même manière que dans le débat (*Streit*) avec Hegel, et pour les mêmes raisons peut-être, le mouvement de la *Verwindung* ressemble à s'y méprendre à celui de l'*Aufhebung*." (SP, 160.)

important point with the term is that it refers to a process that humans do not accomplish consciously as subjects of their thoughts.[35]

Verwindung as loss would be a protection against madness and would function like *Aufhebung*. What is threatening in madness is still the question of the subject, but in a form that is stripped from such determinations as consciousness, will, desire or affect. The exclusion of madness is the appropriation of the thought of the thinker, or more precisely, following the logic of loss, the appropriation of the unthought of the thought of the thinker. Lacoue-Labarthe calls this the extreme limit of hermeneutics. For Heidegger, these two appropriations belong closely together because the already thought prepares way for the unthought. The appropriation of the already thought is finding, interpretation, a preparation in a pharmacological sense to ward off madness. In Heidegger's operation, the questions of interpretation, madness, and the work are united in a way that madness and the work are submitted to hermeneutical treatment. None of Nietzsche's texts are works in the sense Heidegger understands the term in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. This pertains also to Nietzsche's major work, *The Will to Power*, which was incomplete. While empirical explanations for this "worklessness" in terms of madness would be correct as a medical discourse, they would not touch upon the essential; the necessity of the work's impossibility. (SP, 160–163; SP2 88–89.)

Lacoue-Labarthe notes that Heidegger's operation on the notion of work corresponds to the one taken on madness: the form of the work escapes the lucidity of the thinker. The thought of the thinker transgresses its limits without knowing it: the unthought is the essence of the truth of the thought. The presence or the labour of the unthought in thought requires the incompletion of the work. Nietzsche's ambiguity, the form willed by him and imposed on his thought by his knowledge conceals the unthought of his thought:

> The knowledge of form masks the absence of thought. The knowledge of form, because it is a knowledge (and therefore also because it assumes a "subject," however fleeting it may be), threatens the essence of thought — with a threat as serious, as pressing, as irredeemable as that of madness.[36] (SP2, 91.)

Even though the subject was stripped of subjectivity by the exclusion of madness, in regard to the work, there is a return to the subject as a subject of intentions and knowledge, on the condition that what is essential in thought has escaped the lucidity of this knowledge. "The knowledge of form" threatens the essence of thought by masking the absence of thought. Heidegger did not provide an explicit explanation of what is the knowledge of form, but Lacoue-Labarthe finds the answer in *Nietzsche* and *What is Called Thinking?*: it is a question of the constraint and obligation of writing and of literature. There is a risk that the knowledge of form as a knowledge collides with the obstacle of writing and does

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[35]   See translator's note in Heidegger 1998, 367.

[36]   "Le savoir de la forme masque l'absence de la pensée. Le savoir de la forme, parce que c'est un savoir (et donc aussi parce qu'il suppose un « sujet », aussi fuyant soit-il) menace l'essence de la pensée — et d'une menace aussi grave, aussi pressante, aussi peu convertible en salut que celle de la folie." (SP, 165.)

not know how to remove it. The powerlessness of knowledge "lets itself be taken in by writing", which "conceals from thought what is most essential in thought itself." This powerlessness taken in by writing is still a knowledge that has a subject and a consciousness, which makes the threat of writing even more dangerous. Heidegger was forced to exorcise this danger as he declared Socrates to be the purest thinker of the West, the one who did not take refuge in literature and maintained himself in the current that draws into that which withdraws. Heidegger's gesture saves thinking from writing: because *The Will to Power* is not a work and is not "written" in a similar manner to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it provides the possibility to follow the progression of thought towards the will to power. Incompletion of writing is the most appropriate form for the movement of thought. In *The Will to Power*, the subject that knows and writes by making the spokesperson of his thought speak, disappears. It evokes the same fear as the subject of madness in *Ecce Homo*. (SP, 165–168; SP2, 91–93.)

To lose what the thought thinks means to listen to that which has no language, what is unsaid and beyond language, and where thought risks losing itself. According to Lacoue-Labarthe (SP2, 93), "[t]he movement that leads from 'madness' to the unthought is therefore the same as that which leads from writing to the unexpressed" [37] – thus, writing and madness are sublated together. Heidegger's hermeneutics of the unthought takes place in obliteration, where it finds its defense against madness. The most proper to each thought and closest to each thinker is the unexpressed, most concealed and most distant gift of being itself. The stratagem of *é-loignement* is another name for obliteration, erasure of the letter. Philosophy itself is a becoming-letter of thought, in which the unthinkable is irredeemably lost.

> This is why the hermeneutics of the unthought finds in *obliteration*—in a certain erasure of the letter—its surest defense against madness. It is in *obliteration* that all of Heidegger's operations ultimately take place. And if, as we have seen, what is most *proper* to each thought, what is closest to each thinker, is nothing other than the unexpressed or the unsayable—the most distant, the most concealed gift ("present") of being itself—*obliteration* is the other name of the "stratagem of *é-loignement*" and the primitive operation or maneuver on which the whole strategy of thought is built. If danger lies in madness, the enemy is the letter—thought in the letter or the becoming-letter of thought, in which there is the threat of something much worse than death. This becoming-letter of thought is philosophy *itself* insofar as, in it, the unsayable itself, or perhaps the unthinkable, is or might always be irreversibly, irredeemably lost.[38] (SP2, 93.)

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[37]   "Le mouvement qui mène de la « folie » à l'impensé est donc le même que celui qui conduit de l'écriture à l'inexprimé" (SP, 168).

[38]   "C'est pourquoi l'herméneutique de l'impensé trouve dans l'*oblitération* — dans un certain effacement de la lettre — sa défense la plus sûre contre la folie. C'est dans l'*oblitération* que s'accomplissent au fond toutes les opérations de Heidegger. Et si, comme on l'a vu, ce qu'il y a de plus *propre* à chaque pensée, ce qu'il y a de plus *proche* à chaque penseur, n'est rien d'autre que l'inexprimé ou l'indicible — le don (le « présent ») le plus lointain, le plus dérobé de l'être lui-même —, l'*oblitération* est l'autre nom du « stratagème de l'é-loignement », et l'opération (la manoeuvre) primitive sur laquelle s'édifie toute la stratégie de la pensée. Si le danger est la folie, l'ennemi est la lettre, — la pensée dans la lettre ou le devenir-lettre de la pensée, où menace

In the concluding part, *Access (2): Throwing Off the Safeguard*, Lacoue-Labarthe says that the strategy of thought is obliteration. In this case, it refers to Heidegger's thought, but the ambiguity of the statement leaves it open to whether this is how thought functions in general. He emphasizes the ambiguity of the term, which can mean both to efface and to superimpose. Setting aside what dictionary definitions say about the term, he limits the focus on this ambiguity because it is sufficient for the purposes. Lacoue-Labarthe returns to the initial question that was suspended: to what we must gain access in Heidegger himself, if not to thought, which led to the question of by what right Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's thought can be reconsidered. This required to undertake a reading of this interpretation, going through Heidegger's thought and calling into question the strategy of thought. Lacoue-Labarthe says that this would be an obligatory and crude ruse because the answer was already known: the question of access was merely a question of text and writing. However, he adds that this appearance is misleading because this ruse would turn back against itself. The stratagem of *é-loignement*, obliteration, is reversible. The ruse would turn against itself because it would amount to opposing writing, the subject or madness to thought, and in opposition one of the terms has always already sublated the other. Sublation happens always in the sense (direction) of ideality, that is to say, in sense (meaning) and nothing else.[39] (SP, 170–173; SP2, 95–96.)

Whenever thought is opposed to something else, the sublating term will become thought itself, whether it is called writing, text, signifier, madness, desire, etc. The ruse would amount to deciding against Heidegger what Heidegger himself is, which is precisely what Heidegger did with Nietzsche. This power and desire of decision belongs to thought and is its distinguishing feature. Lacoue-Labarthe describes his text as an operation, or even a counter-operation, on the condition that the value of this counter is rendered unclear and indefinite. It is not a critique, a refutation, or a countering, but an attempt to suspect the practice of "contra-diction", the utopia of decision, the *topos* of hermeneutics and commentary, of which Heidegger's questioning of Nietzsche against himself is an example. The question of the other of thought, that thought would not have already sublated or reappropriated has always been raised, even if it risks nonsense and insanity (*l'insensé*). Lacoue-Labarthe admits that something in "Nietzsche" has some chance of resisting thought as such:

> Doubtless, it has been necessary to bring into play, while wandering along this question, that which, in "Nietzsche," has some *chance*, as Bataille would have said, of resisting thought as such, that is, the incoherence or extreme violence (or the weakness, the fall, the shipwreck) of thought, all that which communicates, at bottom, with "empiricist," "naïve" virulence, with a certain type or style of writing, of which Derrida

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quelque chose de bien pire que la mort. Ce devenir-lettre de la pensée, c'est la philosophie *elle-même*, pour autant que s'y perd ou risque toujours de s'y perdre (et d'une perte sans retour, d'une perte irrelevable) l'indicible lui-même, ou, peut-être, l'impensable..." (SP, 168.)

39   "Et la relève se fait toujours daim le sens de l'idéalité, c'est-à-dire dans le Sens tout court" (SP, 173).

has spoken in *Of Grammatology* (and precisely in order to "oppose" it to Heidegger's interpretation).[40] (SP2, 97.)

Lacoue-Labarthe admits that it has been unavoidable to play Nietzsche against Heidegger but claims to have done the best to undo this gesture of opposition. This is related to the ambiguity of obliteration in that Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche is obliteration. "Heidegger himself" does not know this and attempts to avoid the threat of the other of thought that is not of the order of thought. The "last Nietzsche" is a "mad machine" that escapes mastery and must be opposed blindly by removing thought from this danger. Heidegger safeguarded truth from everything that would shake it; safeguard is the proper name of truth as *aletheia*. All this governs the interpretation of Nietzsche and the obliteration of the Nietzschean text, but this obliteration also obliterates itself because it forms an interminable surcharge, where the erasure of the text engenders its proliferation. As writing, interpretation is forced to repeat itself endlessly because writing carries it outside its limits. A thinking that attempts to escape textuality inevitably produces a text, but there is no point of mocking its incantatory, archaizing and laboriously poetizing allure, says Lacoue-Labarthe. (SP, 174–176; SP2, 97–98.) This analysis of the relation of thought to writing is difficult, and in its focus to the notion of text, does not yet elaborate the loss of the subject clearly. *Le sujet de la philosophie* contains two more texts: *La scène est primitive*, on which I do not focus in detail, and *L'écho du sujet*, which I examine in section 4.3. For now, I continue by reading *Typographie*, which carries on inspecting the subject of writing by introducing the concepts of type and imprint.

2.3   Typography and *Onto-typology*

The question of madness that has been on the background of Lacoue-Labarthe's readings of Nietzsche and Heidegge becomes a leading motif in *Typographie*, which could be characterized as the most important of his early writings. This essay, approximately one hundred pages long and divided into three main sections, *L'onto-typo-logie*, *La Stèle*, and *L'instable*, might also be the most challenging piece of writing from Lacoue-Labarthe's pen. Its sprawling structure with multiple detours and breaks is exhausting, and there could be reasons to rearrange its observations thematically into different parts of my investigation. However, this would not do justice to Lacoue-Labarthe's strategy of writing and to the intricate presentation of his argument. However, I break off my reading at the last part of the text to resume it in section 4.1.1 because it introduces Lacoue-

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[40]   "Sans doute aura-t-il fallu faire jouer, en dérivant le long de cette question, ce qui, dans « Nietzsche » a quelque *chance*, comme aurait dit Bataille, de résister à la pensée comme telle : c'est-à-dire l'incohérence ou la violence extrême (ou la faiblesse, la chute, le naufrage) de la pensée, tout ce qui communique, au fond, avec la virulence « empiriste », « naïve », avec un certain type ou style d'écriture, dont la *Grammatologie* avait déjà parlé (et précisément pour l'« opposer » à l'interprétation de Heidegger)." (SP, 174.)

Labarthe's critique of Girard, which is important to my argumentation in that chapter.

With the notion of type, Lacoue-Labarthe refers to a certain tendency in Western thought to think through types, stabilized categories that are conceived as visual forms, such as figures. The main concept here is the *Gestalt*, with which Lacoue-Labarthe refers to stabilized forms and figures, although they do not always mean the same thing for him (TYP 87, TYP2 60). Basically, typography, or onto-typology, Lacoue-Labarthe's modification of Heideggerian notion of onto-theology, means the Platonic comprehension of the essence of being as *idea* and its relation to *eidos*, visible appearance. The Platonic idea, while opposed to mere appearances, is nevertheless accessible only through seeing, because knowledge means *looking* at the idea. The Platonic understanding of being in terms of *eidos* and *idea* is something that Lacoue-Labarthe finds everywhere in Western thought, even in Heidegger, whose destruction of metaphysics still contains references to the figural.[41]

In *Typographie,* Lacoue-Labarthe presents his rather radical interpretation for the term typography, which commonly refers to the arrangement of written text, including type design or selection of typefaces, and determining various factors that affect the appearance of the text, such as line and letter spacing. Lacoue-Labarthe detaches the term from this context in order to refer to the onto-typological apprehension of being, but the original sense of the word is also significant to this interpretation. This results from Lacoue-Labarthe's close focus on the terms "writing" and "style", which typography essentially encompasses. The point of onto-typology is not only to criticize how philosophical thought operates with categories and logical structures, against which post-structuralist critique has attacked in diverse forms, but that it is the human figure, being as a subject, which typography essentially determines. While this condition might be impossible to overcome, it poses a demand for critique and constant vigilance because it contains a risk towards totalitarian systems.

This means that for Lacoue-Labarthe, the figure is essentially the human figure, and that the being as a subject, an "I" or a self that has a personal identity, is determined by identification with a type. This thematic of models and exemplarity at the basis of self-identification is the source for Lacoue-Labarthe's insistence on the theme of *mimesis*; imitation, copying, reproduction – (re)presentation of the self. Especially in his early texts, Lacoue-Labarthe focuses on the practice of writing, although the term carries a sense that Derrida gave it in his conception of *arche-writing* (*archi-écriture*), which encompasses all forms of meaning-making and communication in general. With the notion of *typography* however, Lacoue-Labarthe plays with the physical act of inscribing letters: the human being as a subject is the subject of writing, and its identity is determined not by what it writes, but *how* it is written, by its style. The notion of typography playfully refers also to the practice of arranging letters and choosing typefaces as the style of writing, although Lacoue-Labarthe does not claim that this

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[41]   This is exemplified also by the language of this dissertation; such terms as viewpoint, focus and regard cannot be avoided when describing thought.

typography in the *literal* sense would be a basis for subject formation. It is rather the style of enunciation in general, which is not dependent upon its being written, or spoken.

2.3.1 Identification through Stamps and Impressions

Lacoue-Labarthe begins *Typographie* with the question of style, by examining Nietzsche's "madness", his extravagant style of writing and the overturning of Platonism. A certain undertone of the text is the question of whether dissolving the figure and shattering the mirror, from which the subject sees itself as a stable image, entail loss of all sense, i.e. madness. As in previous texts I have examined, here Lacoue-Labarthe follows closely Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche. The essay is centred around Plato's expulsion of the mimetician in *The Republic*, which is approached through the layers of interpretation provided by Nietzsche, Heidegger and René Girard.

The beginning of the essay follows closely Heidegger, focusing on his text *On the Question of Being*. Lacoue-Labarthe is interested in the fact that Heidegger was not interested about the analogy between Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Plato's Socrates (an analogy that Nietzsche explicitly denied in a letter to his friend), even though Heidegger should have had to recognize its possibility. But instead, there are only deliberate refusals to consider this comparison. When Heidegger attempts to characterize Nietzsche's Zarathustra as a figure, he skips over Socrates and finds an antecedent only in Parmenides. Moreover, Heidegger distinguishes Socrates from other philosophers as a thinker that did not take refuge in literature, which makes all later representations of him incommensurable. Despite this, Heidegger always invokes the Platonic determination of being as *eidos* and *idea* in relation to the question of the figure. In *On the Question of Being*, which is addressed to Ernst Jünger, Heidegger explains thoroughly these Platonic roots of *Gestalt*.

The Platonic determination of being as *eidos* and *idea* is echoed in the concept *Gestalt*, which as a figure is only accessible through seeing. This optical, eidetic and theoretical tendency constrains the whole Western ontological discourse. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that the Platonic understanding of knowledge as looking at the idea is carried to modernity, where *Gestalt* is the final name for the Platonic idea and transcendence. Here Lacoue-Labarthe provides his formulation of onto-typology:

> *Gestalt*, therefore, is the final name of the Idea, the last word designating Being as "theorized" in its difference from beings—that is to say, transcendence, or meta-physical as such. Thus, there is not the least accident in the fact that, just as Plato happens to think of what produces, in transcendence or in transcendental production (in the *Her-vor-bringen* of the pre-sent (the *An-wesende*) by presence (*Anwesen*), of being by Being), in terms of the "type" or the "seal" (*tupos*), Jünger thinks "the relation of form to what it brings into form," *Gestaltung* (figuration), as "the relation between stamp and impression" (*Stempel/Prägung*). In both, and answering to the eidetic ontology as such,

to onto-ideo-logy, there appears in its contours what must be called, in all rigor, an *onto-typo-logy*.[42] (TYP2, 55.)

The terminology of this quote is important and requires further investigation. "Being theorized in its difference from beings" refers to Heidegger's differentiation between the structure of things and the structure of Being, the ontico-ontological difference. This refers also to the difference from metaphysics, which is concerned with beings, whereas Heidegger's fundamental ontology examines Being, the human existence. However, Lacoue-Labarthe seems to think that by its eidetic determination, the concept of *Gestalt* binds Heidegger to the metaphysics he wished to overcome.

The German word *Hervorbringen* means producing, uttering and bringing hither and forth; in Heidegger's usage, it refers especially to the uncovering of beings and bringing them forth from concealment. The hyphenation emphasizes the prefixes *her-* and *vor*, which can be translated as hither and forth, allowing an awkward translation as "bringing-forth-hither" (Heidegger 1977b, 10). *Anwesende* means attendants, those being present, and in Heidegger's usage, beings in their presence. *Anwesen* is usually translated as "to presence" or "presencing". Lacoue-Labarthe identifies Platonic transcendental production with Heidegger's notion of *beings brought into unconcealment by presencing*, arguing that this production happens in terms of a type or a seal, and that it can be identified with figuration in the sense of stamps and imprints. *Gestalt* carries the Platonic determination of being as *typos*, which is the bestowal of meaning ("*donation de sens*"). *Onto-typo-logy* is thus a way of theorization that is determined by seeing, a bringing-into-form determined by figuration and types, which persists in Western thinking. If typifications are used to identify whole categories of people, typography becomes totalitarian and politically dangerous. According to McKeane (2016, 49), Lacoue-Labarthe has insisted that the figure is always fascist.

2.3.2   The Fictioning Essence of Reason

We have already seen how Lacoue-Labarthe used the term *fictioning* in relation to Hegel's notion of *Bilden*. Here it is developed further through Heidegger's understanding of poetic production. In *On the Question of Being* (Heidegger 1976, 395–400; 1998, 298–302), Heidegger elaborated the relation between the *Gestalt* and Platonic idea: The modern *Gestalt* differs from Platonism in that it refers to giving meaning. If the figure is a "bestowal of meaning", it must be "the figure

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[42]   "*Gestalt* est donc ici le dernier nom de l'*Idée*, le dernier mot désignant l'être « théorisé » dans sa différence avec l'étant, c'est-à-dire désignant la transcendance ou le métaphysique comme tel. Au point qu'il n'y a pas le moindre hasard si, de même qu'il arrive à Platon de penser dans la transcendance ou dans la production transcendantale (dans le *Her-Vor-bringen* du pré-sent (de l'*An-wesende*) par la présence (l'*Anwesen*), de l'étant par l'être) le produisant comme le « type » ou le « sceau » (τύπος), Jünger pense « la relation de la forme à ce qu'elle met en forme », la *Gestaltung* (la figuration), comme « la relation du cachet à l'empreinte » (*Stempel/Prägung*). Ici et là se laisse circonscrire, ordonnée à l'ontologie eidétique comme telle, à l'onto-idéo-logie, ce qu'il faut bien appeler, en toute rigueur, une *onto-typo-logie*." (TYP, 181.)

of humanity", because giving meaning belongs to the role of the human as a figure – especially to the figure of the human as a worker, which entails mastery and domination. Heidegger thought that in this way, the figure of a man as a worker corresponds to Nietzsche's notion of the will to power, of which Zarathustra is the figure. This is an essential configuration of the human, a *subjectum*, the *subjectity* that defines the substance of humanity.

Following Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe notes that the metaphysics of the human figure as the bestowal of meaning or as a worker corresponds to Nietzsche's figure of the will to power, and both correspond to the Platonic understanding of being in terms of *eidos* and *idea*. This forms the basis of Heidegger's questioning of the relation between *Gestalt* and *Ge-stell*. The word *Ge-stell* carries the meanings of a frame or a pedestal but is translated often as *enframing*. Heidegger uses *Gestell* to describe the essence of modern technology, by stating that all that comes to presence is enframed in some way; in modern technology, everything is enframed as a standing-reserve. *Gestell* is thus a way for humans to relate to the world, but not merely to a framework. The hyphenation emphasizes that it is an active demand that challenges to reveal the real, according to which it has been translated as *en*framing instead of framing. (Heidegger 2000, 20–21; 1977b, 19–20.) It also gathers together many words which share the form *stellen*, such as *Darstellung* (presentation), *Vorstellung* (representation), *herstellen* (to produce) and *bestellen* (to cultivate or to demand), which in Heidegger's usage gain specific meanings, and are consequently carefully examined by Lacoue-Labarthe (see Martis 2005, 24).

There is a problem concerning which of the two terms came first, *Gestalt* or *Ge-stell*, and which derives from the other. Either *Ge-stell* is a forgotten essence of being that allows us to think *Gestalt* and *idea* in the first place, or *Ge-stell* itself depends on the determined *Gestalt* of humanity, of the figurative power of human representation. The latter possibility obviously closes off all possibility of escaping the metaphysics of *Gestalt*. Lacoue-Labarthe deems this question a false one and focuses instead on the fact that the site from which both Plato and Nietzsche are thinkable can be a word, and not just any word, but a word for being: *Ge-stell*. In and around this word is organized an obstinately observed silence regarding the relation "…between the representation of Being as figure (the metaphysics of *Gestalt*) and *Darstellung* (re)presentation—or, if you will, exposition or 'literary presentation'"[43], Lacoue-Labarthe claims. (TYP, 184–186; TYP2, 57–59.)

Gestalt is thus derived from *Ge-stell* because the essence of *Gestalt* is accessible only after *Ge-stell* is elucidated. As the *idea* cannot be reduced to a mere idea, neither *Gestalt* can be reduced to a mere figure. Thus, *Gestalt* is not the figure neither in the poetic or plastic sense but can be better translated as *form*. Consequently, *Zarathustra* is not essentially poetry, but a *Gestalt* of a thinker which has nothing to do with a person called "Nietzsche". Here everything

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[43] …entre la représentation de l'être comme figure (la métaphysique de la *Gestalt*) et la *Darstellung*, la (re)présentation — l'exposition, si l'on veut, ou la « présentation litté-raire »" (TYP, 186).

gravitates around the single question of the subject, to which Heidegger always displayed distrust. He understood that the problematic of the subject cannot be eluded, but thought that its power must be neutralized because it was responsible for the forgetting of *aletheia*. Lacoue-Labarthe wonders why Heidegger's manoeuvre in regard to this question goes by way of *Gestalt* and even beyond it to *Ge-stell*. The answer is because not only is *Gestalt* derivable from *Ge-stell*, but also *Darstellung*. This common origin sets up a troublesome homogeneity between these two terms – troublesome, because in it, *mimesis* is at play. None of this is explicitly mentioned by Heidegger, and Lacoue-Labarthe must fuse together several of Heidegger's texts to prove this. (TYP 186–190; TYP2, 60–63.) This far, Lacoue-Labarthe's main point has been to highlight Heidegger's prejudice against the question of the subject and to build ground for the relation between *Gestalt* and *Darstellung*.

In the second part of *Typographie*, titled *La stèle*, Lacoue-Labarthe engages further inspection of *Ge-Stell* and its field of meaning. The focus is on Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology*, where he elaborates the notion of *Ge-stell*. A long chain of major concepts of metaphysics can be derived from the word, forming "a veritable lacework, a sort of vegetal labyrinth proliferating around (or out of) a single root."[44] This labyrinth is perhaps impossible to grasp as a whole in its complexity, and it is possible to get lost in it, even when pursuing a single question, which in this case is the area where the question of *Darstellung* is connected with mimesis.

In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger says that *stellen* in *Ge-stell* not only means challenging, but also producing and presenting (*Her- und Dar-stellen*) in the sense of *poïesis*, letting that which presences come forth into unconcealment (*Un-Verborgenheit*). Whereas in antiquity this production that brings forth (*hervorbringende Herstellen*) was exemplified by the erection of a statue in the temple precinct, in the era of modern technology it is transformed into challenging ordering (*herausfordernde Bestellen*). "Both are ways of revealing, of *alētheia*"[45], says Heidegger (1977, 21). In *Ge-stell* the unconcealment is attained through modern technology by revealing nature as a standing-reserve. Lacoue-Labarthe reminds us that in deconstructing the technical determination of technology, Heidegger has gone through the four Aristotelian causes and Plato, and shown "that its etiology presupposes a theory of production", where the essence of being is determined as *aletheia*, which *poïesis*, involving all production, brings forth. However, in modern technology the *poietic* bringing-forth is forgotten, and nature is discovered only as a supply of energy. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that this modification of unconcealment from producing to provoking is a transformation of the term *Bestellen* to *Stellen*, from cultivating to installing and placing oneself, to a provoking installation. (TYP, 192–194; TYP2, 65–67.)

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[44]   "…un véritable lacis, une sorte de labyrinthe végétal proliférant autour (ou à partir) d'une racine unique" (TYP, 192).

[45]   "Beide sind Weisen des Entbergens, der αλήθεια" (Heidegger 2000, 22.) Lacoue-Labarthe translates *Entbergen* as *découvrement*, which refers especially to uncovering and unveiling.

This is a transformation from a simple stand (*étal*) or display (*étalement*) to installation and establishment of the state and of the "generalized *show* of market economy"[46]. The (Heideggerian) essence of technology entails a sense of being as stature and stance, as *stasis*. *Ge-stell* denotes both provocation and stature, which Lacoue-Labarthe calls *stele* (tall ancient monuments often made of large stone slabs). This static determination of being joins together *poïesis* and technology, or even *techne*, in a common unthought of *aletheia*. This means that *Ge-stell* is a word for presence, and that unconcealment is necessarily interpreted as erection. This is the link that connects *poïesis* to *Her-* and *Darstellung*, and to *Ge-stell*. From this point of view, it is clear why Heidegger can consider the Platonic *idea* in relation to *Gestalt*, which Lacoue-Labarthe now translates as statue rather than figure. (TYP, 14–196; TYP2, 67–68.) From Heidegger's deconstruction of the notion of technology, Lacoue-Labarthe has gained the insight that *poïesis* and technology are linked by the static determination of being and of Platonic *ideas*. In Heidegger's interpretation of the era of modern technology, *poïetic* production has transformed into provoking installation, but both are aimed at uncovering *being* by stabilizing and setting up meaning.

The *idea* is thus static, which is not surprising, given that Plato thought them as immutable truths. Lacoue-Labarthe is more interested in that the *idea* is produced in Heidegger's terms by "the poetizing essence of reason", which must not be confused with *poetic* in the sense of *Dichtung*, but of *fictioning*; Lacoue-Labarthe points out that Heidegger's use of *dichten* (poetizing, *poétisante*) and its compounds *erdichten* (fictioning, *fictionnement*) and *ausdichten* (fashioning, *façonnement*) is synonymous with *bilden* (to form or to educate) (TYP, 196–198; TYP2, 68–69). The fictioning essence of reason gains an explanation from Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, in terms of "Nietzschean schematism": the will to power does not aim towards knowing, but arranging and schematizing, imposing regularities on chaos. Lacoue-Labarthe says that the essence of reason is thus defined as positing, or "fashioning and fictioning of the same". This constitution of the *same* is the thingness of the thing and equivalent to Aristotle's categories and Plato's ideas. It is also recognized by Kant as the forming force (*die bildende Kraft*) of reason and transcendental imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). (TYP, 197–198; TYP2, 69–70.)

The essence of the theoretical is fictioning, the ontological power of *poïesis*. *Ge-stell* as production and installation is the installation of *idea*, *schema*, and *Gestalt*. *Poïesis* is applied to thought and delimits metaphysics as the space of theoretical fiction. Lacoue-Labarthe concludes that theory in its fictioning essence is always installing and standardizing meaning, transcendental installation, which is the precondition of thought in general. But this fictioning has nothing to do with *Darstellung*, which is absent from Heidegger's treatment. It does not lead to an abyss because there is no structure of (re)presentation in it, or at least Heidegger did not recognize one, and is not considered as a presentation of thought, which would inevitably be undermined by the general problematic of representation and its abyssal structure. In *Nietzsche 1: The Will to Power as Art*,

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[46] "… l'*étalage* généralisé de l'économie marchande" (TYP, 195).

Heidegger still translated *poïesis* as both *Herstellung* and *Darstellung* (production and presentation), but in *The Question Concerning Technology*, *Darstellung* disappears in favour of *Herstellung*. Lacoue-Labarthe stresses that this is important because it is not merely a disappearance of a word, but of a concept or even a whole motif, which concerns the status of *mimesis* and the presentation of philosophy itself. (TYP, 198–201; TYP2, 71–73.)

2.3.3 Mimesis as Declination

Lacoue-Labarthe locates the most distinct loss of *Darstellung* into Heidegger's *Nietzsche 1* in the reading of Plato's *Republic* in regard to the relation between art and truth, which presents Heidegger's interpretation of mimesis. Plato subordinated art to the question of education and later to the question of communal existence[47]. The artistic product, *mimesis*, is always the *Darstellung* of what is. Even though it is not considered a passive but active installation (*Herstellung*), it remains in its essence as imitation and counterfeiting. Because *mimesis* as the essence of *poïesis* is interpreted as installation, it is better described as *Herstellen* than *Darstellen*. (TYP, 201–206; TYP2, 73–78.) This displacement of *Darstellung* guides Heidegger's interpretation of truth as *aletheia*: the interpretation of *Being* as *eidos*, presencing through outward appearance, presupposes that truth is interpreted as *aletheia*, unconcealment. Hence, Heidegger's interpretation of *aletheia* as unconcealment (*Unverstelltheit*) obscures *Darstellung*. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that *Unverborgenheit*[48] would be just as good a translation of *aletheia*, but it would lack what Heidegger connotes by *Unverstelltheit*: non-displacement, remaining-standing, not-falling and non-instability. Lacoue-Labarthe stresses that through this translation, installation and the whole *stele* are subordinated to the determination of the essence of truth as *aletheia*. Truth is always unveiling – it is unveiling that erects and not the other way around. Thus, all installation is the unveiling of a statue. In this way, *Darstellung* is replaced by *Gestell*, the pedestal and the stele. From this results that "the essence of mimesis is not imitation, but production". This "demiurgic" interpretation of mimesis results in the disengagement of its essence, which is disinstallation. Heidegger translates Plato's demiurge as *Stellmacher* (wheelwright), an installer, someone who constructs frames (*Gestelle*). According to Lacoue-Labarthe, as a result of the assimilation of *aletheia* to *Unverstelltheit*, Heidegger confirms Plato's "demiurgic mimetology"[49]. (TYP, 206–209; TYP2, 78–

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[47] In a footnote to the question of education in *The Republic*, Lacoue-Labarthe quotes Heidegger's view that *paideia* (education) must be referred to *Bildung*, which carries the meanings of an impression of a character and a guidance from a model. Based on this connection, Lacoue-Labarthe finds prefiguring onto-typo-logy already in Plato.

[48] *Verborgen* means literally hidden, whereas *verstellen* carries also the senses of dissimulation and disguising.

[49] By this Lacoue-Labarthe means Plato's claim that production, as the making of furnitures, is copying the ideas of furnitures and thus counterfeiting. Moreover, the artist that copies the products of the manufacturer creates second-grade copies that are even more deviating from the truth of the ideas (Plato 1997, 1200–1203 [*The Republic*, 596–598]).

81.) Heidegger's interpretation of *aletheia* emphasizes on installation and stability, to which the unstable nature of mimesis is the opposite.

Through the *stele*, Heidegger relates Plato's subordination to rectitude[50] to the "pre-supposition" of *aletheia* as the essence of truth. In this gesture, Heidegger lets go of *Darstellung* because it does not fit with the idea of production as installation, and most importantly, does not contribute to the understanding of mimesis as a fall (*chute*). Heidegger's operation presupposes that mimesis is understood as declination, instability and disinstallation. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that this is proven by how Heidegger gives precedence to the *stele* over outward appearances (to stability over the aspect), and moreover by his commentary of the Platonic "paradigm of the mirror". In Heidegger's interpretation, the work of the demiurge is a fabrication, which brings out the outward appearance in something else. The outward appearance is not the fabricated product itself but is "in-stalled" in it in a way that lets the appearance appear. *Poïesis* as art and technology unconceals *aletheia* and reveals the unveiling of *physis*. The *Being* itself is revealed and radiates in the outward appearance of the fabricated thing. *Poïesis* is a mirroring of the idea, which installs its outward appearance into something else, but *mimesis* is a diversion of *poïesis*, and therefore a disinstallation. Lacoue-Labarhe explains this as follows:

> Consequently, mimesis — on the condition that we interpret *poiesis* in its truth and do not confuse it, in the modern way, with fabrication (that is, with the *work* of an active, efficient subject, etc.) — is linked to a certain turning of *Herstellung*, of installation, inasmuch as this installation is itself already a *Bei-stellung*, the idea's "being-installed-with" (something other), its *assistance* or *attendance* to something else. Mimesis is the *diversion* of (demiurgic) *poiesis*. That is to say, it is a *displacement*, a "*disinstallation*", in which, contrary to what takes place in installation properly speaking, the *Beistellung* (the eidetic or ideal attendance-to) can happen ultimately in any way whatsoever and in such a way that it proves difficult, if not impossible, to refer the thing thus installed to its truth or Being, to its idea. (TYP2, 85.)[51]

Mimesis affects the relation of the thing to its idea, the appropriation and the *attendance* of the idea in something else, and therefore the unveiling does not happen:

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[50]   The misinterpretation of *aletheia* as *homoiosis* and adequation; as the justness and rectitude of sight and enunciation, that prepares the ground for metaphysics of *subjectity* and representation; i.e. for onto-ideology.

[51]   "Par conséquent la mimesis, à condition qu'on interprète la *poïesis* dans sa vérité et qu'on ne la confonde pas, à la moderne, avec la fabrication (c'est-à-dire avec le *travail* d'un sujet agent, efficient, etc.), tient à une certaine tournure de la *Her-stellung*, de l'installation, en tant que ladite installation est elle-même déjà *Bei-stellung*, « être-installé-auprès » (d'autre chose) de l'idée, *assistance* de l'idée à quelque chose d'autre. La mimesis est le *détournement* de la *poïesis* (démiurgique). C'est-à-dire un *déplacement*, une « *désinstallation* », où contrairement à ce qui se produit dans l'installation proprement dite, la *Beistellung*, l'assistance eïdétique ou idéale, se fait (à la limite) n'importe comment et de telle sorte qu'il s' « avère » difficile, sinon impossible, de référer la chose ainsi installée à sa vérité ou à son être, à son idée." (TYP, 213–214.)

Mimesis, in this sense, therefore only "produces" the "phenomenal" — or disinstalls the ideal inasmuch as it is an unveiling, or even as it is unveiled in ("natural" or demiurgic) *poiesis*. Mimesis is the decline of *aletheia*, the "lying down" or "stretching out" of the *stele*: Mimesis is the "easy lay" of truth."[52] (TYP2, 86.)

In Heidegger's rewriting of Plato, art as mimesis does not install an outward appearance (*eidos*), but a mere semblance of it, an idol (*eidolon*). Lacoue-Labarthe takes note of how Heidegger describes *eidolon* as a "residue of the genuine self-showing of beings" which happens in some material of *Darstellung*. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, Heidegger brings *Darstellung* back to the discussion in order to provide an explanation for the deduction of painting from the paradigm of the mirror. Lacoue-Labarthe points out that it is Heidegger who connects the painter to the mirror-holders in his translation of Plato. Lacoue-Labarthe carefully deconstructs the analogy between the painter and the mirror-carrier through the concept of *work* (absent in Heidegger's reading): whereas the painter must always do some work, the carrier of the mirror is only a false "author" (*le pseudo-« auteur »*) of the *Darstellung* that the mirror provides *by itself*. Thus, the paradigm of the mirror is actually a paradigm of *Darstellung*, and this is a trap into which Heidegger falls. (TYP, 214–217; TYP2, 86–89.)

The trick in the paradigm of the mirror is that the emphasis on the producing subject is displaced. Plato substituted the question concerning the identity of the mimetician with the question concerning mimesis itself. He left deliberately open this "artfully masked hole", into which Heidegger fell by trying to specify the demiurge. In this attempt, the questions of the subject and work, repressed by Heidegger, made their return. By displacing the producing subject, Plato displaced also the question concerning the presentation of thought. It allowed to concentrate on the question "What is?" instead of "Who produces?" and evaded the difficult question of the subject of philosophy, establishing sure ground for theoretical thought, where the differentiation between showing and dissimulating, appearing and not appearing, can be made. When the discourse is installed within the visible realm, theory becomes possible.

But there is another trick, in which the theoretical itself is placed "*en abyme*". The mirror that allows theoretical reflection, speculation, allows the subject to reflect itself. In fact, the mirror is installed only for (re)presenting (*darstellen*) the mimetician and rendering him uncanny through the process of theorizing and fixing into place, into a living statue. "*Theoretization* is a *thaumaturgy*, but one in which the *thaumaturge* himself is the victim"[53], Lacoue-Labarthe says (TYP2 93–94). The uncanny mimetician that produces everything can be neutralized by revealing that his power rests upon a play of mirrors, a trick of imitating, doubling and substituting. But this can be achieved only by resorting to the same

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[52]   "La mimesis, en ce sens, ne « produit » donc que du « phénoménal » — ou désinstalle l'idéal en tant qu'il est dévoilement, ou même qu'il se dévoile dans la poïesis (« naturelle » ou démiurgique). La mimesis est le déclin de l'*alèthéia*, le « se coucher » ou le « s'allonger » de la *stèle* : Mimesis est la « Marie-couche-toi-là » de la vérité." (TYP, 214.)

[53]   "*La théorisation est une thaumaturgie*, mais dont c'est le thaumaturge lui-même qui est la victime" (TYP, 222).

trick: "In the face of the *Unheimliche*—the improper—mastery becomes possible only by taking it still further, by outdoing it with the *Unheimliche*. This is what specu1ation is."[54] (TYP2, 94.) The trick of the mirror appropriates the improper by delimiting mimesis as imitation, a truth-like installation (*installation vraisemblable*), opposed to truth as *aletheia*. Bad mimesis injures the soul, and the corruption caused by it must be corrected and cured with a medicine of truth.

The explusion of mimesis corresponds to the ancient *pharmakos*-ritual, where a human scapegoat is sacrificed or exiled from the community in order to gain relief from a disaster.[55] Lacoue-Labarthe claims that the whole foundation of the Platonic state depends on it. A "political (re)dressing [*(re)dressement*]" is the function of the explusion, upon which the whole political system of the state with its hierarchies and institutions would be organized. The expulsion of the poet functions as straightening up the society, which Lacoue-Labarthe calls "political orthopedics". Heidegger related *orthotes* (an eye's correctness) to unconcealment (*Unverstelltheit*) and to the stele, which means that political straightening up is an *alehteic* practice. It is not only about setting up and rectifying the societal sphere but erecting also truth with it. Thus, it is a theoretical and "aletheic' practice", which aims towards "the just installation and joining (*Fügung*) of being in its totality: *systematization* itself."[56] (TYP, 225–227; TYP2, 96–98.) Listening to harmful things must be cured with an antidote, which is the knowledge of how things are: unreason is corrected by knowledge. Theory, ontological contemplation, can correct the vulnerability of hearing through sight, or by "(in)sight [*(sa)voir*]"[57] (TYP, 230; TYP2, 101).

The last part of *Typographie*, *L'instable* (The Unstable), introduces Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation and critique of René Girard's theory of mimetic desire. Lacoue-Labarthe connects the Platonic tripartition of the soul (appetite, spirit and reason) to Girard's theory by claiming that Plato's effort to subjugate aggression and desire to reason anticipates Girard's understanding of the violent power of mimesis. I inspect Lacoue-Labarthe's critique of Girard in section 4.1.1, where it serves better my purpose. Next, I proceed to Lacoue-Labarthe's characterization of *aletheia* in terms of mimesis, which can be characterized as the culmination of *Typographie*.

2.3.4   *Aletheia* as the Manifestation of Mimesis

With the notion of mimesis as similarity, Lacoue-Labarthe presents the aim of his reading: mimesis resembles *aletheia*. The reason for this is that *aletheia* does not resemble itself: as unveiling, it endlessly withdraws and masks itself: "de-sists". Lacoue-Labarthe plays with the French language: "Alèthéia — c'est une femme,

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54   "Devant l'*Unheimliche* — c'est-à-dire l'impropre, — la seule maîtrise possible est la surenchère dans l'*Unheimliche*. Et c'est cela la spéculation" (TYP, 223).

55   Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of *pharmakon* is based on Derrida's texts in *Dissemination*, but he does not elaborate this beyond a single reference.

56   "la juste installation et l'ajointement (*Fügung*) de l'étant en totalité : la *systématisation* elle-même" (TYP, 227).

57   Lacoue-Labarthe plays with French verbs *to know* (*savoir*) and *to see* (*voir*).

comme chacun s'imagine le savoir — « *se* » *dé-robe* (le mot a ses ressources après tout)." (TYP, 249.) In the English translation it reads: "Aletheia—a woman, as everyone imagines knowing—*undresses 'herself' and steals away* (the word has its resources after all)" (TYP2, 118–119). The verb *se dérober* means to slip away or to evade. When the *dé-* is detached to form a prefix, it denotes negation, and the remaining *robe* means a dress – thus, Lacoue-Labarthe conflates the senses of evasion and undressing. This forms a paradox in the sense that truth simultaneously reveals itself and flees. The same wordplay was used in Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Hegel, where the truth of the sensuous was at issue (Lacoue-Labarthe 1975a, 85; SP2, 155). Interestingly, there Lacoue-Labarthe wrote *se « dérobe »*, whereas here *« se » dé-robe*. The quotation of the reflexive pronoun perhaps suggests that the personification of truth is in this instance figurative on Lacoue-Labarthe's part, whereas in *The Unpresentable*, a woman actually was the figure of sensuous. This might also result from Lacoue-Labarthe's tendency to put personal pronouns in quotations in *Typography* (especially the "I" but also his own name when signing off) to signal their supplementary character.

The instability of mimesis does not mean the absence of truth, but that *aletheia* slips away and mimesis takes its place. What is called appearance is in fact unrecognizable and differentiated, a displaced and destabilized figure, "A faceless figure: the *same* Aletheia." ("Une figure *sans figure* : la *même* Alèthéia.") This "Aletheia as *no one—in person*" [58] is the manifestation of mimesis as an anonymous voice. (TYP, 249; TYP2, 119.) Truth is revelation, but when truth reveals itself, it withdraws from sight into endless circulation and substitution because it can reveal itself only through representation. Consequently, the truth of autobiographical discourse functions like this; the "real" person behind the endless adoption, modification and presentation of roles can be revealed only as someone who is always already withdrawn from the stage, anonymous. The "naked" person behind the costumes and masks flees instantly if undressed, or more precisely, was never there in the first place but is the lack that constitutes the subject. This is Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of mimetic subjectivity, which both Girard and Heidegger refused to recognize in their readings of Plato. In Lacoue-Labarthes' interpretation, Plato might have been aware of the mimetic condition and attempted to rectify it through the trick that was played upon the mimetician – the hole in the argument was not covered but masked.

Lacoue-Labarthe argues that the question of mimesis is caught within a conflict between Girard's and Heidegger's interpretations of truth and consequently between two ways of deciding about mimesis. Heidegger linked mimesis to *aletheia* and thought of it, in accordance with Plato, as a disinstallation and a decline of *aletheia*, as a false adequation, false similitude and degraded copy, which is incommensurable to the *aletheic* withdrawal in terms of *Ent-fernung*. Girard linked mimesis to the subject of desire and thought of it as an assimilation which perverts the opposition between the adequate and the

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[58]   "Alèthéia en *personne*" – the French word *personne* can refer both to a person and to no one.

inadequate. This generalized instability is more threatening than Heideggerian reduction of mimesis to decline. Lacoue-Labarthe reminds that this interpretation requires that Girard's thought is pushed to its limit and read against him. Here Heidegger is opposed to Girard, but in such a way that Heidegger is in turn read with a suspicion that is gained from Girard. (TYP, 249–251; TYP2, 119–121.)

The result of this operation is that Plato's experience of mimesis requires a presupposition of something that destabilizes *aletheia*. This prerequisite is related to the determination of truth as *homoiosis*, which Heidegger thought secondary, but in a way that its accuracy is displaced:

> [A]n unstable *homoiosis* that *circulates* endlessly between inadequate resemblance and resembling inadequation, confounding memory as well as sight, upsetting the play of *aletheia* and indeed carrying its breakdown right up to the very means of signifying its difference-so inapprehensible (imperceptible) is the agitation that this unstable *homoiosis* imparts to the Same.[59] (TYP2, 121.)

The question of mimesis forces the question of *aletheia* within language to be reintroduced, because in it, the obsession with the subject is at play. While Plato was not aware about the resemblance between *aletheia* and mimesis, Lacoue-Labarthe claims that he nevertheless feared it. After Nietzsche's practice of writing and producing his own figure, it can be understood that Plato himself was lost in the circulation of resemblance, which he attempted to stop. Neither Heidegger nor Girard could recognize this sign of fictioning and self-presentation: mimesis as autobiography. (TYP, 251–253; TYP2, 121–122.)

Lacoue-Labarthe stresses that the Platonic operation of programming a non-mimetic discourse through a mimetic spokesperson is nothing simple – what happens in *The Republic* passes beyond the powers of discourse, even that of deconstruction. It should be approached with something "more positive than critical", "(de)construction", which gives credit to the philosophical even in its failure and weakness, and in the deficiency of its "so-called" and "self-proclaimed" (*soi-disant*) infallibility. Lacoue-Labarthe says that "the philosophical thesis itself", according to which "truth and knowledge *are needed*" ("*il faut* la vérité et le savoir")[60], should be sustained. (TYP, 253–254; TYP2, 122–123.) This is a strong claim, an ethical demand that is necessary, even if truth and knowledge are fallible. It is a demand of criticism against infallible structures of truth, but also against non-truth and absolute relativism, which runs the risk of making the absence of truth an infallible thesis. Even if philosophical writing could not be the discourse of truth, there are no better alternatives. It must be continued in order to take down mythical figures and to recognize totalitarian systems, even if this always runs the risk of erecting philosophical structures that themselves become totalizing.

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[59]   "Une *homoiôsis* instable, autrement dit, *circulant* sans arrêt de la ressemblance inadéquate à l'inadéquation ressemblante, confondant la mémoire aussi bien que la vue, perturbant le jeu aléthéique et le ruinant jusqu'aux moyens d'en signifier la différence, tant est insaisissable (imperceptible) l'agitation qu'elle imprime au Même." (TYP, 251.)

[60]   See also *Il faut* (Lacoue-Labarthe 1992a).

Plato defined mimesis in terms of property by stating that injustice is an absence of proper qualities. When the market economy is connected to different professions of imitation, it arouses the appetite for possession, generalized depropriation and polyvalence, rivalry, hatred etc. Plato's political orthopedics is meant to reduce this "senseless expense of the proper"; it converts desire and aggression through education and assigns societal roles properly. Mimesis is thought as an absence of proper qualities and as a desire which leads to rivalry; hence the need for education to restrict the desire. Mimetism is problematic not because it is a lie, but because it distorts the subject in its relation to language. The task of education is to safeguard the soul from harmful models and to provide a proper inscription of types.

> Things begin, then—and this is what "imitation" is all about—with the "plastic" (fashioning, modeling, fictioning), with the impression of the *type* and the imposition of the *sign*, with the mark that language, "mythic" discourses (whether they are true or not matters little; this becomes a relatively secondary and subordinate question when the essential thing, as is said explicitly, is that such discourses are fictive), originally inscribe in the malleable—plastic—material of the infant soul.[61] (TYP2, 126–127.)

This vulnerability to fables is "a natural submission to maternal or feminine discourse in general". Plato thought that the mother tongue is acquired through the myths told by mothers and nurses. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that in the theorization of mimesis, there might have always been a resentment[62] against this originary maternal domination and feminine education, which always mark the constitutive incompleteness and belatedness of the subject in regard to its own birth. This means that the subject is incapable of giving birth to itself, or assisting in its own birth. Speculative idealism attempted to overcome this restraint – anti-mimesis was revealed in the Hegelian speculative thought, where absolute (in)sight is attained by the subject that theorizes its own conception and engenders itself while seeing itself doing this. (TYP, 257–258; TYP2, 127.) Lacoue-Labarthe naturally does not accept the speculative ideal, and states that mimesis originates from the dependency to fables, where a type is inscribed into the plasticity of the "subject". This defines the essence of formation and education (*Bildung*), and indicates that the subject belongs to the order of the figural and the fictive. Here the English translation does not capture Lacoue-Labarthe's formulation of the subject's engenderment accurately, because "is (not)

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[61] "Ça commence donc — et c'est cela l' « imitation » — par la « plastique » (le façonnement, le modelage, le fictionnement), par l'impression du *type* et l'imposition du *signe*, par cette marque que le langage, les discours « mythiques » (menson-gers ou non, peu importe, c'est une question relativement secondaire et subordonnée, du moment où l'essentiel, comme il est dit explicitement, est qu'ils soient eux-mêmes fictifs inscrivent primitivement dans la matière malléable — plastique — de l'âme enfantine." (TYP, 257.)

[62] More accurately "a kind of virile stiffening and an anxious contraction [une sorte de raidissement viril et de crispation anxieuse]" – a certain masculine rigidity against the interpretation of mimesis in terms of the feminine. Lacoue-Labarthe brings Lacanian terminology to his reading of Plato, claiming that this holds for the theory of mimesis from Plato to the notion of the mirror stage. (TYP, 257; TYP2, 127–128.)

engendered" loses the reflexive form of "(ne) s'engendre (pas)", which indicates the subject's desire to engender itself and the incapability of doing so:

> Mimesis is consequently grounded in this original dependency and subjection of the "speaking-being." It is, as we habitually and lazily say, a matter of "influence." But stated more rigorously, mimesis is the effect of *typo-graphy* and (if we may venture this *Witz*) of the fundamental "in-semination" which at the bottom define the essence of the *paideia* (of formation or of *Bildung*) and by which what we call the "subject" is (not) engendered as being necessarily of the order of the figure or of the fictive in general. An entire Western *discourse* on the subject—discourse that after all could well be Western discourse itself—right away seems to find its limit here; a limit that would lie less, as Heidegger has nevertheless had reason to say, in the supposition of a *suppositum* [*suppôt*], of a matrical identity or substantial *hypokeimenon*, than—on the very borders, perhaps, of the possibilities of *discourse*—in *the necessary reversibility of the motifs of engenderment and of the figure, of conception, and of the plastic*, or, if you will, in this kind of reciprocal and insurmountable metaphorical (figural) exchange between the concepts of *origin* and *fiction*.[63] (T 257–258, TYP2, 127–128.)

Lacoue-Labarthe claims that this problem constrains the whole of Western discourse on the subject, which might encompass Western discourse itself. The limit is not related so much to a supposition of some underlying substance, but to the fact that the concepts of origin and fiction are exchangeable. The fictive cannot thus be thought of without a reference to engenderment, sexuality, hereditary transmission, and education as a second birth – just as conception, origin, and creation cannot be thought of without a reference to fictioning and figure. In this endless referring, the figure of engenderment has always figured the engenderment of the figure, and vice versa. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, this space of *onto-typology* might be fundamentally impossible to delimit because the obsession with the subject endlessly repeats the typographical motif through the history of thought. (TYP, 258–259; TYP2, 128.)

The subject is always preinscribed and dominated by an anterior circulation of discourses. Lacoue-Labarthe differs from the Lacanian viewpoint by stressing that the subject is not traversed by an *Other*, but by the multiple and anonymous discourses of others. Here the (de)constitution of the subject does not happen in terms of a clear splitting between negative and presence, or between death and identity, but in terms of endless dispersal, pluralization and fragmentation. The depropriation caused by mimesis results in a disquieting instability. This

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[63] "La mimesis s'enracine par conséquent dans cette dépendance et cette subordination d'*origine* de l'« être-parlant ». C'est, comme on le dit habituellement sans vigueur, une affaire d'« influence ». Mais plus rigoureusement, c'est l'effet de cette *typo-graphie* et, si l'on peut risquer le *Witz*, de cette « in-sémination » fondamentales qui définissent au fond l'essence de la *paidéia* (de la formation ou de la *Bildung*) et par lesquelles ce que nous appelons le « sujet » (ne) s'engendre (pas) comme étant nécessairement de l'ordre de la figure ou du fictif en général. Tout un *discours* occidental du sujet — qui pourrait bien être après tout le discours occidental lui-même — trouve vraisemblablement là, d'emblée, sa limite, — qui serait moins, comme Heidegger a eu cependant raison de le dire, dans la supposition d'un *suppôt*, d'une identité matricielle ou d'un *hupokeiménon* substantiel, que, aux confins peut-être des possibilités du *discours*, dans *la réversibilité obligée des motifs de l'engendrement et de la figure, de la conception et de la plastique*, ou, si l'on préfère, dans cette sorte d'échange méta-phorique (figural) réciproque et indépassable des « concepts » d'*origine* et de *fiction*." (TYP, 258.)

pluralization of the subject is what Plato finds threatening; a subject constituting only a series of multiple borrowed roles, whose heterogeneity causes the fragmentation of the original subject. In this mimetic life of a "Jack-of-all-trades [un touche-à-tout]", "the 'subject' de-sists [le « sujet » y dé-siste]". In Plato's case, because the fictive roles have a maternal origin, the instability of mimesis threatens especially men in terms of feminization, hysteria, and madness[64]. (TYP, 259–260; TYP2, 128–129.) Here, Lacoue-Labarthe uses the verb désister, which means to desist, to withdraw, or to cease an action. It also has a function in the juridical lexicon, where it means to renounce a claim. However, in this usage, the term is used with the reflexive pronoun se désister, but Lacoue-Labarthe's way of omitting it suggests that the withdrawal precedes the subject or comes from the outside (Martis 2005, 41). The term has surfaced already (TYP, 246, 249; TYP2, 116, 118), but here it marks the status of the subject in general.

The Platonic model follows a classic problem of exemplarity: because fiction writes the subject and assigns it an identity, its exemplary power must be restricted through criticism and censorship. Fiction must be purified from depropriation, such as depictions of adultery, lack of virility or weakening of heroism, impiety, madness, and unworthy behaviour (TYP, 260–161; TYP2, 130). But mimesis begins already at the level of enunciation and hence fictioning is always a lie. It is a *pharmakon* that can also be converted to political remedy, thus it must be safeguarded and handled properly, to ensure the installation of truth. As is well known, Plato thought that the state needs a foundation myth that could be taught even if it was not true. A decision must be made upon the natural equivocity of discourse; truth and the speaking subject must be installed in it, and those who are not capable of this decision (the poets and mimes) must be banished. (TYP, 262–263; TYP2, 131–132.) For Plato, the most important criterion in regard to the use of language is the non-dissimulation of the author. When authors speak in their own name, Plato calls it *haple diegesis*, simple narrative. When authors hide behind a character that they present, it is mimesis: apocryphal, misleading, exposing oneself as another, depropriation, dramatization, *Darstellung* in the sense of *Stellvertretung*, and substitution. Discourse gains its fictioning power from the possibility of dramatization that is inscribed into it; hence the risk of disinstallation of the speaking subject is imminent in all uses of language. (TYP, 263–164; TYP2, 132–133.)

But Plato is forced to repeat the operation because it has a surplus effect that makes it lacking:

> That is to say, the ruse or trope in which the very will to capture the mimetic evasion simultaneously marks and betrays itself is caught in its own device and recovers itself. This operation *already* has a mirror, a theoretical trap—a "thaumatic" machine—in it.

An extra one. And because of this, everything is also lost and swallowed in an abyss.[65] (TYP2, 134.)

Lacoue-Labarthe names Plato's trick a *mekhane*[66] and a *false mise-en-abyme*, first of all because Plato himself betrays the principles that he establishes to govern fiction *as* a discourse of truth by speaking through a mimetic persona. But the case is more complex than Plato's pedagogical programme being presented as a *myth* through the mouth of Socrates – Lacoue-Labarthe states that the pinnacle of the paradox is that the philosophical discourse itself is never addressed directly, but always through the play of mirrors. (TYP, 265–267; TYP2, 134–135.) In the last instance, Plato's theory of language regulates only oral discourse because the author can never be present in written enunciation, which consequently cannot be authenticated. Plato thought that in living speech, the speaker could be identified and made to coincide with the subject of enunciation through a rectification of discourse. Lacoue-Labarthe deems this impossible because "A 'subject' never *coincides* with *itself* [Le « sujet » ne tombe jamais avec *lui-même*]." The Platonic decision between dissimulated and straight discourse can concern only simple theatricality, and thus does not really take place at all. This kind of reduction of mimesis misses "the imperceptible play by which a 'subject' is always, and without knowing it, already fabricated by fiction. That is to say, 'written.'"[67] (TYP2, 136.) Finally, Plato's trick of the mirror for capturing mimesis relies on a distortion because it reduces mimesis to theatricality and staging, missing the point that mimesis is at play in all acts of enunciation.

Lastly, Lacoue-Labarthe admits that writing nevertheless works. It still belongs to the *stele*, as a "last avatar of *Stellung*" – Lacoue-Labarthe finds proof from the German word for writing and authorship: *Schriftstellerei*, which defines the subordination of writing to *Unverstelltheit*, i.e. *aletheia*. However, this subordination holds only if writing is interpreted as a visible trace and not for "*writing before the letter*"[68], which functions prior to the registers of visible and (in)audible. This *écriture* is the locus of the imperceptible (dis)installation of what can be said (*l'ordre du dicible*); discourse installs itself through it (though never to completion), but only as an endless displacement and substitution, which hollows itself from the inside:

> But, as we know, this is not the case when it is a question of *writing before the letter*, a writing that is neither of the order of the visible nor even of the (in)audible—but is perhaps that by virtue of which the order of what can be said is installed (if it is ever installed), *(dis)installed*, imperceptibly, but only as though already hollowed our, cor-

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65   "C'est-à-dire la ruse, le trope, où se marque et se trahit tout à la fois, s'enferre et se ressaisit la volonté de captation de la dérobade mimétique. Il y a là *déjà* un miroir, un piège théorique, — une machine « thaumatique ». En plus. Et par quoi, pour cette raison, tout se perd aussi bien et s'abîme." (TYP, 265.)

66   The crane-like device that was usually used in Greek theatre to bring gods to the stage, from which the Latin term *deus ex machina* originates.

67   "l'insaisissable jeu par lequel un « sujet » est toujours à l'avance — et à son insu — fictionné. C'est-à-dire « écrit »" (TYP, 268).

68   Lacoue-Labarthe refers to the name of the first part of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.

roded, undermined by an unassignable gap, a kind of hiatus or gaping hole that nothing can ever close or fill up since it is anterior to any opening, any virtuality, any potency and any energy, any possible reception of a future presence. [69] (TYP2, 137.)

It seems that Lacoue-Labarthe finally conflates mimesis with *écriture*, because mimesis is the process where the subject is always already written. Plato's attempt to capture mimesis and the subject with it is in vain because mimesis has always already happened through an unnoticed evasion where it cuts itself off before its own production. Mimesis leaves "only an impossible trace—the scar, perhaps, of no wound [qu'une trace impossible — peut-être la cicatrice d'aucune blessure]" (TYP, 169; TYP2, 137).

Even though this leaves us in a difficult position in which to do philosophy, Lacoue-Labarthe says the act of writing desperately confronts death, time and forgetting, and this is the reason why theorization is necessary. The trick of the mirror is the only way of overcoming the delay of the subject in relation to itself, fixing the failure that occurs when trying to say something. In the end, Lacoue-Labarthe returns to the question of madness and philosophy, stating that when the mirror is shattered, the terrorizing instability, which it was supposed to freeze, emerges and mimesis regains its power (such was the case of Nietzsche). (TYP, 269; TYP2, 137–138.) The final words of *Typography* emphasize one last time the substituted nature of the self:

> But in a certain sense, in any case, "I" "here" decline all responsibility—all authority in the matter. I simply wanted to see, "me" too.
>
> "Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe"[70] (TYP2, 138.)

Lacoue-Labarthe signs off by putting his name in parentheses, to one last time remind the reader about the apocryphal status of the author. It seems that the whole reading of this text has been conducted under the false assumption that Lacoue-Labarthe himself is its author, while it in fact has been written by someone that can be called with that name only in inverted commas, as a mimetic construction of that character. This reflects also Lacoue-Labarthe's "more positive" strategy than deconstruction, in which the voice of the author vanishes under the passionate argument between the others, who occupy the stage of writing – in this case especially Heidegger, Girard and Plato. However, it would not be credible to claim that Lacoue-Labarthe does not speak in this text – we can take it for a fact that a philosophy professor named Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe is actually the being that has produced this writing in a singular instance(s) of the

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[69] "Il n'en va pas de même, on le sait, quand il s'agit de l'*écriture avant la lettre*, laquelle n'est ni de l'ordre du visible ni de celui, même, de l'(in)audible — mais par quoi peut-être l'ordre du dicible ne s'installe, si jamais il s'installe, — ne se *(dés)installe*, imperceptiblement, que comme à l'avance échancré, rongé, miné par un écart inassignable, une sorte de hiatus ou de béance que rien ne pourra fermer ni saturer puisque cela précède toute ouverture, toute virtualité, toute puissance et toute énergie, tout accueil possible d'une future présence." (TYP, 268.)

[70] En un certain sens en tout cas, « je » *décline* « ici » toute responsabilité — toute *autorité* en la matière. J'ai tout simplement voulu voir, « moi » aussi, "Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe." (TYP, 270.)

act of writing. The problem is that now that we are faced with the text, there is no real Lacoue-Labarthe in it, only the construction of him, whose thoughts are not even his own, but an echo of what has already been said and its modified repetition. This would hold even if Lacoue-Labarthe would be standing next to us and uttering the words "in person".

2.3.5   The Loss of the Subject as *Désistance*

I conclude this chapter by looking into Derrida's characterization of the Lacoue-Labarthean loss of the subject as *désistance*. But first, it is useful to recap the question of the subject with Lacoue-Labarthe's *La réponse d'Ulysse* (1898a, *The Response of Ulysses* 1991). In Homer's *Odyssey*, Ulysses responds "no one" to Polyphemos's question "who?" (almost giving his real name, because in Greek no one is *outis* or *oudeis*). Lacoue-Labarthe remarks that Ulysses responds to "what?" instead of "who?" and hence takes resource from the confusion between these two questions. This encompasses the question of existence: "why there is someone rather than no one?" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989a, 154; 1991, 199). In Heideggerian terms, the response mixes *Dassheit* (*quodditas*) with *Washeit* (*quidditas*) into a question of whoness, which Lacoue-Labarthe calls *Werheit*. This indicates Heidegger's formulation in *Being and Time* (2001, 67) "*The essence of Dasein lies in its existence*"[71], which means that the being of *Dasein*, the fact that it is, is always a question of *someone's* being. Lacoue-Labarthe adds that this entails the question of identity as something that is not yet formed. This identity of originary lack is not something already constituted and does not yet suppose the *who* upon the *what*. It is always threatened by the response "no one"[72]. However, the question of identity is not a question of disappearance, but of apparition, astonishment before the fact of existence of the self and of others – the latter rises from the ecstatic experience of love, the astonishment before a feeling that *you* exist (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989a, 155; 1991, 200).

Philosophical discourse of the subject has avoided the question of *who* and always responded to the question of *what*. The question is who carries philosophy to its limit, to madness and to the withdrawal of the subject, because nothing comes after the subject[73]. Lacoue-Labarthe says:

> "*Who* therefore cannot come after the subject. *Who*, enigmatically (and always according to the same enigma), is ceaselessly prior to what philosophical questioning installs as a presence under the name of subject."[74] (Lacoue-Labarthe 1991, 202.)

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[71]   "*Das »Wesen« des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz*" (Heidegger 1967, 42).

[72]   In French "no one" is indicated by "*personne*", which can also mean personality. Lacoue-Labarthe writes "*personne (ou Personne)*", playing with the confusion between these two meanings (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989a, 155).

[73]   This is Lacoue-Labarthe's answer to the title of the collection in which the essay was published, *Qui vient après le sujet?* (*Who comes after the subject?*).

[74]   "Qui *ne peut donc venir « après le sujet »*. Qui, *énigmatiquement (et toujours de la même énigme), est comme sans cesse antérieur à ce que le questionner philosophique installe dans la présence sous le nom de sujet.*" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989a, 157.)

The untenable task of the mimetic process is identification, to identify with oneself, which presupposes a subject with which to identify. The question "who?" is the very question of existence as identity. It can only come after the subject if it paradoxically precedes the question. Lacoue-Labarthe distinguishes between a constituted identity and a not yet established identity, which collapses the question of whoness into "we". Even if we would not exist as subjects, in daily life we live as subjects, we are affected and relate to ourselves, through which identity as subject is defined. Even though the relationship to the self supposes a dialectical movement with alienation, it only reasserts the integrity of the subject's being. However, there is another kind of alienation, which alienates the originary alteration of identity: the self prohibits existence, which gives rise to a pathological alienation, where the self is made a thing in the sense of Marxist *reification*. Here the question of "who?" slips into a "what?" which propriates idenitity and alienates native alteration. (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989a, 159–160; 1991, 204–205.) The subject's withdrawal is a condition that evades the typification and appropriation of identities, but there is a societal tendency to attempt to rectify it, which can take on totalitarian forms.

Désistance, a neologism coined by Derrida in the preface of *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, has become a common term to indicate the Lacoue-Labarthean loss of the subject[75]. It is a non-French word that Derrida suggested replacing Lacoue-Labarthe's terms *désister* and *désistement* as the condition of the subject. He gives this word one enigmatic definition: it is *the ineluctable*, that which must come about, but which also seems to have already arrived, happened before its own happening. The noun *désistement* and the verb *se désister*, which literally mean withdrawal or to desist, do appear in Lacoue-Labarthe's texts (TYP, 246, 249, 260; SP, 221, 260), and he has later commented upon Derrida's modification of them (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989a, 156; 1991, 202; 1987, 126–127). According to John Martis (2005, 42, 238), Lacoue-Labarthe has accepted the use of the term. It indicates that the subject is always late because something or someone to which the experience happens has already started without the subject. To remain as the subject of experience is to be as a preinscribed subject, which is already marked by the imprint of the ineluctable, which constitutes the subject without belonging or taking part in it. The imprint of the ineluctable is not an imprint among others, but a *typos* of pre-inscription. (Derrida 1987, 597–598; 1989, 1–2.) In short, *désistance* indicates that the subject is constituted through the lack of that which has already withdrawn from it.

Se désister could be translated as *to withdraw*, but this would diminish the conceptual field of *désister* and *désistement*. *To desist* is not a suitable translation either, because it means only ceasing an activity, which loses the reflexive construction of *se désister*. *Desistance* comes close to Lacoue-Labarthe's *désistement*, but it loses the meaning of cessation. Translator Cristopher Fynsk does not see any other alternative, as he says in a footnote (see also Martis 2005, 41-42). *Désistance* is not primarily an active self-desistance, but neither does it denote a passivity of the subject. Derrida says that it marks the middle voice and

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[75]   See also Silverman 2015, 55–56.

occurs before there is a subject of decision, reflection, action or passion. Furthermore, subjectivity does not consist in *désistance* because it means an impossibility of consisting in the first place. Derrida refers to Lacoue-Labarthe's formulation *(de)constitution*, which is something entirely other than a lack of consistency. (Derrida 1987, 600–601; 1989, 4–5.) Martis (2005, 42-43) stresses that *désistance* contains a paradoxical undecidability because it combines passive withdrawal and active withdrawing in an unresolved juxtaposition. It is both the subject's active withdrawal from itself, and the subject as something that suffers withdrawal. The middle voice conveys Lacoue-Labarthe's insistence upon the irredeemable unresolvability and undecidability of mimesis. I explore this in section 4.2 with Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of *hyperbologic*.

A major trait in Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of mimesis is a general destabilization. According to Derrida, the generality is a result of redoubling; the essence of mimesis desists: It has no essence, but this inexistence does not contain any negativity. Derrida stresses that Lacoue-Labarthe does not try to save mimesis from the definition it receives from Platonic mimetology and its Heideggerian reinterpretation. Interpreting mimesis as an abyssal redoubling of truth and as a destabilization of truth from its origin involves a risk of ennobling mimesis itself to an originary status. Derrida says that even Lacoue-Labarthe cannot constantly evade this step because it "can be marked simply with visible or invisible quotation marks around the word 'originary'". To emphasize that mimesis is not a declination of truth in a Platonic sense, it could be called '"originary'" in double quotation marks, which underline its incompatibility with being originary. The abyssal redoubling of mimesis does not destabilize a truth that already is or would be. Instead, truth itself desists and conflates with mimesis. Derrida sees this as problematic because it would mean that truth is already (originally) contaminated by mimesis, which would however have to be thought of in a non-originary and non-negative way in order to maintain a distance from mimetologism. With the term *désistance*, Derrida attempts to indicate the place where Lacoue-Labarthe says that truth, in its continuous non-resemblance to itself, *withdraws* and *masks itself*. (Derrida 1987, 617–618; 1989, 21–22.)

Derrida connects the expressions *se désister* and *désistance* to a word-family that consists of such terms as *subsistance*, *substance*, *résistance*, *constance*, *consistance*, *insistance*, *instance*, *assistance*, *persistance* and *existence*. These words are compiled by the root -*ester*/-*estance* (or -*ist* in English variants). However, the *dé*-prefix of *désistance* signifies the word's *non-belonging* to this family. Derrida points out that *ester* is in fact used as a verb in French in a juridical context, in the sense of presenting oneself and appearing in court as a defendant or a plaintiff, or *compearing*: "Ester en jugement"[76]. Heidegger's term *Wesen* (usually translated as *essence*) has also been translated in French as *ester* or *estance*, which allows Derrida to offer the following hypothesis: Surpassing the juridical context, he suggests that if *désistance* does not modify *estance*, but marks a rupture from

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[76]   The verb *comparaître* is also employed by Jean-Luc Nancy to describe the exposition of singular beings to each other (Nancy 1996, 30–31).

estance and *Wesen* and thus cannot be interpreted as de-essentialization or absencing (*Abwesen* or *Unwesen*), it cannot be translated to Heidegger's language at all, i.e. to the code of the problematic of the truth of Being. This would call for an "otherwise than Being", not Heideggerian but not Levinasian[77] either – Derrida warns that this kind of attribution of names imposes a "stupid economy". (Derrida 1987, 618–619; 1989, 22–23.)

To summarize Derrida's interpretation, *désistance* is not a negative form of Heideggerian interpretation of the truth of Being but refers to something completely other than Heideggerian Being and pries the concept away from the Heideggerian problematic. The crucial point in Derrida's argumentation is the translation of *Wesen* as *ester*, which he discovers from Gilbert Kahn's French translation of Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*: "ester, se realiser historialement comme essence, sans donc que celle-ci soit donnée hors du temps comme modèle pour sa réalisation" (Derrida 1987, 618). This translation is based on the juridical usage of *ester* as compearing or as an act of presence, which Derrida then connects to the whole family of words carrying the radical form *-ester* or *-ist* as their root. It should be noted that in this scheme, *désistance* has deliberately been given a privileged position, which allows to detach it from Heideggerian language.

Derrida suggests that *désistance* gives birth to the *insanity* (*démence*) and *unreason* (*déraison*), against which Platonic onto-ideology, along with Heidegger's interpretation of it, has been installed and stabilized, but again in a way that is not a negative mode of this stance and not a *madness* (*folie*). "Madness against madness," says Derrida, pointing to a double bind that oscillates between two madnesses. He identifies it with a "defensive stiffening in *assistance* (to partake and to be present), imitation and identification" ("crispation défensive dans l'*assistance*, l'imitation, l'identification"). In his reading of hölderlin, Lacoue-Labarthe says that the mimetic relation, which is a structure of supplementation and the relation between art and nature, a structure of assistance and protection, provides a safeguard against madness "brought about by excessive imitation of the divine and speculation" (TYP2, 222). Derrida finally identifies *désistance* as mimesis, or rather as its double, as that which doubles and engulfs *aletheia* (Derrida 1987, 620–621; 1989, 24–25). *Désistance* functions as a destabilization that dislodges the interpretation of truth as *homoiosis* from any relation to *stance*, which is derived from *Ge-stell*.

The truth-value of mimesis must be decided, but the decision of its truth – identification – inevitably means missing mimesis because it defies all identification. Mimesis is found only by missing it in the first place because the decision concerns an appropriation of a proper being and fails because there is only an impropriety. Derrida stresses that the improper is not a negative form of the proper because a negative belongs to the dialectic structure between adequation and inadequation (truth as *homoiosis*) that Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of mimesis aims to evade. In fact, *désistance* renders mimesis

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[77] Derrida refers to Emmanul Levinas' *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (*Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, 1974).

ungraspable to thought: it means ineluctably missing the lack (*manquer, le manque*) without a negative structure; an im-property is not negative, not a double negation in a traditional way, but a contradictory distortion of thinking itself. (Derrida 1987, 621–622; 1989, 25–26.)

Lacoue-Labarthe's main theme can appear bleak and pessimistic: mimesis is an abyss that ultimately and ineluctably swallows all meaning, beginning from that given to existence as a subject. However, it is not a black hole of death, but on the contrary a living force of infinite production. The thought that at the bottom of self-presentation there is no proper identity, only a nothingness, can be disquieting, but it also has a certain consolation in it; there are no proper models that could dictate what people should be and neither is there a proper originality that a person could strive for. In this sense, mimesis entails infinite freedom of self-production, even if there can never be a complete product that would properly belong to anyone. Worklessness is not a collapse into a singularity of nothing, but a dispersal and a proliferation of everything.

2.4   Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the philosophical context of Lacoue-Labarthe's writing and the foundation of his conception of the subject-formation. While Kant's philosophy is not the target of Lacoue-Labarthe's analyses, it functions as a point of reference for the problematic of representation in terms of *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung*. Lacoue-Labarthe calls the result of Kant's philosophy a crisis, to which all subsequent philosophical movements tried to answer. An important continuation of this problem was speculative philosophy, especially Hegel, Hölderlin and the Romanticism of Jena, which sought an interpretation of the subject as a literary work. The ideas of Romanticism had a strong influence to Western thought, especially to philosophical movements of Lacoue-Labarthe's time.

Lacoue-Labarthe's readings of Nietzsche emphasize an infinite movement of reversal between truth and fiction: because there is nothing outside language, there cannot be a truth that could function as an immutable reference point. The subject finds itself always within language, which does not represent truth, but functions as art. Following Nietzsche, Lacoue-Labarthe argues that instead of representing truth, language dissimulates the condition that there never was a truth. This quality of language dissimilates the subject of writing from itself and makes it apocryphal. In a complex investigation of Heidegger's relation to Hegel and Nietzsche that involves the relation between thought and writing, Lacoue-Labarthe arrives to his main theme: the loss of the subject as (de)constitution.

With the notion of onto-typology, Lacoue-Labarthe thematizes the loss of the subject through type and figure, which opens the notion of philosophical writing to a more general understanding of identification through typology. In onto-typological interpretation of being, type is a character that is stamped on the matter of subjectivity. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that because the subject has

no substance, it cannot function as a ground for imprinting the figure but is itself formed through a process of interminable figuration. Understanding humanity through types and characters can be traced back to the Platonic *idea* and *eidos*, which have transformed into modernity through the concept of *Gestalt*. Lacoue-Labarthe locates Heidegger's conception of *Gestalt* through the notion of *Ge-stell*, which also gathers together such terms as *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung*. Within Heidegger's lexicon, Lacoue-Labarthe notes that mimesis and *Darstellung* are ignored in favour of the notions of production, installation and erection, which he calls fictioning. Inspecting Heidegger's examination of Nietzsche and Plato, Lacoue-Labarthe finds that Heidegger adopts Plato's understanding of mimesis as declination, and drops the notions of mimesis and *Darstellung* from his conception of art. This leads to conceiving art in terms of *aletheia*, unconcealment, which opposes *poïesis* to mimesis. Lacoue-Labarthe accepts the interpretation of mimesis as instability, but remarks that this condition is unavoidable. Moreover, while it must be opposed, such attempts risk becoming totalizing systems.

Finally, Lacoue-Labarthe argues that mimesis is the truth of being because it is characterized by the same paradoxical movement between unconcleament and dissimulation. In the moment when truth reveals itself, it slips away, and mimesis takes its place. This condition of truth exemplifies Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of the subject as a product of mimesis, which can reveal itself only through substitution and dissimulation. He elaborates this by playing Heidegger's and Girard's interpretations of Plato against each other – through this analysis, Lacoue-Labarthe gains insight about the semblance between *aletheia* and mimesis. The subject is characterized by a withdrawal, which Derrida suggested to call *désistance*, an ineluctable lack that precedes being as a subject.

Now that I have examined the background of Lacoue-Labarthe's thought and his claims about the mimetic nature of the subject, it is time to move into the second theme of this investigation: digital gameplay. In the next chapter, I leave Lacoue-Labarthe in the background in order to construct theoretical grounds for Chapter Four, in which Lacoue-Labarthe's texts are read from the perspective of gameplay.

3   DIGITAL GAMEPLAY

The purpose of this chapter is to demarcate my viewpoint on digital games and on the act of playing. This is not a complete definition of digital gameplay and is only intended to provide a conception that is relevant in terms of the loss of the subject. To consider all available literature on gameplay would not be relevant within the Lacoue-Labarthean framework that guides the focus of this chapter. Hence, I investigate a selection of digital games research literature that helps to construct an understanding of gameplay that will be usable in Chapter Four, where it will be conflated with my readings of Lacoue-Labarthe. The current chapter constructs a rationale for the concepts that I use to describe digital gameplay, and as such, does not provide especially novel perspectives on game studies. I find it necessary to introduce a separate conception of digital gameplay before continuing with the readings of Lacoue-Labarthe. While Chapter Two focused on the background of Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of mimesis, this chapter explicates the background in game studies, upon which the aspects of gamic mimesis are constructed in Chapter Four.

My approach to digital games and gameplay is guided by the Lacoue-Labarthean notion of loss of the subject that was investigated in the previous chapter. Hence, I am interested in the act of gameplay as the (re)presentation of the subject. In this regard, I do not consider the agent of gameplay as a separate subject from the player, but as production of the player as a subject through gamic mimesis. Gameplay is a technological supplement to the self, like any kind of external medium without which the subject could not come to appear at all. This viewpoint aligns the notion of gameplay with Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of writing and mimesis. The form through which the subject produces itself and becomes contaminated by others is art: the subject itself is an incomplete work, a fragmentary recycling of the traces of others, which both produces itself and is produced. Creating a digital game is an art in which the developers present themselves through the gamic form and the code, which, with the power of the computer, transforms into a machinic agency. Digital gameplay is a confrontation with the otherness of both the developer and the machine, but

it is also the art of the player as a subject that produces itself through agency, which is essential to the gamic form.

Even though the subject is produced through any kind of agency, the more specific connections between Lacoue-Labarthe and digital gameplay restrict the field of games to which these connections apply. The characterization of digital games and gameplay presented in this chapter delimits the field of digital games under the focus of this research into such games that present a functional gameworld, allow the player to experiment with different kinds of actions within that world, and communicate at least part of their rules through their functionality, in response to the player's actions, instead of clearly explicated rulebook. Certain claims about gameplay, digitality and digital games that will be proposed in this and the subsequent chapter can also extend to games outside this description, but I do not claim that the Lacoue-Labarthean aspects of gamic mimesis will define digital gameplay completely. Lacoue-Labarthe's argument of the relation between the subject and mimesis is, on the one hand, a very general investigation about the nature of human existence itself, but on the other, the particular texts engaged in Chapter Four are focused on delineated problems that cannot be converted into a general characterizations of digital gameplay, given the difference between gaming and Lacoue-Labarthe's contexts. Hence, at times it is possible to make claims about digitality or gameplay in general, whereas the main thread of this research will consider the specific kind of digital gameplay described in the current chapter.

In order to consider the relation between digital gameplay and the representation of the subject, the nature of computers must be approached from the perspective of the player. For example, Olli Leino (2010, 82) criticizes the division between theoretical game-centric and empirical player-centric perspectives to digital gaming for distancing emotional investment from the player's experience of gameplay. Similarly, Graeme Kirkpatrick (2016, 12) advocates an aesthetic approach that focuses on what digital games feel like to players. Sherry Turkle has written of the experience of human-computer-interaction in general, describing the nature of the computer primarily as an evocative and fascinating object that can be both disturbing and stimulating (Turkle 2005, 19). Computers open the possibility to interact with them in a way where the machine can function as a projection of a part of the self – as a part of everyday life, they function as a constructive medium through which worlds can be created by programming, and enter the development of identity, personality and sexuality (Turkle 2005, 20–21). According to Lacoue-Labarthe, being is nothing before it becomes dissimulated through mimesis and hence the subject does not exist as a baseline substantiality. As a subject of writing, it is determined by mimesis, regardless of the form mimesis happens to take – in this general characterization, gameplay does not initially differ from the other arts. The specific forms of gamic mimesis are rule-based agency and a struggle to achieve the goal, through which it presents the condition of the subject in general. In digital gameplay, the subject borrows its agency from the code and the machine, which emphasizes the technological aspect of mimesis.

With subject of gamic agency, I refer to the subject of writing within the context of gameplay. Gamic agency consists of the computer's and the player's acts; it is a product of gamic action, a term that I take from Alexander Galloway and will explicate in section 3.3.2. It has been claimed that gameplay is not merely a combination of the computer's algorithmic system and the player's input, but a more complex relation between the computational system and the player's disposition (see e.g. Arsenaut & Perron, 109–111). However, according to the Lacoue-Labarthean conception of mimesis, there cannot be any subjective dispositions before mimesis having already produced the subject that is capable of dispositions. From this perspective, the focal point of gameplay is not separate from the player as an actual person. On Lacoue-Labarthean basis, I interpret gameplay as a (re)presentation of the self, a *work* in the vein of the Jena Romantics, who conveived the subject as a literary work. This self-production is of course destined to *désœuvrement* and cannot produce stable forms, only form in continuous movement, a protean figure that veils the emptiness within.

While this condition pertains especially to infancy and the presubjective rhythmic space within the womb, the subject never becomes complete and is always haunted by the inability to participate in its own birth. Because self-presentation must be repeated infinitely, the subject cannot stop becoming contaminated by mimesis. In digital gameplay, the gamic system and the code that constructs it create the subject as a subject of gamic agency. In Lacoue-Labarthe's view, the tension between a deliberate autobiography and an involuntary being-written characterizes subjective existence. In gameplay, this occurs as a tension between the player's and the computer's actions. For the player, gamic agency occurs within the gameworld that represents the actions and their consequences in a fictional[78] form that is intelligible for a human. However, the process of gameplay is orchestrated through the underlying level of code, which is unperceivable to the player. It is the locus for the computer's actions, in which many operations take place unbeknownst to the player and of which only a part is rendered visible through the gameworld. This dichotomy between the visible and the veiled is significant for Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of mimesis and is the guiding thread of the aspects of gamic mimesis that are introduced in Chapter Four.

This point of view concerns digital gameplay primarily as an experience of human-computer-interaction. In digital multiplayer games that introduce human opponents, the situation is slightly different, because the players seem to struggle against each other instead of the computer. However, to achieve the goal of such games, i.e. defeat the human opponent, requires the player to master the gamic system itself. This pertains to any kind of game that is played against a human opponent, but in digital player versus player gameplay, the agency of each player

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[78] The conception of the gameworld as a fiction has been problematized, as it can equally represent non-fictional places (Vella 2015a, 23, 106). I use fiction here in the Lacoue-Labarthean sense as writing that produces the subject: the "truth" about the subject's origin cannot be produced but as a fiction. The fictionality of the gameworld does not refer to what the world represents as a text but how the relation between subjectal self-(re)presentation and its proper being occurs through digital gameplay.

as the subject of gameplay is produced through the procedural system. The experience of contending a human opponent can differ considerably from purely computer-generated agency; for example, player versus player combat in *Dark Souls* (FromSoftware 2011) tends to be much more unpredictable than combat against computer-controlled foes, whose actions exhibit disquieting mechanistic determination but become quickly predictable. Despite such differences, in both cases the player's actions are conditioned by the underlying algorithmic system. This pertains also to cooperative play, which can alter the overall gameplay experience but not the general process of subject formation. The introduction of other human players to digital gameplay complicates the situation but does not alter its status as procedurally conditioned agency.

This chapter is divided into three subsections. The first describes the notion of a digital game as a rule-based system that consists of goals and obstacles, which the player struggles to overcome. Then, the implications of digitality to the gamic form are elaborated. The second part focuses on the visible appearance of games as the action that happens on the screen. This discussion is divided into three parts: the first examines the notion of interface as an immersive simulation, the second discusses the notion of the gameworld as a representative space of the game and the basis for the player's interaction with the gamic system, and the third considers the visible appearance as a figural surface that dissimulates its codified foundation. The last part of the chapter focuses on the notion of gamic agency, which is determined as a product of both the player's and the computer's actions, bringing together the visible appearance and its underlying codified foundation. This discussion begins from the notions of interaction and agency and then proceeds to examine Alexander Galloway's conception of gamic action and Colin Cremin's interpretation of gameplay as a craft.

3.1   Beneath the Surface

By digital games I refer to games that require a digital computer to be played. They can also be called computer games or video games, although I prefer to emphasize digitality and procedurality over the visual. This demarcation includes all games that are played with personal computers, game consoles, mobile phones and other devices that have a processor chip. In other words, I focus on such games that specifically require a computer to function and cannot be efficiently reproduced without it. However, this delimitation is not intended to produce a concise demarcation of digital games and does not aim for a generality that could be extended to all games that fit this requirement. When I inspect digital gaming through the readings of Lacoue-Labarthe in Chapter Four, many insights about gaming could be extended also to non-digital games and claims about digitality could be applied to human-computer-interaction in general. Hence, the focus of this perspective is the area in which the attributes of gameplay, digitality and Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of the subject overlap. In the present chapter, I elaborate my interpretation of games and digitality by

providing two general characterizations of digital games: they are rule-based systems that are driven by a procedural and algorithmic computer processes. This view is constructed especially through Jesper Juul's and Ian Bogost's conceptions of digital games.

3.1.1 The Rule-System

Because the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of digital gameplay focuses on the subject of gamic agency, which is produced through the player's and the computer's actions, games must be primarily inspected from the areas that enable those actions: the system of rules (more precisely a system of goals and restrictions) that comprises the game's functionality, and computation that implements the system. Both, when combined with the player's actions, produce the subject of gamic agency.

Differentiating the game as rule-system from the fictional setting or the game's narrative is a well-known subject of debate. In *Half-real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (2005), Jesper Juul has made a famous distinction between rules and fiction: the rules and the player's interaction with them are real, but gameplay also involves imagining a fictional world. For example, the death of a playable character is not similar to the death of the actual player, but it has consequences that are not encountered in other fictional media (King & Krzywinska 2006, 116). Both aspects and the interaction between them comprise Juul's definition of a digital game. According to Juul (2005, 5), there are two ways how rules provide challenge to the player: emergence and progression. Emergence means a set of rules that result in a large number of different game variations; progression is a requirement to perform a predefined set of actions.

A common feature of all games is an unambiguous set of rules that provides challenge to the player, which must be overcome by improving the player's skills. Juul contrasts progression-oriented games to games of emergence. The former, of which an adventure game is the purest example, provides sequenced scenarios in which the player must find the correct action to proceed. The game designer has a lot of control and the player is given little freedom. In games of emergence, a defined number of rules provide multiple variations of gameplay. Examples include card games, chess, strategy games and multiplayer computer games. According to Juul, the complexity arises from the organization of simple components, which allow innumerable different interactions between them. In my view, both types of games are defined by the combination of a rule-system and the player's freedom to interact with it; the differences result from different relations between freedom and restrictions.

Juul provides a classification which he terms "the classic game model," a list of features that consist of the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be a game:

1. a rule-based formal system;

2. with variable and quantifiable outcomes;

3. where different outcomes are assigned different values;

4. where the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome;

5. the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome;

6. and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable (Juul 2005, 6–7).

Juul claims that this model is the requisite for constructing a game, comparable to what celluloid film is for movies, canvas for a painting or words for a novel, but also transmedial in a similar way a story is, independent of a specific medium. I prefer to compare the game model to, for example, the formal structure of a story, or to the principles of creating a perspective in a drawing, than to the material basis of other art forms. Juul's claim means that according to the classic model, games are by definition abstract, not tied to the material representation of the rules. However, he sees the classic model insufficient for digital games because they have the capability of modifying and supplementing it. The computational medium changes the classification and makes digital games differ from other kinds of games. Because the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of mimesis as the (re)presentation of the subject is of a general sort, all kinds of gameplay could be described through it – however, focusing especially on digitality opens a possibility for extending the interpretation to the use of computers in general. Another reason for focusing on digitality is that the computer is an exceptionally efficient mean to implement complex rule-systems, which makes it an ideal platform for games.

Juul accepts that games are rule-based and must have variable and quantifiable outcomes. A game must also have a goal and reaching it must require a relevant amount of effort from the player (cf. Leino 2010, 134–140). A game is separate from the rest of the world because its consequences are negotiable and do not necessarily have any real-world implications. Juul's notion about consequences is purely material and does not consider cultural and intangible consequences, which might not be negotiable or even consciously apprehended. He rejects many attributes, such as voluntariness, separateness and unproductivity, less efficient means, fiction and social groupings, because these properties are not found in all games and are thus not necessary in the definition (Juul 2005, 31–34).

A more inclusive definition is provided by Grant Tavinor (2009, 26–33) who suggests that digital games employ either rules and objective gameplay or interactive fiction. This disjunctive definition includes such games that do not have distinct goals to pursue. However, I will focus on games that are structured around goals and obstacles. In his book *Games: Agency as Art* (forthcoming), C. Thi Nguyen proposes a similar perspective that is based on Bernard Suits's theory: in gameplay, the player attempts to reach a goal voluntarily under unnecessary limitations or constraints. According to Nguyen, this kind of gameplay is structured upon aesthetics of striving, because it is engaged for the sake of aesthetic experience invoked by the player's struggle. Most importantly, Nguyen states that the artistic medium of such games is agency, crafted by the

developers into particular temporary forms, through which players can explore the multitide of different agencies. The notion of agency is crucial to games, and in my view, digital games produce a specific kind of technologically enabled agency that is part of the ongoing (re)presentation of the subject.

Games that are structured around striving must combine free play with fixed rules, because rules and limitations make action meaningful by setting up a difference between potential events (Juul 2005, 18–19). By setting up a relevant framework for play, rules create freedom (King and Krzywinska 2006, 17). However, the distinction between play and game is language-dependent: in the English language, *play* and *game* can be distinguished from each other, whereas in the French and German languages, there is no clear distinction, as the words *jeu* and *Spiel* can imply both senses. In English translations of German and French texts, the ambiguous character of the word can be lost. Juul (2005, 29) clarifies the ambiguity of the term play with the distinction of free-form and rule-based play. Roger Caillois (2001) approached the distinction between play and game with the terms *paidia* and *ludus*. *Paidia* is spontaneous play without explicit rules or structured forms, *ludus* is *paidia* within a system of rules, which add a level of difficulty to the play (King and Krzywinska 2006, 10). It is important to notice that digital games are always rule-based because a computer cannot function without predetermined instructions. While free-form play is possible within digital environments, it happens always through the restrictions of the computation. I will use the term gameplay to denote rule-based play, in which the player competes against obstacles to reach a predetermined goal. Hence, games with no clear goals, such as sandbox games, are not within the scope of my viewpoint, unless the player sets up a goal that requires a relevant amount of effort to be achieved.

My viewpoint is limited to games that have distinct goals and obstacles. In his book *The Art of Failure* (2013), Juul argues that gameplay is constituted by a process of failure and repetition. I do not claim that games which do not feature failure are not games, but such games do not fit into my understanding of gameplay. Luckily, many games are structured around failure because players tend to seek challenge from playing. Moreover, the notions of obstacle and failure are not univocal. For example, *Dear Esther* (The Chinese Room 2012), can be considered a game that features no struggle. It has the goal of triggering narrative sequences by traversing an uninhabited island, and when the final location is visited, the game ends. However, the player can fail, for instance by walking into the water and drowning, in which case the character is returned to the location that preceded the action. It is also possible to not be able to navigate the island and fail to find the locations that trigger the narrative further, even though this is improbable. The player's movement is restricted by the island's geography and hence the gameplay mechanics involve following paths in order to arrive at the desired locations. Hence, even games that are not difficult can be considered in terms of goals and obstacles; their level of difficulty just happens to be extremely low.

I consider digital gameplay the player's struggle with the computational system that is both a machinic otherness and a work produced by the developer. The game as an artefact combines the autonomous functioning of the machine with the developer's work, e.g. the code, whereas gameplay combines the computer's and the player's actions and produces the subject of gamic action. The figure of the developer as a master to which the player is an apprentice is inspected in sections 3.3.2 and 4.1.1, but here the developer must be understood as an implied author that is embodied in the algorithmic system. Moreover, because games often involve multiple developers, the figure of the developer is always a fictional product that is based on the player's interpretation of the game's behaviour. Considering the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of mimesis, the subject is always produced by a technical supplement, *écriture*, which can take infinitely multiple forms. If gameplay is viewed from this angle as production of the subject of gamic action, it must be understood as subset of the wider field of mimesis. While accepting that gameplay and digitality are not privileged sites for mimesis, I argue that the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of mimesis fits exceptionally well to digital gameplay. Extending Lacoue-Labarthe's thought towards this area that is foreign to his texts is the main task of this dissertation. Because games and digitality fit together exceptionally, I will focus on digital games. This does not mean that non-digital games would considerably differ from the Lacoue-Labarthe-based conception of gamic mimesis but focusing on digitality opens a possibility for understanding the experience of using computers in general from a Lacoue-Labarthean basis. The next part of this chapter will focus on the notions of digitality and computation.

3.1.2 Digital Computation

If agency is the artistic medium of games of striving, the medium of similar digital games is the combination of the player's and the computer's agency. Here I will explicate my understanding of digitality by following certain characterizations of computation. The functioning of computers will be inspected on a schematic level, as computer science is not within the scope of this research. Nevertheless, certain characteristics of computers must be emphasized on a general level in order to understand what the digital means in digital games and why it is significant in relation to games in general and to Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of gameplay. How computers function is naturally a complex topic – the present elaboration provides only a general idea of certain notions that I use to refer to the computational basis of digital games, most importantly computation, procedurality and algorithm. These terms are inspected from a philosophical perspective and in relation to the conception of digital gameplay.

As Juul (2005, 5) notes, computers and games fit together exceptionally well: the processing power of the computer allows complex implementations of rule-based systems with greater efficiency than other applications, such as human-controlled play. The computer can process the interaction between a player's actions and a complex set of rules faster than any human and determine the outcome of the game based on events that are not apparent to the player (Juul

2005, 53–54). Naturally, another player, or a game master of a role-playing game, can also determine the outcome of a game through information that is unavailable to the other players. However, the computational medium allows the developer fully to control the amount of information that is hidden from the player. In digital gameplay, the player confronts an autonomously functioning machine, which is completely different situation than, for instance, a badminton match with a human opponent or a tabletop role-playing session. While the laws of physics and especially the mind of another human being might be even more difficult to grasp than the algorithmic basis of the computational process, the experience of digital gameplay differs considerably from other kinds of play. Digital games have also the distinct ability to render an interactive audiovisual representation, which creates an impression of embodied presence and agency within a fictional setting.

Juul's most fruitful description of games is his characterization of the rules of a game in terms of a state machine. He regards a game as a machine that has an initial state that can be influenced by a player's input. The game changes its state according to received input and produces the resulting state as an output. When the state of the game changes, it responds differently to the same inputs. (Juul 2005, 60.) Computers store game states in their memory and represent them on the screen. This technology enables the representation of immensely complex state machines. Even the use of a graphical user interface of a modern operating system requires multiple layers of code and numerous computational operations to function. The computer's efficiency to handle instructions and to respond to the user's input makes it a perfect platform for complex rule-based systems. While gameplay is not a simple process of input and output but defined by both the player's and computer's actions, Juul's description is an adequate characterization of the computer's functioning as a machine.

The functioning of a computer is based on computation that is performed by its central processing unit, with the aid of other components, such as random-access memory and data storage. It processes arithmetic and logical operations, whose instructions are fetched from the computer's memory, and produces an output based on the received input. Computers do not function as linear pathways but as engines that carry complex and contingent behaviours (Murray 1997, 72). The independent functioning of singular units was an important turning point in the development of computers: early computers were reliant on the physical structure of their segments and were only able to perform computations based on the linear arrangement of their physical parts. Today's computers are not reliant on complex physical structures and can reuse and execute their programs by programmatic need. Common instruction sets can be stored in digital libraries, usable to multiple programs. The digital storage of program instructions and even programs themselves has allowed a non-linear and iterative functioning of the code, which has enabled the independent functioning of singular computational operations. This kind of system is not a

stable structure but formed through the actualization of different functions (Bogost 2006, 25–26).[79]

A digital game is written as code, a programming language (or multiple different programming languages) that gives the computer instructions of how to function. Understanding the code is not relevant to players, because they control the game through its graphical user interface. However, neither does the computer's central processing unit "understand" the language with which the game is programmed, because it can process directly only machine code, a binary format that consists of 0s and 1s. The binary signal corresponds to the voltage applied to a transistor in the physical circuitry of the computer. Hence, ultimately the code affects the flow of electric current through numerous tiny transistors etched on a semiconductor material. At the bottom, this is the computational system with which a player of a digital game interacts. The computer user cannot experience the system as such, only through abstraction into a higher level of code, or in the case of a digital game, through a graphical user interface.

A loader program can be used to translate machine code into a more readable form, such as hexadecimal notation. On top of the machine code is assembly language, which transforms it into an abstracted form that can be used more efficiently for programming. However, today programming is mostly done with different higher-level programming languages, which are then transformed into lower-level code through compilers and interpreters. Higher-level languages use a higher level of abstraction from the machine code, automating lower-level operations and making programming easier and more efficient. Game developers can also utilize pre-written game engines and data libraries to handle specific tasks. Different tools, such as software development kits and application programming interfaces abstract and simplify programming even further. Hence, there are many layers of different formal languages and data registers between the game developer and the bare circuits of the computer. It is possible that a game developer has a profound understanding of lower-level languages, but with the tools available today, this is not necessary for creating a digital game.

In gameplay, the developer is removed from the game itself, and the player acts only with automated scripts that communicate between each other and the computer's hardware. The core action of gameplay occurs in this unseen stage, in which there is no representation, only process. Gamic agency combines the player's action with the acts of this automated system. According to Turkle, the computational specificity of digital games allows them to "reflect the computer within—in their animated graphics, in the rhythm they impose, in the kind of strategic thinking that they require." The innumerable amount of logical instructions "allows the games to become a more perfect expression of the player's actions." Because the action takes place in an abstract, programmed

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[79] Sherry Turkle draws a parallel between the historical development of psychoanalytic theory and artificial intelligence. Both moved away from centralized models, such as drive and logic, towards decentred models of the mind, such as the notion of object-relations and Lacanian criticism of centralized ego in psychoanalysis. In the theory of artificial intelligence, focus shifted to emergence: "the way local interactions among decentralized components can lead to overall patterns" (Turkle 1996, 138).

world, the "physical machine and the physical player do not exist" in the space of the game. (Turkle 2005, 69–70.) A major motivation of Chapter Four is to link the Lacoue-Labarthean notion of *loss of the subject* to the concealed stage of gameplay, where the player's agency is merged with the machine's autonomous functioning.

While programming and playing digital games are very different activities, there are games that attempt to teach the player about the codified foundation of digital games. I will briefly introduce examples to explicate this difference. *Else Heart.Break()* (Erik Svedäng AB, 2015) seems initially a typical adventure game in which the player controls a character in a fictional town, exploring it freely and interacting with other characters and items. The town itself, with its denizens, functions autonomously by following a daily routine. However, as the story proceeds, the player learns that every interactive object in the game, such as computers, doors, keys or soda cans, can be modified with a special programming tool called a "modifier". After this revelation and the acquisition of a modifier, the gameworld expands into infinite possibilities of modification, but only if the player learns the programming language that is required. Luckily, no experience in programming is required, as there are characters that explain the basics and many items already contain code that can be copied or edited for other purposes. For example, if a door is locked, the player can hack into it with the modifier, copy the codified representation of the door's destination into a door that is not locked and then use that door to enter the room behind the locked door. Edible items can be hacked to provide the player different attributes, and the player can even teleport between cyberspace and different locations. *Else Heart.Break()* utilizes a programming language called *Språk* (Swedish for "language"), which was created specifically for that game, but functions similarly to real programming languages, such as BASIC[80]. After discovering the codified sub-layer of the graphical gameworld, the player must learn to use *Språk* to proceed in the game.

Another example of a game that introduces programming is *Human Resource Machine* (Tomorrow Corporation, 2015), a much simpler game, in which the player must create an algorithm that controls the playable character. The game consists of different levels, in which a numerical input is given, and the player must combine simple commands into an algorithm that produces a desired output. When the instruction is executed, the character begins to take numbers from the input queue, process them on a numbered grid according to the player's instructions and then place the result on the output queue. If the output is false, the game interrupts the sequence. For example, the player is asked to triple each number from the input queue and send the result to the outbox. Again, no previous programming knowledge is required as the game begins from simple tasks which then become gradually more complex. *TIS-100* (Zachtronics Industries, 2015) is a similar game, but uses a programming language that bears a direct, albeit simplified resemblance to assembly language.

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[80]   Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code, a programming language that was released in 1964.

The game is supplied with a manual that expains the available commands. Like *Human Resource Machine*, *TIS-100* represents the functioning of the code through its graphical user interface, by highlighting the lines of code that are being executed.

While these games teach the player actual programming skills and simulate the processes that drive digital games, they are not constructed upon the languages they teach. *Else Heart.Break()* is not programmed with *Språk*, which cannot be used to modify the game itself, only its fictional world within predefined restrictions. Similarly, while the instructions used in *Human Resource Machine* and *TIS-100* resemble the operations that can be done with assembly language, they are represented through the gameworld, behind which is the actual programming language(s) with which the games are created. A game that would allow the player to tinker with its proper code would easily become unplayable if the player would not possess adequate skill for its manipulation. Moreover, modifying the code would be a transition from gameplay into modification or development of the game itself – the action would not be any more digital gameplay, but a practice in actual programming. Even though a digital game would teach the player programming skills, its structure as a game necessitates a layer of code that is hidden from the player or not relevant to the experience of gameplay.

I use the term algorithm to denote the numerous instructions that define how the game responds to different actions made by the player. With data structures, they comprise the structure of digital games (see Manovich 2001, 223). Here is a general definition of algorithm:

> An algorithm can be seen as a mathematical recipe, consisting of a finite set of rules to be performed systematically that is an outcome to the solution or an approximation of the solution of a well-formulated problem (Martignon 2015, 219).

Juul (2005, 62–64) quotes Donald Knuth's list of five important features of algorithms: finiteness, definiteness, input, output and effectiveness. According to this list, algorithms consist of a finite number of steps, which are each presicely defined, unambiguous and are rigorously carried out until the algorithm terminates. Algorithms produce one or more outputs based on zero or more inputs. Their operations are performed exactly and in a finite amount of time. The definiteness of an algorithm means that it reacts only to the state of the system and to relevant inputs, but not to anything that is outside of its context. The rules of a digital game are algorithmic, because they are designed to respond to an input systematically. In fact, the description of a game as a state machine means that all games, also non-digital games, can be understood through the notion of algorithm.

A rule of relevance specifies which aspects of the game are relevant to the rule and which have merely decorative value. For instance, in gameworlds that feature buildings, many doors tend to be unusable because there are no interiors into which the player could enter. These kinds of doors exist only for decorative purposes and have no function in terms of the rules of the game. On the contrary,

doors that can be opened have a function of either expanding the player's field of vision into the interior space or transporting the player inside. Through gameplay, the player cannot gain exact understanding of how the game's algorithms are implemented through code. Instead, playing the game develops certain approximated interpretation of the underlying algorithmic process, which the player can use to overcome the game's obstacles. There are digital games that explicitly communicate all their rules to the player through a natural language, but in such cases the game still implements these rules through computation, without demanding the player to be conscious of the details of this process. In a digital game that is presented as a simulated, fictional gameworld, the player is primarily interacting with signs that indicate a function but might not correspond directly to the algorithmic process. These kinds of simulations cannot be learned through a predetermined a set of rules, but through playful exploration. Sherry Turkle uses Claude Lévi-Strauss's notion of *bricolage* to describe interaction with simulations: not systematically structured top-down work, but an improvised, experimental and bottom-up kind of approach, which is comparable rather to playing a musical instrument than using a mechanical tool (Turkle 1996, 61–63).

Colin Cremin (2016, 86) calls the possibility of interaction "a potential to affect or be affected by player-forces, to be acted on directly or through other objects…" He divides such interactive entities into "force-signs" and "sterile-signs", in contrast to "decorative signs" and "striations", which cannot be used in any way. The experimental process trough which the player unfolds the algorithmic functionality of the game is a key constituent of the sense of freedom and agency, even though it incorporates the algorithm into the subject of that agency. However, games vary in this respect – the distinction between rules and freedom can be described through linearity and open-endedness. Cremin goes as far as to claim that games that demand the player to perform a set of predefined reflex actions in a precise sequence are not proper digital games, as they leave no room for improvisation (Cremin 2016, 24, 62–63).

An algorithm is a linear procedure, but when multiple algorithms respond to each other, they form a complex network. A digital game does not force the player to perform an algorithm, because it is constituted by an open network of different algorithms that produce a space for improvised and varied play. From the Lacoue-Labarthean perspective, this means that gamic mimesis embraces the interpretation of mimesis as instability, whereas performing an algorithm corresponds to the totalizing tendency of onto-typology.

Another way to describe how the code affects the gamic structure is Ian Bogost's (2006, 5–8) differentiation between system operations and complex networks; the former are totalizing, stable and linear structures that imply fundamental, permanent and universal rules, whereas the latter are open, consisting of interactions between constantly changing constituents, which Bogost names unit operations. The open system is not absolute and holistic, but a complex result of multitudes. Bogost compares system operations to structuralist tendencies in humanities – Heidegger's *Gestell* is the grasp of

totalizing systems, such as systematic scientific work seeking to quantify and control the world as a standing-reserve. Bogost sees Heidegger's distinction between totalizing structures and *poiesis* as a parallel to his idea of unit-operational systems as a resistant force against structured system operations. In Bogost's view, a unit can mean a variety of things, such as people, genes, electrical appliances, emotions, cultural symbols, experiences, etc. A system can become a unit inside a larger system. Units can also be material manifestations of conceptual structures.

Bogost explains his view by comparing Leibniz to Spinoza – for Leibniz, the universe was a system falling in line according to the divine order, whereas Spinoza thought it a web of shifting attributes and was thus the "more digital thinker". From contemporary philosophy, Bogost finds Alain Badiou's concept of multiplicity and the instantiation of multiplicities closest to the idea of unit operations (Bogost 2006, 8–12). For Bogost, the most important aspect of Badiou's philosophy is the unification of the mathematical presentation with its cultural counterpart, which is essential for the cultural criticism of computational representations. Procedurality is the most important property of digital environments because it "refers to the practice of encapsulating specific real-world behaviours into programmatic representations" and "is a name for the computer's special efficiency for formalizing the configuration and behaviour of various representative elements." Badiou's figure of count-as-one is very close to the idea of unit operations: "an understanding, largely arbitrary, certainly contingent, of a particular situation, compacted and taken as a whole." (Bogost 2006, 13.)

Bogost separates unit operations from Espen Aarseth's (1997) notion of cybertext because it risks becoming too close with system operations, which construct certain ontological domains for certain types of texts. Instead, unit operations can be observed at work in any cultural artefact or portion of it, although they are most suitable for explaining digital games (Bogost 2006, 14). Bogost advocates for a general means to inspect and criticize art, a theory of how art functions from a certain perspective, which allows a better understanding of digital games than other models. However, he does not think unit operations as being necessary for narrative production or that works of art could be reduced to configuration. With the notion of unit operations, Bogost attempts to create a general understanding of the functioning of art that would also be useful for investigating computational media.

This viewpoint is inspired by the problem of universals, which Bogost interprets as abstraction (Bogost 2006, 21–23). Basing his insights to poststructuralist literary theory, he elaborates the difference between system and unit operations: "particular uses of signs (parole) are unit operations" and "broader flows of signification (langue) are system operations" (Bogost 2006, 23). Totalizing systems correspond to a structuralist tendency to impose all-encompassing rules and stable structures. Even though poststructuralism aimed at the destabilization of systems and emphasized the referentiality of unit operations (readings), Bogost thinks that poststructuralist strategies had become

doctrinal and collapsed back to closed systems. Deconstruction resists this threat, but Bogost claims that even Derrida's writing can become a system of fundamental, ironic instability of play. This seems more of a sidenote because the matter is not inspected further. Bogost stresses that there is no hierarchical tension between unit operations and system operations, because "programs that deploy themselves via unit operations still must vigilantly encourage trespass over their borders" (Bogost 2006, 25).

Even though a unit is a singular instance of meaning, it is always part of a multitude of different and constantly changing units. Bogost's viewpoint is very close to Lacoue-Labarthe – the endless cycling of roles through mimesis could be interpreted as unit operations, whereas system operations would correspond to onto-typological mass identification and stagnated figural models. Because a computer is capable of encapsulating game rules into specific procedures, it can be used to create complex open-ended systems that function as an interaction between independently behaving units. A game can elaborate its rules to the player but the way these rules are implemented inside the computer is always concealed from the player because a human does not have the ability to understand what happens inside the machine. On the surface is the represented a world that functions according to pre-given rules, a space to which the player can step into by playing the game.

By compressing complex rule-systems into codified algorithmic structures that comprise an autonomously functioning, open-ended and decentralized network, digital games enable players to experiment with different kinds of actions within a highly responsive and clearly demarcated environment without the need to pay attention to the complexity of its underlying systems. This results from the computer's ability to process complex data much faster that any human is capable of (see Shinkle 2012, 99). When using a digital computer, it is impossible to understand what really happens inside the processor, whose operations can be grasped only on a schematic level, or through a recorded state of its workings, which can be a considerable effort. The presence of the computer process is impossible to apprehend as such, because the computer is useable only through its operating system, which represents the results of the computer's calculations in an intelligible and abstracted from. Many parts of the underlying process itself are even irrelevant to the user in regard to the desired output. The purpose of this view is not to mystify computation in any way but to highlight the impact of the computational medium to games. Naturally, also non-digital games are guided by many processes that the player cannot conceive during gameplay. For example, in badminton, the laws of classical mechanics that affect the trajectory of the shuttlecock are out of reach to the player, as it is impossible to calculate its movement precisely in the midst of intense gameplay. The player's actions are based more on tacit knowledge than detailed insight about the laws of physics. Similarly, the opponent's mind, behaviour and decisions are fundamentally out of reach to the other player and not even theoretically calculable as the laws of physics are.

The being-out-of-reach of the ground of all kind of interaction is an ontological and epistemological problem that concerns the nature of reality, knowledge and the human mind itself. Digital gameplay does not differ from the general human condition, which is always characterized by the finitude of knowledge. My emphasis on digitality explores its relation to Lacoue-Labarthe's investigation of mimesis, because digital technology and computational algorithms play a prominent role in today's societies. Digital games are characterized by the relation between a concealed procedural system and an interactive representational surface in a way that reflects the general condition of being-in-the-world. While the principles of the computational medium are ultimately more comprehensible than the phenomena of the physical world or subjective intentionality – because in theory, the code can be completely deciphered and understood – it can also compress the experience of the unknowability of the essence of nature and the other into an artefact that is accessible though the mode of play.

According to Turkle, the terms used to describe computers and the human mind have been in exchange from the beginning of computer culture – she claims that this is not merely a manner of speaking but carries the implicit thought of similarity between processes that happen in both people and machines (Turkle 2005, 22). Hence, the question concerning artificial intelligence is "…not whether machines will ever think like people, but whether people have always thought like machines" (Turkle 2005, 28–29). Putting aside the questions concerning artificial intelligence and the nature of the human mind, Turkle's suggestion that computers and the human mind are experienced similarly is interesting from the perspective of how digital gameplay is experienced. While the self, as well as others, can in the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation be contacted only through mimesis, which inevitably distorts the appearance of its proper being, the computer process can be revealed, at least to the level of obtainable knowledge about the physical world. As a mundane object of everyday life, the computer is merely a technological artefact that can be used effectively without understanding the principles of its functioning. This applies to various kinds of devices and tools, even though today many of them contain computer chips. However, a computer program has a distinct quality of autonomous functioning, which reflects both its machinic nature and the thought of its developer. This feature becomes emphasized in digital games, which are not tools but interactive systems that deliberately resist the player's effort to use them. Digital gameplay brings forth the mimetic relation to others through the otherness of the machine – I return to this theme especially in section 4.1, although it constitutes one of the main threads of the whole Chapter Four.

My view on gameplay is focused on gamic action as unconscious confrontation with the procedural nature of the computer. Digital gameplay differs from other forms of human-computer interaction by emphasizing an antagonistic relation between the player and the game, which manifests both the machine and the developer implied by the code. However, the gamic system cannot be interacted with without it being represented through an interface. In

Lacoue-Labarthean terms, gameplay as interaction with a rule-based system that is structured around a predetermined goal and limitations to the means through which it can be achieved, corresponds to the active production of the subject as a subject of writing. The subject of gamic action can appear only through the act of playing, through which it becomes contaminated by mimesis and supplements its proper essence through the appearance of the game's interface, in which the player's and computer's actions are already merged into gamic agency. The being-out-of-reach of the computational ground of digital gameplay corresponds to the subject's inability to partake in its own birth; the subject of gamic action is always already constituted through the algorithm before its appearance on the screen. While the player's and the computer's actions supplement each other reciprocally, as both are needed for producing gamic agency, the gamic system sets up the framework within which the action can occur and hence corresponds to the voices of others that write, or program the subject prior to its appearance. In the next part of this chapter, I explore the relation between the game's appearance and its procedural functionality by focusing on the notions pertaining to the figural surface of gamic action.

3.2 The Visible Appearance

In Lacoue-Labarthe's view, the subject can come into being only as an appearance, unstable image or fiction, which is copied from others and conceals the underlying lack of originality and proper essence. In digital gameplay, the subject is produced as the subject of gamic agency, which is constituted by the actions of both the player and the machine. This subject appears on the representational space of the game, its visible appearance on the screen, through which gamic action and its algorithmic basis unfolds to the player. However, because mimesis itself is always unreachable to the subject, the process of gamic mimesis, through which the subject is produced by the otherness of the code and the machine, cannot be attained by the player. Hence, the site where gamic mimesis properly occurs, is not the game's visible appearance but the computational process and the system of rules inscribed into the instructions of the code, which are concealed by the visual representation of the game. The level of gameplay that is visible on the screen allows the struggle against obstacles to appear to the player but conceals gamic mimesis as such. (Re)presentation (i.e. fictioning or figuration) is unavoidable because the subject is nothing before being redoubled through mimesis. Similarly, digital gameplay cannot occur at all outside the representational space of the gameworld. If the player would interact directly with the algorithmic system, the action would be called programming the game instead of playing it.

In this part of the research, I will explicate my understanding of the visible appearance of the game and its relation to the algorithmic system beneath it. I also examine how gameplay is experienced by the player as *being-in-the-gameworld*. This will help to understand the difference between the player's

experience of her- or himself as the subject who acts within the gameworld, and the involuntary self-withdrawal brought about by the mimetic relation to the algorithmic system. Rather than defining digital games through the notion of the gameworld, this chapter focuses on the difference between the computational system and the visible appearance of the game and the interdependent relationship between the two. The notion of *being-in-the-gameworld* is directly relatable to Lacoue-Labarthe's notions of figure and fiction, through which the subject gives meaning to its being. However, a closer inspection of the notions of being and appearance in relation to Lacoue-Labarthe's reinterpretation of Heidegger and my conception of digital gameplay is engaged in section 4.4, whereas here I focus on explicating the background of the terms that I use to describe the figural level of digital games.

Johan Huizinga (1955, 8–10) famously described games in terms of the magic circle that is separated from the rest of the world and in which actions do not have the same consequences as outside it. This view has been criticized, for example by Arsenaut and Perron (2009) who suggest thinking about gameplay in terms of a cycle instead of circle and by Bogost (2006, 135) who notes that "players carry subjectivity in and out of the game space." Interpreting gameplay in terms of the Lacoue-Labarthean notion of mimesis entails that gameplay is understood as self-production, whose product replaces the underlying lack of originality with the subject of gamic action. While digital game as a system or a gameworld can be understood as a distinct whole, gameplay itself is an act that is inseparable from the general and ongoing formation of the subject, to which gamic action partakes.

This subchapter is divided into three sections. First, I determine the gameworld through the notions of interface, immersion and simulation. These terms describe how the gameworld enables the player to act within it and how this possibility of action creates a sense of agency. Second, I consider the existential aspect of gameplay with the notion of *being-in-the-gameworld* and its relation to the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of being. Lastly, I elaborate Sherry Turkle's characterization of human-computer-interaction through the notions of opacity and transparency, which exemplify my interpretation of the gameworld as an interface to the automated system beneath it.

3.2.1 Interface as an Immersive Simulation

The term immersive simulation can be used to refer to certain types of games or game design principles. However, I do not use the term according to any established definition – in fact, the notions of immersion and simulation are considered here separately. The term nevertheless captures the types of games that are the primary focus of this research and describe my conception of the game's visible appearance. I consider gameplay as a learning process that, as an experience, does not concern directly the rules but inhabiting the gameworld and learning from the process of play itself (Turkle 1996, 66–70). The computer user has been thought of as being similar to a theatre audience that is unaware of anything extraneous to the action on the stage (see Laurel 1993, 15–18). However,

the computer user has more influence on the unfolding action – with computers, the virtual world comprises a stage which is filled computer-generated and possibly human agents. As in theatre, the technical apparatuses are hidden behind the scenes and from the point of view of the user, there is nothing except the representation.

It is completely possible that a digital game explicitly communicates all its rules to the player through a tutorial or a rulebook – many games explain the player at least part of their mechanics – and that successful gameplay requires the player to study them beforehand. However, the codified form through which those rules are written into the memory of the computer and the procedural nature of their implementation is usually not made explicit. The procedural system is made accessible to the player through the gameworld that functions as an interface – if the game's rules are explained to the player, they are related to the functioning of the gameworld, not the computer's instructions. Viewed from the side of the computer, the relation between the rules and the gameworld is conversely insignificant.

Vella (2015a, 105–106) is critical towards interpreting the gameworld as a surface representation or an interface that makes the underlying system understandable, calling such view "a Platonism of the gameworld." He states that the player's act of perception, which produces the experience of the gameworld and the things in it as a lifeworld, is primary, and that the understanding of the game as a system is only a part of that phenomenology. However, Vella objects to opposing the game system to the gameworld and suggests that they are "complementary interpretative frames that can be brought to bear upon the player's gameworld experience" (Vella 2015a, 114). From the Lacoue-Labarthean understanding of the notion of representation, the gameworld can be considered as a representation of the underlying rule-system, because the notion of representation itself is understood in terms of deferral and dissimulation, whose relation to Platonism is at the core of Lacoue-Labarthe's writing. In section 4.4 I will focus on the paradoxical exchange between truth and appearance and elaborate the difficult relationship between the gameworld and the rule-system through Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of the sublime.

The player's interaction with the rules is represented through a gameworld, by which I refer to the fictional setting on the screen where gameplay takes place. The term must be understood broadly as any kind of figural presentation: a (digital) chessboard comprises a gameworld just as much as the digital environment of a three-dimensional digital role-playing game. Digital gameworlds differ from other fictional worlds and the interfaces of non-digital games in that they function according to the automated computational system, which responds to the user's input by changes within the gameworld. The gameworld overlaps with such terms as gamescape, simulation, and virtual or digital environment. I consider it as an interface through which the player operates the computer. Generally, an interface refers to a point of interaction between two entities, but a more specific description can become difficult – the definition of an interface between a human and a computer must face questions

concerning the concepts reality and representation (Laurel 1993, 14). By viewing the gameworld as an interface to the algorithmic system, it can be understood primarily as a representation of the functionality of that system. When an interface functions seamlessly, it brings technology and humanity into proximity, humanizing the former and articulating the latter through the machine (Shinkle 2012, 103).

The following pages will inspect how the gameworld creates a sense of immersion by giving the player agency to act within that world. This investigation emphasizes the difference between the experience of gameplay and understanding the game through its programming or rule-system. This thematization also narrows the set of games to which my argument is applied into such games that present a navigable space. However, even *Minesweeper* or *Tetris* represent a space, and even though there is no playable character that could navigate it, the player's actions nevertheless occur within the boundaries of that given space. For example, the puzzles in *TIS-100* are purely abstract but the game represents them through a space that consists of a limited number of spatially arranged interconnected nodes, each of which can store 15 lines of code. The boundaries created by this arrangement affect directly the available solutions for the puzzles and even though the game could rely on a purely textual interface, this would render it very difficult to understand.[81]

Digital environments are not characterized by what they present, but by how the player can act within them. A natural way to examine the possibilities to act within an environment is spatiality. According to Aarseth (2001, 154), digital simulations demand active experimentation instead of observation because they are characterized by spatiality. He distinguishes two viewpoints on the concept of space in digital media: In a strict sense, based on Kant, digital environments should be considered as places or objects instead of spaces because space is what determines human experience in general and cannot be reproduced as a distinct parallel space. Following Henri Lefebre, Aarseth suggests that space can also be considered as a multifaceted notion that can refer to natural, abstract, social, represented or representational space. He focuses on the distinction between represented space, which refers to a formal system of relations, and representational space, which is symbolic and aesthetic and combines with the strict understanding of space. By this operation he defines spatial representation in digital games as unspatial, symbolic and rule-based representation of space. Gameplay by automatic rules is made possible by the fact that it does not occur in real space. (Aarseth 2001, 162–163.) Aarseth does not focus on the status of digitized space as a space for action and only states that digital games are "allegories of space" that comment on "the ultimate impossibility of representing real space" (Aarseth 2001, 168). The remark that space cannot be represented is important because it allows us to detach from the idea that digital games represent a fictional or simulated reality. This of course does not mean that digital

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[81]   Spatial arrangement is in fact important also for actual programming, in which in-dentation is used to indicate the structure of the program and consequently make the code more readable.

games would not represent worlds, but my focus is on the representation of action, which I interpret in terms of mimesis.

The emphasis on spatiality means that navigation in space is an essential element of gameplay. Manovich (2001, 245) notes that in many games "narrative and time itself are equated with movement through 3D space." Digital games are driven by action and exploration, rather than narration and description (Manovich 2001, 245; 247). Similarly, Murray describes digital environments as procedural, participatory, spatial and encyclopaedic. The first two comprise interactivity, the other two immersion by making the world explorable and extensive (Murray 1997, 71). Interactivity rises from the participatory organization of procedural environments which are responsive to the user's input. An essential property of digital representation is its ability to render responsive behaviours through code (Murray 1997, 74). Myrray emphasizes that navigation characterizes the spatiality of digital environments as an interactive process – instead of the space in itself, the experience of using interactive objects is essential for creating a feeling of being part of the fictional world (Murray 1997, 79–80, 112). The player is immersed in the gameworld through its interactivity, which represents the underlying system of obstacles and means to overcome them.

While criticizing Murray's view of immersion for undertheorization, Vella (2015a, 151) notes that the notion of immersion provides two insights to understanding the sense of being-in-the-gameworld: "a sensory engagement with the gameworld as world, and a capacity to take action upon the objects of the gameworld." Hence, immersion emphasizes the possibility to take action (Vella 2015a, 160). In this way, immersion in the gameworld is fundamentally connected to interaction and agency, especially through spatial representation and negotiation (Aarseth 2001, King & Krzywinska 2006, 76–77). Spatial exploration is closely connected to the sense of freedom: a dialectic between spatial freedom and restricted movement can be an effective way to produce a sensation of oscillation between control and its loss, creating an impression of agency (King & Krzywinska 2006, 90).

A game provokes the player to give life to the objects in the gameworld and creates a feedback loop that encourages more engagement (Murray 1997, 110). According to Murray, the computer provides a stage for the creation of participatory theatre and mechanics of performance, which deepen the fantasy and create an immersive trance (Murray 1997, 125). The conventions of participation, game mechanics and a physical controller, by which the player's self is embodied in the game world, comprise a fourth wall of the virtual theatre, which ensures that the player is partly kept outside the world so that his emotions remain at a "comfortable" level and arousal of the enticing object of the imaginary world can be regulated (Murray 1997, 119). From the Lacoue-Labarthean point of view, the player's self cannot be embodied in the gameworld in a way that involves simultaneously being kept outside it. Interactivity might deepen the immersion to the fiction, but immersion does not distinguish games from the experience of any kind of fictional media. Rather than being embodied

in the fictional world of the game, the player's self is deformed through the interaction with the algorithmic system and endlessly modulated by combining the player's and the computer's agency through different actualizations of gameplay. I will return to the problematic of simultaneous immersion and distancing in section 4.2.

Juul criticizes Murray for emphasizing immersion because the player can also be absorbed in the act of playing as a real-world activity instead of being transported to a fictional world (Juul 2005, 190). However, the experience of the game's fiction affects the experience of its rules. Juul remarks that formally equivalent games can be experienced differently if the representation of their rules is altered. He demonstrated this by translating Tic-tac-toe to mathematical calculations; when the Xs and Os in the grid are translated to numbers, the experience of the game shifts from the spatial to the mathematical, though the core of the rules remain the same (Juul 2005, 51–52). This shift affects how the player interacts with the rules because the skill used to overcome the difficulty of the game is considerably different as a mathematical than a spatial challenge. "Rules and fiction compete for the player's attention", claims Juul (2005, 121).

Juul's account on digital games is focused on the differentiation between the real and the fictional. "A statement about a fictional character in a game is half-real, since it may describe both a fictional entity and the actual rules of a game," says Juul (2005, 163). Rules and fiction not only compete for attention, but complement each other because fiction makes the player understand the rules. Gameplay is interaction with real rules, controlled through fictional entities (Juul 2005, 167–168). Both fiction and rules shape the player's experience of the game, but Juul sees the fictional world as subordinate to the rules; it can only help the player make assumptions about the rules, while rules themselves also contribute to the presentation of the fictional world: even if the rules are initially hidden from the player and must be deduced by perceiving the gameworld, they are not necessarily dependent on that world (Juul 2005, 177). Juul's strict distinction between rules and fiction is a way to differentiate ludological game studies from a narratological perspective, but also to mitigate the distinction by showing how both aspects are relevant for understanding gameplay.

However, on the basis of Lacoue-Labarthe's argument, the distinction is not absolute because the subject is always produced as a fiction and has no real essence beyond its representation. Regarding gameplay, the "reality" of the rules refers to the determinateness of the computer and the restrictions intrinsic to the gamic structure, driven by logical operations. What is "real" in the sense of physical reality is the determinateness of the computer, in which the rules of the game are inscribed. To the experience of gameplay, this reality is completely out of reach, hidden behind the representation through which the game can be played.

Hence, a digital game is experienceable only as a fiction that replaces the truth of the game and necessarily veils it with representation that makes possible that there is a digital game instead of a myriad of incomprehensible machine instructions. This relation between truth and appearance is essential to Lacoue-

Labarthe's conception of the subject and will guide the argumentation in Chapter Four. While the essence of the self might be properly out of reach, the essence of a digital game is in fact accessible with an adequate amount of insight about the functioning of computers. This results from the artifactuality of games and contributes to their engrossing nature because they give the player a promise of control and mastery.[82] However, the procedural ground of the game can never be fully revealed by interacting only with the representation.

Juul describes fictional worlds as simulations that employ simplification and stylization as expressive devices implementing specific stylized concepts of real-world activities (Juul 2005, 171–172). This does not differ from the conventions of visual arts or literature, which must always rely on schematization. Representation never coincides with reality because it requires a technical supplement. Juul notes that games metaphorically substitute real-world activities with something different; "in games that emphasize a fictional world, there has to be a metaphorical substitution between the player's real-world activity and the in-game activity performed" (Juul 2005, 172–173). A small click of the mouse transforms us to any action imaginable, from picking up an object to firing a gun, an event determined by the game's rules and produced in a fictional space.[83]

My viewpoint does not concern the status of the gameworld as a simulation of real-world action, but as a simulation of agency in an abstract form, which is mediated through the visual appearance of the game. Through gameworld, digital games simulate action itself – not the action of e.g. firing a gun, but agency as the mode of the player's existence. Simultaneously, the gameworld simulates the algorithmic system that makes it functional and enables the player's gamic agency in the first place by substituting the algorithm with fictional entities, for example transforming the code that defines for the computer the rules pertaining to the functioning of a gun into audiovisual output. Immersive narratives, fictional worlds or real-world representations can undeniably be a crucial reason to play games, but in regard to the subject, gamic agency as a combination of the player's and the computer's actions is primary. I will return this viewpoint in section 3.3.

I shall consider the notion of simulation further with Ian Bogost, who argues that the meaning of a digital game stems from the procedural functioning of a codified system of rules and the player's action through them (Bogost 2006, 86). Gameplay as the process through which the player grasps the rules of the game

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[82]   According to Turkle, this seductive quality cause people to become infatuated with control – such relationship with a computer lacks the mutuality and complexity of human relations and will close the possibilities for personal development (Turkle 2005, 24). This claim implies that direct communication with other humans is in some way more authentic than confronting others through technology. If the other can be contacted only through mimesis, a technical supplement, then human-computer in-teraction exemplifies this condition. Instead of replacing authenticity with artificial-ity, digital games can illuminate the mimetic and supplementary relation to others.

[83]   Möring (2013, 177) points out that many characterizations of games as metaphors, in-cluding Juul, do not define the notion of metaphor clearly enough and end up con-flating the meanings of metaphor and simulation.

indicates the embodiment of the computational structure in the player's understanding (Bogost 2006, 99). The code enters the material world through the player's faculty of reason: on the one end of a digital game is the hardware of the computer coupled with binary logic, which embodies determinate physical reality with an uncanny quality of calculation and exactitude. One the other is the player's understanding of the rule-system, interpreted through its representation in a fictional space. Between them is the code, or layers of different programming languages, of which the part pertaining to the game's rules is created by the developer. In this way, the abstract language of programming is left to function autonomously, powered by the materiality of the computer and the materiality of the player's existence.

Gameworlds are incomplete because all information concerning the world cannot be specified. Thus, the player fills in the gaps according to his knowledge about the actual world and genre conventions (Juul 2005, 122–123). It is possible that the gameworld cannot explain certain events in the game, which seem inconsistent with the fiction. Juul's example is extra lives in a situation where the game does not provide any narrative explanation for them, and the narrative genre contains no clues of such magical reincarnation. These kinds of inconsistencies can be only explained by referring to the rules, infers Juul (2005, 130). A hallmark of connecting game mechanics to the fictional world of the game is *Dark Souls*, in which the world has been overtaken by a curse that prevents most people from dying. Upon death, the playable character is revived at a predetermined point, as are most enemies. Moreover, the game emphasizes the curse of undying by its notorious difficulty, which usually results in many defeats and retries during its peculiar story that is centred around the theme of death and rebirth.

A digital representation cannot construct all features of visual reality – as Manovich (2001, 15–16) notes, different interfaces can be taken as representations which organize data according to "particular models of the world and the human subject". According to Bogost, the imperfection and subjectivity of simulations can be faced with resignation, blindly accepting its model and refusing to consider its implications, or with denial, rejecting simulations altogether because of their simplifying character (Bogost 2006, 107). Bogost defines simulation as a "gap between the rule-based representation of a source system and a user's subjectivity" and relates it to the problem of meaning making in general, to the difference between sign and meaning. He interprets Derrida's notion of archive fever, the obsession to return to stable remembrance of the origin (and the fear of it, because archivization always entails forgetting through inclusion and exclusion), to the subjectivity of simulation (Bogost 2006, 108). Derrida thought that the work must be exposed to its possible destruction in order to preserve it in the archive; Bogost suggests that in a similar vein simulation fever can be overcome by learning how simulations are constructed through exclusion (Bogost 2006, 109). The crisis of simulation fever is the crux of the experience where unit operations meet subjectivity and the "mental synthesis" performed

by the player fills the gap between subjectivity and the game process (Bogost 2006, 129; 2007, 43).

Bogost's account on simulations is close to Lacoue-Labarthe's problem of self-presentation, which focuses on the gap between the proper self and its loss through (re)presentation, which dissimulates and dissimilates the subject from itself. However, Bogost's claims are problematic in relation to digital games in general because they are focused on simulation games that actually attempt to represent a source system and make this their central feature. Bogost's main example here is city-building simulation, which is a great example of the problems of simulation though disregards the fact that all games do not imitate existing systems, but rather create their own. Nevertheless, through his critique of simulations, Bogost offers a crucial insight: rule-based systems and programming are always subjective and carry values and presuppositions. This indicates that the player not only interprets the game but is formed by it. A simulation is not just a gap between representation and the player's subjectivity, but a gap between the player's subjectivity and its representation. While Bogost's view focuses on subjectivity, it does not problematize the subject itself, which is probably a result of his focus on game criticism instead of the formation of the subject.

A digital game appears as a gameworld, a figural surface that represents the functionality of the algorithmic system. The gameworld is the representational space of the game, but instead of a simulation of a physical space, its spatiality is related to functionality – immersion in the gameworld is a result of interactivity and the possibility to take meaningful action, rather than a realistic representation of an actual space. As an interface to the automated system, the gameworld is necessary for a player to play the game and experience it. In the next part, I consider the notion of *being-in-the-gameworld*, which emphasizes digital gameplay as a mode of existence in which the player's being as a subject is produced through technologically supplemented agency.

3.2.2 Being-in-the-Gameworld

Given that *being-in-the-world* is a crucial term in Heidegger's philosophy, which constitutes perhaps the most important subtext for Lacoue-Labarthe's writing, the notion of *being-in-the-gameworld* should be highly relevant to the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of gameplay. However, Heideggerian terminology has been continued by various approaches, whose contexts differ from Lacoue-Labarthe's approach. Hence, a relevant connection between the previous usage of the Heideggerian lexicon in game studies and Lacoue-Labarthe's writing should not be taken for granted. The notion of *being-in-the-gameworld* is nevertheless a relevant description of how a digital gameplay appears to the player and represents gamic action. For example, Olli Leino characterizes the gameworld as an extension of the player's facticity, a term that Jean-Paul Sartre used to refer to the aspects that delineate human freedom, which allows the player to make themselves and realize their existence (Leino 2010, 220).Vella (2015a, 56) notes that through *being-in-the-gameworld*, the player's subjective

being as *being-in-the-world* is revealed. Because the player enacts the *being-in-the-gameworld,* the act of playing presents the player's existential condition. Vella focuses heavily on the notion of the gameworld and embodiment through the playable character. Proceeding from the notion of mimetic subject formation requires a slightly different interpretation of *being-in-the-gameworld*, in which the emphasis is not on the figure itself, but on the functionality of the figural representation as a necessary but distorting supplementation to both the player's subjectivity and the computer process.

Vella claims that the gameworld, as a textual heterocosm, is perceived as actual through a process he calls the recentering of consciousness. It establishes the "ludic subject-position" that belongs to the gameworld and perceives it as meaningful. Vella believes that the ludic subject is manifested and embodied in the playable figure, which the player identifies as an "I" within the gameworld. (Vella 2015a, 159.) He focuses on such games that "establish a world within which the player is located as an entity, or figure, belonging to that world" (Vella 2015a, 11–12). As my approach is focused on the computer process and the pre-figural basis of subjectivity, the focus on the playable figure renders Vella's notion of the ludic subject[84] problematic in relation to my understanding of the subject of gamic agency. However, Lacoue-Labarthe's distrust against the figure does not mean that it should be disregarded – on the contrary, its grasp on the subject must be considered. The figure does not alone explain the functioning of mimesis and for this reason it is important to investigate the locus of gameplay outside the representational order of the gameworld.

Juul (2001) has argued that the player is "both an empirical subject outside the game *and* undertakes a role inside the game." Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska connect this statement to the notions of *being-in-the-world* and *being-in-the-gameworld*. This latter being differs from other forms of art and culture because it involves a flickering between *as* and *as if*; the actual and the virtual. King and Krzywinska suggest that this kind of experience can be achieved especially in virtual reality but suspect that "[t]he extent to which the same can be said of playing games would seem to depend on how far gameplay activities are physically analogous to their real-world equivalents" (King & Krzywinska 2006, 114). The problem with this view is the emphasis on the content of the activity, which in my view is not as important as the underlying structure of goals and obstacles. All gameplay actions are accomplished by a controller device, which never corresponds to action represented on the screen, unless it simulates the use of that particular controller device the player is using. While different technologies, such as virtual reality headsets, motion sensing input devices and steering wheels can enhance embodiment, they do not alter the core function of

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[84] Vella (2015a, 128) focuses on the player's experiences of the gameworld as a basis for the ludic subject, "…a subjective interiority played out in the course of the player's engagement with the gameworld from the point-of-view of the ludic subject-position." This position emphasizes a difference between the internal experience of the game-as-played and the external experience of the game as an object.

gameplay: interaction with a pre-programmed rule-based system driven by a digital computer.[85]

King and Krzywinska differentiate perceptual immersion in the gameworld as a representation from a psychological immersion in the game itself through the ability to affect it, which can result in embodied presence (King and Krzywinska 2006, 118–119). As Lacoue-Labarthe suggests, there never is anything else than an illusion of presence because the subject can never be truly present to itself. The notion of *being-in-the-world* already contains the idea of *Dasein*'s ek-sistence as an extension outside itself and a critique towards a Cartesian understanding of a subjective self-presence as a focal point to which the world is represented. Through gamic action, the subject writes itself into the gameworld and becomes replaced by the subject of gameplay, which, as a product of the procedural system, always differs from the original agency of the player. However, because the subject is constituted by the lack of its proper origin, the player has no proper agency and gameplay functions similarly to the endless circulation of roles that veil the fundamentally unreachable ground of the self and disappropriate its attempts to present its proper being. Thus, gamic mimesis produces the subject's existence as *being-in-the-gameworld*, which in this respect is completely equal to *being-in-the-world*, as both are necessarily brought forth by mimesis.

The gameworld is not only an interface for the system beneath it, but something that fundamentally affects the experience of a game. Through the requirement to act within the gameworld, games situate the player within it. The player's belonging to the gameworld has been examined especially in games that employ a playable figure through which the player's *being-in-the-world* is embodied as a *being-in-the-gameworld*. My perspective on the experience of games differs from this in that I focus on the notion of gamic action as interaction with the computational process. This interpretation of gameplay does not require a distinct playable figure as it is not focused on the distinction between the player's existence outside and within the game. The subject of gamic action is characterized by its dependence on the computer process, not upon the player's existence as an entity within the gameworld (cf. Vella 2015a, 161). This stance is guided by Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of mimesis as the loss of the subject, which operates prior to visible appearances and works as both the condition and the breakdown of the order of the figure.

3.2.3   Opacity versus Transparency

This subsection concludes the examination of the visible appearance of digital games by discussing the notions of opacity and transparence. Thus far the current chapter has established that digital games are systems of rules driven by digital computation, but interaction with them happens through a figural surface which

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[85]   Embodiment in gameplay has been explored from various pespectives (see e.g. Ash 2013; Kirkpatrick 2011; Nicoll 2016; Shinkle 2008, 2015; Vella 2015a). This discussion is valuable, but not directly related to the Lacoue-Labarthean context and hence I do not explore it further in this research.

creates a sense of agency by enabling the player to act within it and simulating the functioning of the computational system in response to the player's actions. However, these aspects are not equal to each other because the algorithmic basis of the system is hidden from the player. This situation pertains especially to digital games, but is common in all interaction with digital media, which function on the basis of abstract principles that the user is not required to comprehend. As already noted in section 3.1.2, on a more general level this condition pertains to all kinds of interaction due to the nature of reality and limitations of human knowledge. It comports also with Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of the subject as something that can come into being only through mimesis, which supplements the original agency of self-production by the deferral intrinsic to all meaning.

The development of computers has led to increasingly complex simulations and sophisticated systems at the expense of the increased difficulty to understand how they function. In this respect, computation differs from other technologies. For instance, a person can drive a car by using its steering interface without actual knowledge of how the engine functions. Even though a vehicle can be an important part of personal identity, it is completely different from computational systems, whose unit-operational structure can provide a stage for the whole presentation of the self. An automotive engine is used for transportation, but computer programming can dictate how the self is produced in a digital environment. If computational systems define the user's identity, there is a risk that it is formed through automated procedures whose effect on identity goes unnoticed (see Cheney-Lippold 2011). This kind of political concern is not the primary focus of this research, although the Lacoue-Labarthean viewpoint will have inevitable political implications that I regret not being able to explore in detail in this research. To produce an understanding of the opaque nature of the interface as immersive simulation, I will now consider Sherry Turkle's differentiation between the computer as a transparent codified system and an opaque simulated system, which highlights the difference between code, and the graphical representation from the perspective of user experience. Even though Turkle does not emphasize digital games here, her view is valuable for the Lacoue-Labarthean understanding of digital gameplay due to its emphasis on the difference between representation and origin.

According to Turkle, digital technology is not merely a mirror of the mind but enables "a new state of the self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through technology" (Turkle 2011, 16). As interaction with computers traverse everyday life, the subject of writing becomes determined through digital technology. This situation heightens the subject's distance from its production, because even though computational systems are within the reach of human understanding, the design of operating systems and user interfaces favours simulation over transparence. As noted earlier, this is because games and software have become increasingly complex. Turkle claims that while the culture of complex simulated systems has enabled the new sate of self, it has replaced the programming culture that was vibrant in the days of early personal computers: "socially shared activity of computer programming and

hardware tinkering has been displaced by playing games, participation in online chat and blogs, and using applications software out of the box" (Turkle 2005, 5).

Turke describes the early computer culture, which sought an understanding of complex systems at their simplest level, in terms of "the aesthetic of technological transparency" (Turkle 2005, 7–8). In the 1970s and early 1980s, the lack of graphical user interfaces resulted in an experience of contact with the machine itself; personal computers required the use of specific symbolic commands and formal language. According to Turkle, the experience of using a graphical representation is fundamentally different to the use of formal language, which can contribute towards an understanding of the computer as a rule-based machine – in the days of early computers, it was thought that the understanding of the complexity of computers at the elementary level would result in a more empowered relationship, not only with information, but also with politics (Turkle 2005, 8). Today, when the political itself occurs in digital platforms operated by algorithms that are either concealed or incomprehensible to the user, the relations between technology, identity and politics have become even more significant.

A competing view of computer aesthetics emphasized the emergent features of artificial intelligence, according to which simple rules could create, through their reciprocal interaction, complex and unexpected behaviour without the need to address the machine's computational mechanism directly by the user. From the perspective of the player of adigital game, the demand for understanding the system at its simplest level is not reasonable, because the gameplay experience is dependent upon the qualities of the gameworld. The complexity of computers and software has also increased from the days of early computers. In the mid-1990s, the transparency of the machine had changed to "complex simulation worlds of opaque computers" (Turkle 2005, 9). In the 21st century, teaching programming skills shifted to using computers as information appliances through visually represented applications, which can be viewed as a degradation of computer literacy (Turkle 2005, 10–11). The aesthetics of transparency marks the loss of the political aesthetic tied to digital authorship and understanding the functioning of computers at a more detailed level. In a time where digital computers increasingly dictate one's life, the concern of understating their real functioning becomes increasingly political (Turkle 2005, 13). It should be noted that today the need for programming skills has been acknowledged, as merely living in an environment of digital technology does not result in enhanced information skills (see e.g. Kirschner & De Bruyckere 2017). As noted earlier, programming skill is not relevant for the experience of digital gameplay, which occurs on the basis of *being-in-the-gameworld*, and hence embodies the aesthetic of opaque simulations.

Turkle describes the different relations to computers in terms of "modernist culture of calculation" and "postmodernist culture of simulation" (Turkle 1996, 20). For example, in the 1980s, IBM's command-based MS-DOS followed the modern aesthetic by providing a means to dig into the functioning of the system, whereas Apple's Macintosh embraced the postmodern idea of simulation with

its opaque graphical user interface (Turkle 1996, 34–37; 2009, 44). The postmodernist simulation aesthetic has become a standard for operating systems with graphical user interfaces. Turkle claims that as a part of a larger cultural change, simulation has become dominant also in other intellectual domains (Turkle 1996, 41–42). Here modernism refers to the search of origins, mechanisms and structure, whereas postmodernism renounces this attempt and focuses on the world of shifting surfaces. In the latter viewpoint, there is no truth behind the simulation, no grand structure and purpose, but a shifting, fragmentary surface. Turkle emphasizes that in the culture of simulation, "[c]omputers embody postmodern theory and bring it down to earth" (Turkle 1996, 18)[86]. The use of the notions modern and postmodern in this instance is superficial; instead of a difficult discussion of the relation between the two terms, I would like to highlight the notions of transparency and opaqueness, which can be related to Lacoue-Labarthe's thought about veiling and unveiling that was inspected in section 2.1. and will be returned to in section 4.4.

Despite the indefiniteness of the term, Turkle's description of digital computing through her interpretation of the postmodern is interesting in regard to the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of mimesis. According to Turkle, the postmodern did not initially find any object that could represent it in the way physical machinery represented industrial modernity until the creation of personal computing and the Web, which represent the precedence of simulation over the real, surface over depth, and play over seriousness, making the ideas of postmodernism accessible and consumable (Turkle 1996, 44–45). While it would be inaccurate and redundant to define Lacoue-Labarthe's thought as postmodernism[87], his idea about the (de)constitution of the subject shares the qualities that Turkle gathers under the term, especially the emphasis upon simulation, shifting surface and the absence of stable structure. Putting aside the discourse concerning the postmodern, it would seem that computation has interesting connections to the Lacoue-Labarthean text: as decentralized networks of singular units, computational systems embody the ideas of plurality and transience, which can also be found in the conception of subjective identification that was explored in Chapter Two. Through the user experience produced by opaque user interfaces and simulations that conceal the algorithmic system, computers manifest the reciprocal relation between origin and fiction that deprives the subject of its proper essence. This is exemplified by digital games, which cannot be experienced outside the fictional surface that replaces its codified origin. When understood as a struggle to appropriate gamic agency by overcoming the restrictions of the system, digital gameplay corresponds to the Lacoue-Labarthean conception of mimesis as the condition of the subject, in

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[86]   Similar notion is made by Murray, who argues that only computers made it possible to capture and represent the postmodern idea of "life as composed of parallel possibilities" by their ability to process efficiently large amounts of diverse data (Murray 1997, 37–38).

[87]   Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of the subject in terms of fiction has nevertheless been interpreted as a characterization of the postmodern subject (Silverman 2015).

which the self must constantly produce itself by appropriating its presentation from others in order to mask the lack of proper essence.

3.3 Gamic Agency

This is the last part of the characterization of digital gameplay before introducing it directly to Lacoue-Labarthe's texts. While the two previous parts of this chapter focused on the digital gameplay experience as interaction with computational systems, using immersive simulations, *being-in-the-gameworld* and the relation between these aspects, here I will investigate the notion of gamic agency. The subject of gamic agency is produced through the player's and the computer's actions, in which the player's self-presentation is effectuated by the computer process, which enables the functioning of the interactive system in the first place. Because that system is out of reach for the player, gameplay is experienced through the gameworld, which is a figural reprensentation of gamic action. An instance of gameplay is the actualization of the game's system of possibilities. It can be characterized as a performance or a dance (Kirkpatrick 2011, 133–139), improvised and experimental action but also a struggle and a process of learning. Gameplay does not correspond directly to the reception of artworks, such as reading a book or looking at a painting. Even though all appreciation and experience of art and culture can be regarded as an active process, gameplay is more about performance than reception.

The figural surface of the game on the screen, combined with moving image and visual perspective, can suggest adopting a viewpoint from the study of corresponding arts, such as cinema. The fact that many games exhibit a narrative structure might tempt us to examine them also with theories of narration. These approaches are undeniably relevant to approach these dimensions of gaming, but in regard to the subject of gameplay, even though they might touch it, they do not reach what is essential to it. Gameplay is always created in the singular instance of someone playing a game. The situation resembles meaning making as *écriture* in that every iteration of reading adds a link to the chain of repetitions without an origin or an end, even if the reader would be the creator of the text. However, *écriture* simply happens, or is always already there, affecting the subject's attempt to write itself. Gameplay is a more specific interaction and a struggle within a closed system, which the player deliberately engages.

Gamic agency consists of both the player's and the computer's actions. As already noted, agency can be regarded as the artistic medium of games in general. It can also be considered as a general condition of aesthetic experience, but digital games emphasize it through their demand to act within the world they present. As a subject, the player is both the agent of gamic action and the product of this action. Without gameplay, the player would be a subject of some other action, at least the subject of thought and enunciation, or in the Lacoue-Labarthean lexicon the subject of writing, which both produces itself and is produced. Digital

gameplay exemplifies the subject's oscillation between the producer and the product in an unresolvable conflict with the algorithmic system.

Juul defines gameplay as "a consequence of the game rules and the dispositions of the game players" (Juul 2005, 88). Gameplay is something that is not present in the rules and cannot always be predicted by observing only them because it is also based on the player's behaviour, which dictates how the game proceeds (Juul 2005, 83–90). Juul's argument rests upon the fact that human behaviour affects the events in a way that is not predictable by observing only the environment. While the claim seems almost obvious, it helps us to understand the difference between a game and gameplay. As noted later in this chapter, a game without the player's input is a pure machinic process. Gameplay is constitutive to all games because they cannot be experienced without the player's participation through improvisation. Without gameplay, a game is an empty space, pure possibility, at most an automated mechanism. Gameplay combines the player and the machine into a compound subject, which is characterized by the antagonist relation and the struggle for control.

3.3.1　From Interaction to Agency

Agency in digital games is often discussed in terms of interactivity, which is both a useful and a problematic term. Lev Manovich has claimed that in regard to digital media, the concept of interactivity is a tautology, because human-computer interaction is interactive by definition. Computers allow real-time manipulation of the information displayed on the screen; hence an object represented by a computer becomes automatically interactive. He also notes that while it is easy to categorize different interactive structures, to deal theoretically with the user experience of them is a more difficult question. Manovich finds it difficult to distinguish human-computer interaction from the interaction required by art in general, the demand for the user to fill in missing information, maintain and focus attention, or move. (Manovich 2001, 55–56.) He distinguishes physical interaction, such as pressing a button, from psychological interaction, which (especially from cognitivist viewpoint) is required to comprehend any information. He stresses that psychological interaction should not be identified with the objectively existing structures of physical interaction, a confusion that is based on the assumption that mental representations correspond directly to operations with external visual effects. Furthermore, Manovich claims that this assumption is also shared by psychologists from Freud to modern cognitive scientists, formulating their theories of mind in accordance with visual technologies and computer workstations. Manovich relates this kind of externalization of mind, as he calls it, to the demand for standardization in mass society.

This tendency standardizes subjects and the means of their standardization by equating internal mental processes with external visual forms that can be easily manipulated and regulated and made public (Manovich 2001, 57–60). Manovich thinks that the established equivalence between mental functions and physical interactivity means also that when using computers, "we are asked to

follow pre-programmed objectively existing associations." He sees this as a version of Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation, according to which "we are asked to mistake the structure of somebody else's mind for our own." While cinema and fashion ask us to identify with someone else's bodily image, interactive media does the same with mental structure, that is "to follow the mental trajectory of the new media designer" (Manovich 2001, 61). Behind Manovich's critical view on digital media is a societal criticism; he claims that conceptual confusion has led to a troubling societal condition.

King and Krzywinska further note how Althusser's notion of interpellation describes the position of the player as an active participant in the on-screen action. A call-and-response relationship with the participant is much stronger in games than in other media; the game creates a space that can be accessed only from the position of an individualized subject (King & Krzywinska 2006, 197). This does not justify any conclusions about the blurring of the border between reality and simulation because the context of reality and gameplay remain apart (King & Krzywinska 2006, 199–200). A belief that repetitive simulation of an action, such as killing humans, conditions players to commit equivalent actions in reality and overcome moral restraints is seen as a reason for the military using combat simulators; not to teach tactics, but to weaken the constraints that normally apply. King and Krzywinska note that military simulators work in a different context than other games because they are already linked to actual violence by their actual military context – to play a first-person shooter is not to be shaped into the role of a shooter, but to play at that role (King & Krzywinska 2006, 200–201). The notion that the player is interpellated to a narrow range of limits and demands of the game-system under the disguise of freely acting individuals does not take into account the differentiation between *paidia* and *ludus* and the possibility of rule-subverting play (King & Krzywinska 2006, 206). Inconspicuously, the code can be biased, and gamic systems can represent ideals and values. Whether the space of gameplay gives room for improvisation or ends up imposing its structure on the playing subject is a question of mimesis. There can be other ways to approach the problem, but within the context of Lacoue-Labarthe, it culminates in how mimesis is understood: imitation or improvisation.

Brenda Laurel has described human-computer interaction through Aristotelian poetics and Aristotle's four causes: the formal, material, efficient and end cause. In the formal cause, the form of the interaction is "a representation of action with agents that may be either human, computer-based, or a combination of both" (Laurel 1993, 47–48). The material cause consists of digital graphics, sounds and text etc. The efficient cause is the program code. The end causes are functionality and the user's experience of the activity. In the days of early computers, human-computer interaction happened directly with the machine by using physical switches. Later, punch cards replaced direct interaction by offering a mediated transaction. Command-line and menu-oriented interfaces reintroduced direct interaction as a conversation of two distinct parties mediated by the screen. However, conversation is not just linearized turn-taking between the participants, but assumes a vast amount of shared information, a space where

meaning takes place. Laurel says that graphical user interfaces explicitly represent the common ground of interaction. The interface is not only a means for a person and a computer to represent themselves to each other, but a shared context for action. Both the human and the computer are agents, initiators of action. (Laurel 1993, 3–4.) Laurel argues that interactivity is experienced as a feeling of participation and immersion. Digital representation allows the user to act within it, not merely affect it. This participation as an agent within a representation resembles the work of an actor and children's make-believe, says Laurel, adding that our deepest playful instincts and conventions of art provide important insight into the design of interactive systems (Laurel 1993, 20–21).

In human-computer interaction, the action is shaped by both the system and the user. It shifts the Aristotelian conception of dramatic activity as a series of potentialities progressing from possibility and probability towards a necessity into multiple necessities, differing according to the user's choices. This makes human-computer interaction more dynamic than drama, because whereas drama represents a pre-written action, in the digital environment the action itself is modified. (Laurel 1993, 69–73.) Aarseth has criticized Laurel's differentiation between dramatic (enacted) and epic (narrated) games based on the form of game interface and thinks that the dramatist model treats the user as both a dramatic character (agent) and as an audience (Aarseth 1997, 137–138). However, the real user most likely does not behave like a puppet – Aarseth counters Laurel's dictum, according to which the game characters should be treated as characters instead of people, by stating that the players should be regarded as people, not characters (Aarseth 1997, 139–140). Aarseth's criticism against Laurel concerns mainly the imposition of the Aristotelian system and the limitations of artificial intelligence against a human interactor. However, while a human player might not behave as a puppet, games usually employ strategies that precisely discipline the player into preconfigured behaviour with the illusion of agency and freedom of choice. This juxtaposition will be revisited in section 4.2 with Lacoue-Labarthe's investigation of the paradox of acting.

Regardless of whether the player conforms to a pre-programmed structure or has proper imaginative power to shape the action, the sense of agency is essential to the experience of gameplay. As Murray notes, agency means "the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices" (Murray 1997, 126). Digital environments function like a dance: Participation is structured by formulas and rules, which considerably restrict the sense of control – however, the virtual world can be altered by player's actions, which Murray describes as a feeling of being "both the dancer and the caller of the dance", which produces the feeling of agency (Murray 1997, 218; see also Eichner 2014, 108–109). Activity alone does not mean agency because actions should be chosen by the player and their effects should be related to the player's intentions in order to yield agency. By this definition, agency goes beyond participation. Murray credits agency a high status as an aesthetic pleasure that is savoured for its own sake (Murray 1997, 127–129).

The agency of digital games is never the property of the player, who as the subject of gamic agency is ineluctably constituted by the otherness of the developer's rules and the functioning of the procedural system. The computer also plays the game with the goal of defeating the player or at least hindering progression by setting up obstacles and restrictions. At the same time, the acts of the machine are aimed towards developing the player's skill and knowledge about the system beneath the representation. Games provide varying degrees of instructions and facilitation, for example by allowing the player to choose a difficulty setting. There are also games that celebrate the obscurity of their systems and intentionally refuse to explain how they should be played, provoking experimentation but also frustration.

A notorious example is *Dark Souls*, which provides the player a few hints about how to control the character's basic movements and attacks but explains nothing about its versatile gameplay mechanics on a deeper level. For example, the game instructs the player on how to perform an evasive manoeuvre that shortly negates incoming damage but does not reveal that the effectiveness and agility of this action is dependent on certain character attributes and the weight of the character's equipment. This can inhibit progression completely if the player does not happen to try different equipment or seek help from external sources. *Dark Souls* is often regarded as a demanding game, but part of its difficulty stems from the obscurity of its gameplay mechanics. When the player finally succeeds in understanding its systems, the feeling of mastery upon its initial effect of difficulty can be very satisfying. To a degree this structure of failure and learning pertains to all kinds of digital games.

To sum up this discussion, by interaction I refer to the algorithmic functionality of the gameworld, which brings forth, through the impression of agency, being-in-the-gameworld as the player's self-production. However, because the notion of interactivity might be redundant in regard to digital games, I would like to replace it with the notion of action. In digital games, interactivity is a result of the computer's and the player's acts, which together comprise gamic agency. The next part will focus on Alexander Galloway's inspection of gamic action and Colin Cremin's continuation of Galloway's thought with the notions of affect and craft. This will conclude the interpretation of digital gameplay as a production of gamic agency.

3.3.2   Gamic Action as Craft

I will now introduce Alexander Galloway's definition of digital games through the notion of action. This gathers together my understanding of gamic agency as a product of the player's acts within the gameworld, and the machine's acts within the code. According to Galloway, action defines the medium of digital games, because without action, there are only abstract codified rules: the active participation of the player and the machine enable the game to come into being (Galloway 2006, 2). A digital game as an artefact is the static collection of rules written in programming language, whereas gameplay is the enactment of the game by the actions of both the player and the computer. Even though action is

part of any engagement with art, gameplay makes it its primary material. Galloway stresses that gamic action does not refer to a theory of interactivity, or an active audience, preferring to characterize games as action-based instead of interactive. Beyond gestural mimicry of the controller, gamic action has its own grammar, the code:

> Video games create their own grammars of action; the game controller provides the primary physical vocabularies for humans to pantomime these gestural grammars. But beyond the controller, games also have their own grammars of action that emerge through gameplay. These grammars are part of the code. (Galloway 2006, 4.)

To this research, Galloway's most important insight is the differentiation between two actions in digital games: *machine actions*, which are performed by the computer, and *operator actions*, which are performed by the player (Galloway 2006, 5). A second differentiation distinguishes the diegetic space of the game from nondiegetic play elements, which is important for understanding Galloway's argument. The setting of the game, the space in which the actions take place, comprise the game's diegesis. It is common to all games and does not entail a narrative. This corresponds to what I have previously called the gameworld. Nondiegetic elements are crucial to the player's actions but are not part of the diegesis of the game. Game menus, loading screens, health bars and cursors are usually nondiegetic, but can also be embedded in the gameworld. Galloway claims that every game has some kind of diegetic setting, of which the nondiegetic apparatus is external. He emphasizes the importance of nondiegetic acts to gameplay and remarks that in games, diegetic and nondiegetic acts are attempted to be fused together seamlessly. (Galloway 2006, 7–8.) Both operator and machine acts, as well as diegetic and nondiegetic acts, are equal in gameplay, consisting of the structure of Galloway's viewpoint.

Galloway distinguishes four moments of gamic action, namely *pure process*, *subjective algorithm*, *dromenon*, and *play of the structure* (Galloway 2006, 10). Pure process and play of the structure are machine actions; dromenon and subjective algorithm are operator actions. Pure process and dromenon occur within the gameworld; play of the structure and subjective algorithm ar extraneous to it. These differentiations explicate how gameplay combines the player's and the machine's actions into gamic agency, which is represented through the gameworld. I will deviate from the structure of Galloway's presentation by introducing first both types of machine acts before considering operator acts, because this fits better into the differentiation between the visible appearance and the algorithmic system concealed by it.

A *diegetic machine act* is called a *pure process*, which occurs, when a player ceases playing the game, and the game runs by itself. Galloway calls this kind of idling an *ambience act*, in which the game is not paused, but left to its game state. Whereas pressing a pause button puts the game entirely on hold, in an ambience act the player is on hold and the machine can run freely. The ambience act occurs in such game states where the passage of time does not contribute to any important change in the game, as certain gameplay situations cannot be left idling without affecting the game's outcome. Galloway's point is that the

machine has always its own act, "a state of pure process" which runs even if the player leaves. Cinematic acts, in which player input is not required, do not count as ambience acts, because in them the player is not missing, but forgotten: "cinematic interludes are a type of grotesque fetishization of the game itself as machine" (Galloway 2006, 11). An ambience act, on the contrary, has a tension to it because it contains the possibility of action.

Nondiegetic machine acts, i.e. actions performed by the machine outside the diegetic gameworld, comprise the *play of the structure*, which Galloway derives from Derrida's notion of the endless substitution of meaning (see Derrida 1967a, 72–73; 1967b, 423–425). Galloway interprets that for Derrida, play is a deviation from order – he sees this conception of play as being relevant to digital games because nondiegetic machine acts break the differentiation between the outside and the inside of the game by creating a generative agitation (Galloway 2006, 30–31, 34). An example of a nondiegetic machine act is a heads-up display (HUD), which provides visual information related to the rules of the game, such as the character's health, inventory and other attributes, but is extraneous to the representational space of the gameworld. Galloway interprets the HUD in terms of supplementarity because it completes the gameworld through a process of exteriority.[88] Other examples are crashes, freezes and lags, which result from the faulty functioning of the computer and are not embedded in the gameworld.

An essential component to gameplay is the "game over" -act, which, even though often motivated through the gameworld (for example by the death of a playable character), is located to nondiegetic machine acts, because it effectively disables gameplay and suspends the diegesis of the game. Nondiegetic machine acts comprise the flow of gameplay by affecting the player's performance negatively or positively – a very common interplay between enabling and disabling nondiegetic machine acts takes place between "game over" and rebirth (Galloway 2006, 28–31). The act of reviving the character often clearly deviates from the narrative order of the game's diegesis and lets the player continue from a checkpoint or a saved game state. At the same time, revival is essential to many digital games, in which success is met through multiple deaths and retries.

Whereas pausing all actions of the player results in the ambience act, pausing the game is a *nondiegetic operator act*, which negates all action of both the player and the machine. In addition, managing the game's settings, using cheat codes and hacking the game fall into this category. These *configuration acts* are operated from the outside of the gameworld and engaged by the player. However, a more important nondiegetic operator act is a configuration act as the site of gameplay. Such games as resource management simulators, and real-time strategy and turn-based games often utilize interfaces and menus that are not embedded in the gameworld but consist the primary gameplay mechanic. (Galloway 2006, 12–14.) Galloway suggests that nondiegetic operator acts are "an allegory for the algorithmic structure of today's informatic culture" (Galloway

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[88] The HUD can of course be part of the gameworld, for example the fictional HUD in *Half-Life* (Valve 1998), which, as a part of the survival suit of the protagonist, is a diegetic element (Tavinor 2009, 75).

2006, 17). He calls this phenomenon a *subjective algorithm*, which means "the action experience of structuring subjective play, of working with rules and configurations". In the experience of ambience (nonplay), the player's desires are arrested in the algorithm, and the experience moves closer to the "rhythms of the machine", submitting the desires of the player to the desires of the machine. Galloway describes the act of submission as a masochistic fascination. Games dictated by ambience acts allow this kind of submission to the experience of algorithm, whereas games focusing on nondiegetic operator acts allow to enact the algorithm. (Galloway 2006, 18–19.)

Finally, a *diegetic operator act* is the player's action represented through the gameworld. Galloway describes this through Huizinga's concept of *dromenon*, which means an act or an action, something acted, an action represented on a stage, a performance or a contest. Huizinga examined the act in relation to a rite, in which representation corresponds to identification, a re-presentation of the event, whose effect is reproduced through action. From this viewpoint, a representation is only an action reshown figuratively, whereas play is the reproduction of the effect in action. In Galloway's lexicon, the *dromenon*, as a diegetic operator act, is the player's action within the diegetic world of the game. It consists of move acts that result in spatial transitions and expressive acts that couple the acting agent with an actionable object. (Galloway 2006, 22–24.) In my interpretation, Galloway's *dromenon* corresponds to the notion of being-in-the-gameworld as the ability to take meaningful action within the representational space of the game, through which the player is identified as the agent of gameplay.

In summary, the machine's acts are almost always extraneous to the gameworld, because they emerge from the code. The machine's act within the gameworld is a pure process, an ambience that occurs only when the game is unaffected by the player's actions. Nondiegetic machine acts comprise the functionality of the gameworld and the gamic structure itself, which is the condition for the player's action. The player's acts take place both within the gameworld and outside it; as subjective algorithm, the player's action is an attempt to uncover the rules and configurations of the gamic system beneath its representational surface. As dromenon, the player's action occurs within the gameworld, which is often the only way to interact with the underlying system. Galloway summarizes his view as follows:

> [G]aming is a pure process made knowable in the machinic resonance of diegetic machine acts; gaming is a subjective algorithm, a code intervention exerted from both within gameplay and without gameplay in the form of the nondiegetic operator act; gaming is a ritualistic dromenon of players transported to the imaginary place of gameplay, and acted out in the form of diegetic operator acts; and gaming is the play of the structure, a generative agitation between inside and outside effected through the nondiegetic machine act (Galloway 2006, 37).

He stresses that these moments are not a structure or fixed rules, but observations arising from the examination of certain games. It is important to note that the player's and the computer's acts supplement each other; neither one can

comprise gameplay in itself because both are dependent on the response of the other. In regard to this research, the importance of Galloway's account is the differentiation between the player's and the machine's acts, and in the emphasis on their interdependency for producing digital gameplay, through which the player attempts to master the algorithmic structure. However, Galloway emphasizes action as an image, which leads to questions about realism and ideology that are not the focus of this chapter – hence, I stop pursuing his thought further.

I will now turn to Colin Cremin's characterization of gameplay through the notions of affect and craft, which develops Galloway's ideas into a direction that is highly relevant to the Lacoue-Labarthean viewpoint. Cremin suggests that the aesthetic form that is common to all digital games is *affective*, describing this thought, which is based on Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's nonrepresentational philosophy, as follows:

> [A] theory of videogames in motion, about play as force, immersion as becoming and interaction as enhancing and decreasing intensities of different assemblages of players, of avatars, in game objects and so forth that determine, in a fluid and open-ended manner, the possibilities of play" (Cremin 2016, 2).

Cremin builds upon Galloway's research, which already introduces some Deleuzean viewpoints. But whereas Galloway takes action as his starting point, Cremin approaches games from the notion of the affect. This is relevant to the Lacoue-Labarthean conception of mimesis as the formation of the subject, because both refer to a pre-subjective state of being. In a Deleuze-Guattarian interpretation, affect is a force, not a feeling or an emotion (Shouse 2005). Feelings are subjective interpretations of affects, whereas emotions are the display of feelings. Affect is something that precedes personality, language, biography and sociality. Feelings are labelled according to language, and emotions are their communication to the world, but affect precedes the biographical personality of feeling and its display. Only when autobiography or language is not yet formed, can affect be displayed through emotion. This is possible for infants, but as soon as this display comes under conscious control, the affect cannot be expressed directly anymore. Hence, affects are unstructured and unconscious experiences of intensities, bodily sensations, which cannot be realized in language.

It is clear that the Deleuze-Guattarian notion of the affect is very close to Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of mimesis as an unconscious force that precedes language and subjectivity. However, drawing parallels between these kinds of thinkers results easily in misinterpretation of either one in favour of the other, and oversimplifies the complexity of their writing – comparing these perspectives in detail would require an extensive study of its own. Therefore, I will not consider the similarities and differences between Lacoue-Labarthean and Deleuze-Guattarian views further. Because of the proximity between these philosophical viewpoints, Cremin's conception of gameplay is close to my own and provides some fruitful formulations and insights for my investigation, especially a conception of gameplay as a relation between a master and an

apprentice. Cremin proposes twelve axioms to demarcate his viewpoint of digital games. In my view the most important are the first five:

1) *"Videogames are art only in motion and are only brought into motion through the added craft of the player,"*
2) *"Play is force, and forces produce sensations,"*
3) *"Videogame play is rhizome-play, the capacity of player to compose with forces whose intensities enable the discovery of new possibilities through which lines of flight can be taken: to disentangle the design through a process of deterritorialization,"*
4) *"Videogames are prepared canvases on which the player paints forces,"*
5) *"The videogame is a relationship between an artist and apprentice"* (Cremin 2016, 23–30).

The rest of the axioms state that play is rhizomaic, a capacity to compose with forces on a canvas that is the game through a process that deterritorializes its design. The diegesis of the game consists of different kinds of signs and spaces: when the player is immersed in the game, the relationship between diegetic and nondiegetic becomes imperceptible. The axioms from seven to twelve seem more like specifications, whereas the first ones compose Cremin's core argument. Like Galloway, Cremin does not intend to provide an exhaustive description and calls his axioms only a general overview.

The first axiom emphasizes the action of the player, without which the game cannot appear as a game. The second axiom proposes that gameplay is a force, which is relevant for Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of mimesis as a formative force. In the third axiom, Cremin's notion of rhizome-play utilizes Delueze-Guattarian concepts of the rhizome and the arborescent[89]. Rhizome denotes open-endedness, momentariness and deterritorialization, whereas the arborescent designates rigid structures and predetermined sequences. Cremin claims that games without a possibility for experimentation and discovery are not proper digital games at all. All games have arborescent design, but rhizomaic elements allow experimentation within that ridig structure. In other words, Cremin suggests that the pre-programmed structure of codified rules is a space that allows experimentation and improvisation in a way that the outcome of the game cannot be predicted from the rules themselves.

The fourth axiom is a direct continuation of this because the player's ability to paint forces is dependent on the possibility of rhizome-play. The game as a canvas (or *ludo-diagram* in Cremin's lexicon) means that it is not yet a game without the player's affects that deterritorialize it. Axiom five states that the player is an apprentice to the developer, who is the artist. This remark is important, because even though the player can be said to paint and compose with affective forces on the canvas of the game, it is the developer who has prepared it. In me view, the artistry of the developer is a fictional model, because it might

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[89]   The rhizome has been discussed also by Murray, who describes it as a theoretical model to open-ended and boundaryless text systems (Murray 1997, 132–133), and by Bogost (2015, 139–143), who notes that it has gained popularity in explaining digital media since the 1990s.

consist of a work of multiple individuals and is always manifested through the action of the machine.

Cremin emphasizes the open-ended and unpredictable nature of gameplay:

> Gameplay is a smooth space of experimentation drawing diagonals through the striated grid of the program. It is form in motion, the striations themselves allowing for this possibility. The procedures the game rules authorise and the rewards and punishments accompanying them are engendered at the points where the smooth and striated intersect but that can never entirely determine how the lines are drawn, elements assembled and striations crossed. This openness defines rhizome-play. (Cremin 2016, 32.)

The distinction of the smooth and the striated describes the dichotomy of restrictions and freedom, which characterizes the player's interaction with the enabling and disabling acts of the machine. There is a fundamental openness in digital games, which Cremin calls rhizome-play. If a game does not support this kind of smooth experimentation, it is not properly a digital game. Cremin elaborates that Deleuze and Guattari consider *Chess* a striated space and *Go* as a smooth one because *Chess* has arborescent predictability in the prescribed characteristics of its pieces. Rhizome-play is a smooth process of experimentation within the arborescent structure of obstacles and the striated hierarchy of rules.

The smooth and the striated are not equivalent to rhizomaic and arborescent; even though *Go* has a smooth space and *Chess* does not, neither of them is a digital game. Rhizome-play is something produced solely by computers: "if the game can be reproduced outside of the digital sphere without compromising the gameplay, then it is not a videogame" (Cremin 2016, 60). Cremin examines a digital football game as an example, stating that what takes place in it cannot be reproduced in physical reality. Even though it can be interpreted as a simulation of actual football, it follows completely different rules and allows wholly different kinds of actions to playing football on an actual field. Actual football cannot be simulated completely in the digital sphere. Cremin remarks that and even if a convincing simulation of physical reality would be possible, the player would still lack the skill of a professional football player. The digital sphere is characterized by fiction which enables the player to play with agency by improvising with different kinds of actions.

Cremin provides a schema that corresponds to digital gameplay:

• Play-force: the application of force or production of affects through compositions: playing the videogame.

• Rhizome-play: the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of the videogame space: the videogame 'playground' that the nomad transforms by 'going smooth' between the striated grid of the program, cutting their own line through the arborescent code through experimentation.

• The event of play: the actualisations and virtualisations, the images and affects, of reiterative actions: play as a rupture that produces the new. (Cremin 2016, 63–64.)

Not fixating on Cremin's Deleuze-Guattarian lexicon, we can extract some interesting remarks about gameplay from these propositions. Gameplay must be

understood as a force, not merely an activity or interaction, but as an affective, experimental and creative process. Through the application of force, the player transforms the composition of the developer and resists its predetermined structure. The game provides a framework, a certain environment with certain restrictions, a canvas in Cremin's vocabulary, with which the player can play. Gameplay is every time a new artistic product, created through the rupture between the developer's design and the player's experimentation.

The forces added by the player are more analogue than digital. Cremin accepts Galloway's four moments of gamic action but criticizes them for the undertheorization of Deleuze's philosophy and isolated usage of Deleuzean concepts. He claims that it is more useful to approach games in terms of affect than as products of binary code, more as artistic canvases and less as machines. Digital games are different from other machines, such as cars, in that they do not do anything in a physical sense. An assemblage of a human and a car can travel at high speed, but an assemblage of a human and a digital game will not do anything similar. It connects two worlds, the game's diegetic sphere and the player's nondiegetic actions, or the developer's and the player's artistry. (Cremin 2016, 65–66.) The developer creates a canvas, a "possibility of play that becomes a play of forces through the added affects of the player" (Cremin 2016, 67). Cremin stresses that the canvas is an abstract concept that does not mean a representation, such as the background image of a game, but the possibility of play.

I will not go deeper into Cremin's thought at this point, because the intererpetation of gameplay as a relation between master and apprentice will be inspected from the Lacoue-Labarthean perspective in the beginning of the next chapter. While Cremin's emphasis on the Deleuze-Guattarian lexicon is too strong to be used along with Lacoue-Labarthe's texts, it develops Galloway's conception of gamic action into a direction that allows to connect it with the notion of artistic production and consequently mimesis. Whereas Galloway views gameplay as close to the cinematic image, Cremin's view is detached from such a context and presents a more general notion of mutual creation between the developer and the player. Neither of these viewpoints correspond completely to my understanding of digital gameplay as a production of hybrid subjectivity between human and machine agency, but both provide crucial insights to it.

Cremin's conception of gameplay as a craft and the game as a canvas is an optimistic view – I would consider it as a view of a certain type of gameplay, instead of gameplay in general. Gameplay as gamic mimesis oscillates irredeemably between creative freedom and algorithmic restraint. In Lacoue-Labarthe's terms, the subject oscillates between the agent and the product of writing, as that who in its attempt to produce itself cannot avoid being already produced. In gamic mimesis, the subject of gamic agency is always destabilized by the subject's belatedness to itself, the lack of originality which is necessarily masked by the appearence of agency through gamic action, which, while seemingly the player's own, is always a performance conditioned by the algorithm.

3.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have laid out a conception of digital gameplay that will act as a ground for the Lacoue-Labarthean aspects of gamic mimesis in Chapter Four. The first part focused on what I consider the core of digital games; a rule-based system of predetermined goals and restrictions whose completion requires a relevant amount of effort and experimentation from the player. Digital games employ complex rule-systems that cannot be effectively executed without the processing power of a digital computer. These systems are represented to the player as interactive virtual environments which conceal their machinic foundation. The second part inspected the visible appearance of the game as a gameworld, an immersive simulation which functions as an interface to the underlying system and creates a sense of *being-in-the-gameworld* by giving the player agency within that world. The dichotomy between the gameworld and the algorithmic rule-system was then elaborated through a differentiation between opacity and transparency; a digital game is characterized by opacity because it hides its rules behind an ambiguous fictional setting that the player must inhabit to understand how its systems function. The third part of the chapter focused on gamic agency, demarcating it with the notions of interactivity, machine acts and player acts, and craft.

Gameplay is not only interaction between the computer and the player but agency that is constituted by both the player's and the machine's acts. A dissonance between restriction and freedom is constitutive of gameplay because the rigid structure of rules driven by the computer's determinate logic provides the player a framework to act freely. This can be encountered either by criticizing games for subjugating the player under their structure or by celebrating the player's ability to participate in a meaningful action through improvisation. In my view, both elements are present in any instance of play, but different games provide different amounts of freedom. A digital game is characterized by computation, which allows the creation of complex simulated systems that are not reproducible by other means. In gameplay, the subject is formed as a composite of the developer's writing, the computational procedure and the player's skilful action.

As this investigation is focused on both Lacoue-Labarthe and game studies, the scope of my account on digital games is necessarily limited. Within the constraints of this research, it is not possible to consider the whole field of digital games research. Hence, I do not claim these perspectives of gameplay to be complete or original when looked at from the viewpoint of game studies – as stated at the beginning of this chapter, its purpose has not been to produce new knowledge about digital games but to demarcate my viewpoint on gamic agency in terms of the concealed computational process and the figural representation of the gameworld. In the next chapter, I will introduce this viewpoint to readings of Lacoue-Labarthe, which results in an understanding of mimetic subject formation in digital gameplay.

4   ASPECTS OF GAMIC MIMESIS

In this chapter, I examine mimesis in digital gameplay by conflating readings of Lacoue-Labarthe with the conception of gameplay that was formed in the previous chapter. This results in four characterizations of gamic mimesis through Lacoue-Labarthean terminology: *antagonism*, *hyperbologic*, *rhythm* and the *sublime*. It should be noted that these aspects do not comprise a system, nor do they provide an exhaustive definition of gameplay, mimesis, or Lacoue-Labarhte's philosophy. From the viewpoint of game studies, all these characterizations of gaming have been explored in some form from different theoretical positions. This is not surprising, given that Lacoue-Labarthe's writing exemplifies that its subject is thoroughly constituted by others – his thought is always a repetition of others, because there is no other possibility to present anything. Because digital game studies have already established a variety of research positions, it is inevitable that Lacoue-Labarthe's thought does not produce insights that would differ radically from digital games research that is founded upon the context of Western thought.

However, as I have attempted to show in Chapter Two, Lacoue-Labarthe's investigations on the notions of subject and representation provide a distinct interpretation of mimesis, which opens an important view towards gameplay as a process of formation. Lacoue-Labarthe's insistence on the totalizing tendency of the figural and the attempt to seek the logic of mimesis beyond representation touch directly upon gameplay as a relation between the player's actions within the gameworld and the computer's procedural functioning beneath the surface.

This chapter is divided into four subsections. In the first, I return to *Typographie* and examine Lacoue-Labarthe's continuation of René Girard's theory of mimetic desire and the double bind. Here, I focus on the struggle for mastery upon gamic agency, which in Lacoue-Labarthean terms is a struggle for appropriation of representations. The origin of repetition is always absent, which renders mimesis a repetition of something that was never there. In the stage of mimesis, the emptiness of the subject faces the emptiness of the other. Hence, formation of the self through a repetition of the other does not result in autobiography, but in a story of the other's death, which constitutes the self. This

understanding of autobiography is taken from Lacoue-Labarthe's *L'écho du sujet*, to which I return in section 4.3 to discuss the notion of rhythm. Before that, section 4.2 continues from the notion of mimetic rivalry to the logic of mimesis, which Lacoue-Labarthe names hyperbologic, a paradoxical oscillation between emptiness and dispersal, appropriation and disappropriation. Lacoue-Labarthe describes mimesis an unresolvable relation between passivity and activity, in which the subject is both actively elaborating its identity through a character, and passively taking on predetermined modes of being. In regard to digital gameplay, this relation occurs through the problem between the player's freedom and the restrictions of the gamic structure. Finally, hyperbologic, both in general and as the structure of gameplay, is the logic of *aletheia*, truth of being, whose exchange with mimesis was elaborated in part 2.3.4. The third subsection focuses on Lacoue-Labarthe's formulation of rhythm, with the support of Susanna Lindberg's continuation of the theme. Rhythm refers to the affective and nonconceptual ground of being, through which Lacoue-Labarthe detaches mimesis from visual imagery. Here, I inspect gamic agency in terms of playstyle. For Lacoue-Labarthe, rhythm defines mimesis as a differing repetition, a dance-like modulation of figures, which corresponds to the mimetic formation of gamic agency as a form in motion. Finally, section 4.4 examines gameplay in terms of being and appearance, returning to inspect the relation between the opaque surface of gameworld and the concealed truth of the computer's functioning. This is based on Lacoue-Labarthe's investigation of the relation between the beautiful and the sublime in Kant and Heidegger, through which I elaborate how digital gameplay can touch upon the ground of subjectivity and provide a shock that brings forth the fact that there is presence, even though this experience escapes conceptual thought.

4.1   A Struggle for Mastery

Digital gameplay is organized around the struggle between the player and the machine, which represents the developer's work for the player. Turkle (2005, 24), for instance, has suggested that a computer program reflects its creator's mind and enables programmers to explore their identity by working with the program. However, when using a program someone else has programmed – especially playing a digital game – the computer's agency becomes foregrounded, because the user has no access to the code.[90] The notion of a developer as an adversary is problematic, because in gameplay, the player faces not only a static work, but an

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[90]   Again, if we consider a situation where the game's source code is openly accessible and a player decides to look into the programming, we are not anymore talking about gameplay but programming. While studying the code might help the player to understand the game's algorithmic nature better – just as studying classical mechanics could contribute to a badminton player's understanding of the trajectory of the shuttlecock – studying code or physics are completely different experiences than the act of playing a game.

almost lifelike automated entity that is driven by a computational process. The fact that the original creator is not present in the work can be confronted through any kind of artwork, and when meaning making is considered as *écriture*, this situation pertains to every act of presenting something, even speaking. A digital game is characterized not so much by the detachment of the developer from the work, but by its automated character, through which the developer and the machine form a hybrid entity of both human and machine.

During gameplay, the player enters into a similar state, where her or his actions are supplemented by the computational process. The computer is not merely a mediator between the developer and the player, but a constitutive part of both. Lacoue-Labarthe approaches antagonism as a structure of imitation of models – gameplay can be regarded as a similar process, but it does not concern imitation of an exemplary character, such as a protagonist, but imitation of action. The player's attempt to overcome the obstacles requires certain types of actions that must be learned through experimentation. This pertains especially to games that do not explicitly state all their rules to the player, which are the primary focus of this research. However, even games that do have an explicitly stated rulebook can be learned through the process of play. In case of digital games, reading the rulebook does not produce gamic agency in the same way as interacting with the computational system that enacts those rules. In the process of learning through play, the gamic action begins to resemble the developer's intention of how the game was supposed to be played; the computer forces the player towards a certain type of play by its rule-based structure.

Antagonism determines also the process of mimetic identification, because in order to become unique, the similar must be abolished. The subject wills to identity, but only with itself. When the apprentice becomes the master, the old master must be displaced. Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of antagonism is adopted from René Girard's idea of the double bind and mimetic rivalry, but Girard's thoughts about religion are at least dubious to Lacoue-Labarthe (Lindberg 2008). The notion of rivalry surfaces always when Lacoue-Labarthe talks about models and exemplarity, but a more focused investigation of antagonism is done in regard to national identification and historical formation as the relation between modernity and antiquity. The historical viewpoint is not very relevant in regard to gameplay, but it presents some more general remarks about mimesis that are useful. However, Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Girard is essential for his interpretation of mimesis as a structure of double bind and is highly relevant for understanding gamic mimesis. I will begin this subsection by introducing Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Girard, after which I inspect the notion of historical formation in terms of the subject's origin. Lastly, I introduce Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of *allothanatography*, in which the themes of rivalry and surpassing the model culminate.

4.1.1 Rivalry and Mimetic Desire

In Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation, antagonism between the subject and its models is constitutive to the formation of the subject. It is caused by a

combination of two drives, desire and aggression: the subject desires the roles of the others, who must be subverted in order to appropriate those roles. In gameplay, the player desires to reach the game's goal and master the gamic system, which results in a struggle against the game's obstacles. Even if the actions represented in the gameworld would not display aggressive behaviour or violence, the structure of goals and obstacles results in a conflict between the player and the game, where the player contests the restrictions of the gamic system. According to Galloway (2006, 91), playing a game means playing its algorithm: "To play the game means to play the code of the game. To win means to know the system." Proceeding through the game means learning its hidden logic, a nonlinear narrative that unfolds in algorithmic form (Galloway 2006, 92). Galloway believes that in this way, digital games present contemporary political realities, such as the society of control, in which computerized information creates a sense of freedom, but results in a complete control of the individual (Galloway 87–88). The subject of digital gameplay is formed through an antagonistic relation with the machine that effectuates the gamic system, which both hinders and enables the player's attempt to appropriate gamic agency by mastering that system.

Lacoue-Labarthe describes the subject's antagonistic relation to its models with René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, which he connects to Plato's tripartition of the soul in *The Republic*. Lacoue-Labarthe's aim is to show how Platonism provides a grounding for Girard's theory and how both fail to understand mimesis. Plato famously divided the soul into three parts: reason, spirit and appetite. In human beings, and correspondingly in the state, the desire of the appetitive part and the aggression of the spirited part should be subjugated to the logical part of reason, which controls the others (Plato 1997, 1072–1074 [*The Republic*, 441–442]). Plato argued that the rational part of the soul must dominate over desire and aggression, which threaten the whole communal existence and political life if united uncontrollably. Lacoue-Labarthe interprets Plato's operation as an attempt to halt desiring rivalry, an endless reciprocal hatred implied by the mimetic nature of desire. These terms are not present as such in Plato's writing – Lacoue-Labarthe derives the notion of mimetic rivalry from Girard's analyses of desire (see Girard 2005, 154–156).

Girard claims that all desire is *desire for the desire* of the other, instead of *desire for an object*. The relation between the subject and the object is not primary, but the relation between the subject and the *rival*. A conflict ensues because the model dislikes competition and the disciple consequently feels rejected by the model. The model's command to imitate is immediately followed by its denial, which according to Girard means actually a prohibition to appropriate the object of the model's desire. Girard calls this contradictory double imperative a *double bind*, which forms the basis of human relationships. In digital gameplay, the double bind occurs as the player's relation to the algorithmic system. The player does not attempt to appropriate the roles of the authors of the game themselves, but the control upon gamic agency. This corresponds to Cremin's understanding of gameplay in terms of master and apprentice that was inspected in part 3.2.2:

the player attempts to surpass the mastery of the developer and the machine, but becomes a technologically supplemented subject.

The desire to identify as a stable subject provokes to get rid of the origin of imitation – the similar – in order to achieve proper originality. In this coalescence of mimesis, desire and rivalry, mimesis provokes desire (to be similar with the other), which in turn provokes violence (against the other). Ancient scapegoat rituals have functioned as a way of dealing with violence through a restricted setting. Later, the cathartic function of tragedy served a similar purpose. Lacoue-Labarthe believes that an intuition about this kind of violent power of mimesis was the reason for Plato's attempt to banish the mimetician from the state. Unlike Aristotle, Plato rejected the possibility of the cathartic function of tragedy, thinking that tragic violence can never bring forth harmony and peace. Lacoue-Labarthe ironically points out that by banishing mimesis through the figure of the mimetician, Plato resorted to a scapegoat ritual, which is in fact the origin of tragic catharsis itself. Because theatricality always contains, in Lacoue-Labarthe's terms, a structure of substitution, it cannot purge *itself* and get rid of the harmfulness inherent in (re)presentation. Thus, Plato was caught in a trap of the representation of a scapegoat, and his attempt to eradicate mimesis by mimetic means was never finished. (TYP, 230–235; TYP2, 101–105.) Lacoue-Labarthe summarizes:

> On the other hand, and for this very reason (unless it is the inverse), it means that he cannot do otherwise than carry out mimetically the expulsion of mimesis—which amounts to not expelling it at all or to repeating indefinitely and spectacularly, as in religion or the theatre, its vain expulsion.[91] (TYP2, 106.)

Girard's theory provides material for Lacoue-Labarthe's analyses of the antagonistic structure of mimesis, it falls under the same criticism as Plato, because of its attempt to control mimesis. Lacoue-Labarthe gives Girard credit for recognizing that both tragedy and sacrifice are simulations and for showing how Plato's expulsion of mimesis fails, but disapproves of his interpretation of Christianity as a way of overcoming violent desire. Within this context, ritual means a repeated dramatization of the resolution to the mimetic crisis that was caused by the double bind. As a representation, it effaces the original thing it represents: when a ritual simulates violence, it replaces it and makes the original violence inaccessible. Girard did not approve this loss of originary effectivity, which led him to think that only Christianity can reveal the essence of mimesis and sacrifice, that is, to make manifest the violent foundation of sociality. The revelation traces the ritual back to primitive violence and makes its proper refusal possible. Girard wished to deconstruct the ritualistic origin of the religious by sublating Greek thought into the Christian religion, but to achieve this, he had to be able to reveal what mimesis is. (TYP, 238–239; TYP2, 109–110.) Girard claimed that when Christianity reveals the primitive violence behind sociality, it can be

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[91] "D'autre part, et pour cette raison même (à moins que ce ne soit l'inverse), qu'il ne peut faire autrement que d'accomplir mimétiquement l'expulsion de la mimesis, — ce qui revient à ne pas l'expulser du tout ou à en répéter indéfiniment et spectacu-lairement, comme dans la religion ou le théâtre, la vaine expulsion." (TYP, 235.)

overcome. Lacoue-Labarthe's main criticism is that mimesis is unrevealable because there is no original thing behind the endless chain of substitution. The foundation of sociality remains foundational insofar as it is represented and does not appear as such.

To reveal mimesis and decide upon it presupposes that mimesis is revealed from the outside through a discourse that has no references to violence or ritual. Because Girard revealed mimesis through Christianity, the fate of Christ should contain nothing mimetic or sacrificial, no role or scapegoat function. Lacoue-Labarthe finds an inherent paradox in Girard's operation because it denounces the claim to difference, which forms the ground of mimetic violence, but at the same time organizes its own power upon an assertion that there is a difference that is immune to the mimetic contagion. Girard rejected the claim of difference but requested an absolute difference for his conception of religion (TYP, 239–240; TYP2, 110–111). Lacoue-Labarthe does not support Girard's claims about religion but finds an interesting insight in the contradiction of Girard's argument.

Lacoue-Labarthe proceeds as follows: If the truth about mimesis is to be revealed, an access beyond the representation of mimesis, i.e. to the other side of the ritual, must be gained. This presupposes that mimesis is anterior to representation. On this level, there are no representations of objects and thus, desire imitates and desires only desire itself. If this is accepted, then behind mimetic desire is something that is prior to visible forms and models. This could indicate that representation and mimesis are fundamentally different, but Lacoue-Labarthe suspects that there might be a representation also outside the perceptible and theoretical domain. Instead of conceiving mimesis outside of representation, Girard's text might require a rethinking of the concept of representation itself. This representation would take place on a stage that is inaccessible to perception and thought, on which the scenario of desire would be played unbeknownst to the subject. This rethinking of representation detaches it from theoretical and theatrical interpretations, and from the concepts of subjectivity and ideology. (TYP, 241–243; TYP2, 111–113.)

In digital media there is a representation beyond the perceptible domain of the visual display device; the domain of digital computation, which is the proper site of gameplay, but also always fleeing in its inconceivable efficiency and complexity. Even though the theory of mimetic desire would not be completely relevant to gameplay, the notion of antagonistic struggle and appropriation of roles touches the very foundation of gamic action. Gameplay is not a struggle with an exemplary figure, but with an entity of machinic otherness. It takes place outside visual representational order; the unpresentable situation of desire imitating and desiring desire itself is exemplified by the struggle over the agency of gamic action between the player and the composite entity of the developer's machinations and the computer's automated efficacy.

Lacoue-Labarthe introduces Nietzsche's reformulation of Aristotelian catharsis and Freud's idea of a death drive as examples of primary identification, which would precede imitation, reflection and self-consciousness. This ungraspable origin of mimetic desire can be conceived only as an abyss.

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Surprisingly, Lacoue-Labarthe finds insight into the originary representation[92] from the insufficiency of Plato's operation against mimesis. The danger of the originary absence of subjective propriety is manifested in Plato's attempt to expel mimesis. Because the act of expulsion is targeted towards a representative of mimesis, a scapegoat, only external and scenic mimesis is expelled. The scapegoat must incarnate the lack of being-proper that is the core of mimesis. It is not only the endless doubling that Plato saw as a societal threat, but what provokes it: mimetism as infinite malleability and instability.

> That is to say, not only the undifferenciation and endless doubling which threaten the social body as a whole, but, on an underlying level and actually provoking them, *mimetism* itself, that pure and disquieting *plasticity* which potentially authorizes the varying appropriation of all characters and all functions (all the roles) that kind of "typical virtuosity" which doubtless requires a "subjective" base—a "wax"—but without any other property than an infinite malleability: *unstabi1ity* "itself."[93] (TYP2, 115.)

The scapegoat incarnates the failure and decline that are native to identity; the only recourse is to appropriate, identify, and verify mimesis. But this, says Lacoue-Labarthe, betrays the essence of mimesis, which lies in the fact that it has no essence. What is proper to mimesis is that there is nothing proper to it, though this does not mean that the essence of mimesis is simply impropery or negativity. Mimesis *ek-sists* or *desists*; it appropriates everything to the point that the notion of property itself is disturbed. Lacoue-Labarthe describes its essence:

> …in other words, if the "essence" of mimesis were not precisely absolute vicariousness, carried to the limit (but inexhaustible), endless and groundless—something like an infinity of substitution and *circulation* (already we must again think of Nietzsche): the very lapse 'itself' of essence"[94] (TYP2, 116).

This is why the scapegoat is a mime who shows himself as being everything and nothing at the same time. Through this victim, the *pharmakos*, mimesis is theatricalized and theorized, in an attempt to "…catch it in the trap of (in)sight"[95] (TYP2, 117). Thus, theatricality reveals mimesis instead of masking it, and defines it as that which is never by "herself" (*par « elle-même »*). In this paradoxical logic,

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[92]   Lacoue-Labarthe puts the terms "originary representation" and "ground" inside quotation marks to emphasize their paradoxical nature in regard to mimesis, which has no ground or origin. The strategy is similar to Derridean *sous rature* (Spivak 1997, xiii–xviii). For the sake of readability, I have cut out the quotation marks.

[93]   "c'est-à-dire non seulement l'indifférenciation et le dédoublement sans terme qui menacent le corps social dans son ensemble, mais, de manière sous-jacente et les provoquant en fait, le mimétisme lui-même, cette et pure inquiétante plasticité qui autorise potentiellement l'appropriation changeante de tous les caractères et de toutes les fonctions (de tous les rôles), cette espèce de « virtuosité typique » qui sans doute exige un support « subjectif » — une « cire » —, mais sans autre propriété qu'une infinie malléabilité : l'instabilité«même»." (TYP, 245.)

[94]   "…autrement dit, si l'« essence » de la mimesis n'était pas justement la vicariance absolue, portée à son comble (mais inépuisable), sans terme ni fond — quelque chose comme l'infini de la substitution et de la *circulation* (il faut déjà repenser à Nietzsche) la défaillance « même » de l'essence." (TYP, 246.)

[95]   "…prendre au piège du (sa)voir" (TYP, 247).

mimesis can be shown only as its absence, which pertains also to the subject as a product of mimesis:

> Far from covering up or masking mimesis, theatricality "reveals" it—which means that it fixes it, defines and "presents" it as that which, in all events, it never is on its "own." More rigorously, to mask and to reveal, regarding mimesis, to betray and to unveil: these are—as finally we could never hope to say better—to go *from like to same*. Mimesis is always from like to same. For such is the law of representation—or of (re)presentation (*Vorstellung* and *Darstellung*, here more than ever, are indissociable): there is "presented" in it what does not present itself and cannot present itself, that is, there is represented in it what has always already represented itself.[96] (TYP2, 117.)

Representation can be opposed only through representation, which indicates that the process of dramatization is ceaseless. Lacoue-Labarthe posits that all factuality is inevitably hollowed by representation, at least by language. In my interpretation, when Lacoue-Labarthe proposes that mimesis is "from like to same" he means that likeness, appearance as a distortion of truth, becomes identity itself, and equivalent for the self as such. Plato feared that this kind of proliferation of roles and the loss of proper self would result in societal chaos and moral depravity; hence he attempted to banish mimesis and establish transparent discourse. The situation regarding gameplay is similar to Lacoue-Labarthe's characterization of mimesis and theatricality: gamic action, which takes place at the level of computation, is revealed through theatricality, i.e. its representation through the gameworld, as that which cannot occur by itself.

Digital games are not primarily on-screen representations of things – the content on the screen is usually a representation of something, but as a part of the game, it is a sign that has a potential function within the game's algorithmic system. Games represent action – or multiple possibilities for different kinds of actions – through which the player experiments and creates gameplay. Here mimetic desire is the aim towards the goal of the game, to master its system and overcome the artistry of the developer and the restrictions of the computational system through the artistic addition of play. Furthermore, the stage for the representation of action takes place at a level that is inaccessible to perception: the codified functioning of the computer. This is not exactly the stage prior to representation and language that Lacoue-Labarthe thought about, because it is in the end a machine created by humans. However, even the game developer does not use the same language as the bare machine, but higher-level codes and application programming interfaces that allow programming without understanding the lower level operations of the computer's physical components. In this way, everything in the computer happens under a series of

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[96] "Loin de recouvrir ou de masquer la mimesis, la théâtralité la « révèle » — ce qui veut dire la fixe, la détermine et la « présente » comme ce que de toutes façons elle n'est, par «elle-même », jamais. Plus rigoureusement, masquer et révéler, quant à la mimesis, trahir et dévoiler, c'est — comme en définitive on ne croit jamais si bien dire — *du pareil au même*. La mimesis, c'est toujours du pareil au même. Car telle est la loi de la représentation — ou de la (re)présentation (*Vorstellung* et *Darstellung*, ici plus que jamais, sont indissociables) : s'y « présente » ce qui ne se présente pas et ne peut pas se présenter. C'est-à-dire s'y représente ce qui s'est toujours déjà représenté." (TYP, 247.)

veils of different kinds of programming languages – in the player's case the veil is yet doubled by a graphical user interface and the game's fiction. The operations that drive everything are imperceptible and incomprehensible for the player and to some extent even for the developer. This is quality is shared with all computer software, but only games create the structure of goals and obstacles. While struggle against a word processing software is completely possible, it is usually considered undesirable. On the contrary, a game is played for the sake of struggle itself.

When the game provides only an opaque simulation that hides the programming beneath it, the player is forced to experiment and improvise within the constraints and possibilities programmed by the developer. While the developer has the upper hand and takes the role of the proper artist, gameplay is not the developer's property. It is a space of mimetic struggle, a stage driven by algorithmic processes that function autonomously. Even the graphical interface of digital games is not always unambiguous in its suggestions and might require a process of learning how to interact with it. Some games make this kind of reticence their essential feature, for example *Dark Souls*, where the game does not provide any useful information about the delicate combat mechanics that are essential for succeeding in the game. The player must experiment, through possibly frustrating failures, how to effectively defeat the foes encountered or seek help from external sources. This heightens the impression of being lost in a destroyed kingdom filled with deranged undead, but also gives the player freedom of experimentation and improvisation through the variety of playstyles its rules offer.

Another example of this kind of deliberate confusion is *The Witness* (Thekla, Inc. 2016), a first-person puzzle game set on a peaceful uninhabited island, where the player must solve numerous puzzles without any verbal information about their rules. *The Witness* makes the absence of a direct explanation of the rules its essential characteristic: the game is not only about solving puzzles but discovering the rules of how they can be solved. This impermeable silence can result in the deeply frustrating experience of trying to understand the developer's intentions[97], followed by the satisfaction of finally discovering the rules, until the game anticipates the player's progression and introduces a new rule to its puzzles.

Mimetic desire in digital gameplay is the desire to "beat" the game, to overcome its obstacles and to master the craft of its gameplay mechanics. In games that represent a playable character, it is not the character that finishes the game, but the player through that character: if the protagonist dies at the end of the story[98], the player has still succeeded by reaching the game's goal. The player might control a character whose motives and values are displeasing, and still enjoy the gameplay. Games without a playable character as a protagonist, such

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[97]   *The Witness* was in fact designed by a single person, Jonathan Blow, but its development included several programmers and artists.

[98]   I will deliberately not mention any particular game here but for an example, see Juul (2013, 103–107).

as many simulation, strategy and puzzle games, exemplify that gameplay concerns always player as the agent of action and a character that is played, not a representation of a fictional character.

Half-Life exemplified this point by providing a completely mute protagonist, a character named Gordon Freeman, of whom the player sees only his hands during the game. Only his name, age, education and occupation are provided through extradiegetic text at the beginning of the game, after which the character does not make any kind of sound. Even when hurt, only his hazardous environment suit indicates this by laconically describing the severity of the injury. This muteness to the point of absurdity (for example, Gordon never says anything in dialogues with non-playable characters, who do all the talking) emphasizes that *agency* belongs to the player, not the character, even though we know that it is Gordon's *story*. Whether the player might take the represented character as a model is another question, something that can be encountered with any product of fiction. Gamic mimesis is different and in fact has no direct relation to any figurative or fictional model.

4.1.2 The Absence of Proper Origin

Lacoue-Labarthe finds a definitive example of the double bind in the national identification of modern Germany, which he locates to the theoretical trajectory from German Romanticism and Idealism to Nietzsche and Heidegger. Here, mimetic antagonism refers to the Aristotelian sense of mimesis as *poïetic* supplementation of nature and to Heidegger's notion of *Ge-stell* as the essence of artwork. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that historicity itself is organized around antagonism, because the essence of history is mimesis, a technic supplementation (IM, 130). From the investigation of historical formation and national identity, stems an important insight that connects the problems of representation and simulation to the formation of identity in general. The depth of Lacoue-Labarthe's analyses is immense, as he gathers numerous philosophical theories into concise paragraphs, which require close reading, not only of Lacoue-Labarthe but also of his sources, which he introduces at some instances by rather broad strokes[99]. As the philosophico-historical focus of these texts does not entirely coincide with the problematic of digital gameplay, I do not engage in thorough readings of them – examining Lacoue-Labarthe's main arguments allows to investigate the notions of origin and imitation in relation to gameplay. While traversing the whole 18th and 19th century discussion on aesthetics, Lacoue-Labarthe's investigation culminates in Hölderlin, whose work on tragedy introduced the notion of the origin of identification as something that never appeared, which renders the product of identification as that which it is not (IM, 78; TYP2, 242). Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of history must be understood in the sense of the autobiographical narrative that can tell the story

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[99] For example, Lacoue-Labarthe refers to the "bi-millennial questioning of the Same out of which philosophy in its entirety has unfolded," which encompasses Western thought from Heraclitus' notion of "one differing in itself" (*hen diapheron heauto*) all the way to Heidegger's attempt to leap over Kant (IM, 44; TYP2, 121–123).

of both collective and individual identities, which are always formed reciprocally. The historical antagonism between modernity and antiquity demonstrates the functioning of the double bind on a larger scale but touches also the formation of the subject as human existence.

In this historical context, antagonism refers to the relation between ancient Greece and modern Europe, which culminated in German national identification. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that the differentiation between *foreign ancient* and *native modern* was governed by an Aristotelian interpretation of *natural* and *artificial* in terms of *physis* and *techne*. In Schiller's lexicon, Greek art was a *naïve* imitation of nature, whereas it was up to Moderns to accomplish nature through their *sentimental* art and surpass the Greeks. This historical application of the Aristotelian definition of art was based on a Rousseauist division between nature and culture. (IM, 73–74; TYP2, 237–239.) This was also the schematic programme of Hegelian dialectics, which Lacoue-Labarthe interprets as a re-reading of Aristotelian mimetology. The dialectical operation sublates the opposition between the naïve and the sentimental and with it a series of others, such as intuitive and speculative, sensible and ideal, and necessary and free, which are gathered under the opposition between the body and the spirit. When opposed to the naïve, the sentimental is always outside and beyond itself. It is a step beyond itself (*le pas en lui*) as an internal transgression that simultaneously cancels and preserves the contradiction it is born from. The sentimental sublates the opposition between the sentimental and the naïve. (IM, 74–76; TYP2, 239–241.) The speculative thought tried to rework the notion of art as copying and substituting in a way that would enable simultaneous preserving and changing of the ancient models. Lacoue-Labarthe's criticism is that the origin was never there in the first place, only an endless chain of substitutions which cannot resolve originary difference. On a more general level, this means that the origin of identification is a misinterpretation, a representation of something that was never there.

Lacoue-Labarthe argues that the idea of Moderns surpassing Ancients through imitation in fact presupposed that the ancient model was unattainable as such, because only mimesis without models can surpass exemplarity. This was demonstrated by Hölderlin's conception of tragedy, which tried to resolve the contradiction between divine and human agency dialectically but had completely different resolution than sublation (Martis 2005, 99). Hölderlin saw the properly ancient Greece as natively mystical and primitive, oriental and *aorgic* (sensuous, intuitive and undifferentiated) in opposition to organic, which denotes an organized and differentiated individualization of modernity. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, this image of ancient Greece haunted philosophy from Hegel, through Nietzsche, to Heidegger, who saw pre-Socratic Greece as properly ancient, whereas the Platonic Greece had already lost its archaic essence. (IM, 80; TYP, 243–244.) Nietzsche opposed the two Greeces in terms of the untimely tragic Greece as the unity of the Dionysian and Apollonian, and the declining, sophistical and political Greece. His understanding of *techne* followed the Aristotelian definition, according to which art is not passive imitation, but the

highest degree of activity. Here, properly artistic mimesis is described as virile activity, in opposition to passive imitation. Through truly creative virility, an individual or a community could erect itself as a living work of art. Authentic mimesis, capable of auto-formation, follows a logic according to which the more one imitates (actively and constructively), the more one constructs oneself. From this viewpoint, proper mimesis is interiorization, reconstruction and appropriation of the model through the most extreme disappropriation. Nietzsche believed that proper imitation must not be the imitation of what the model has done, but imitation of the model's formative power, poïesis or genius. [100] (IM, 102–104; Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 222–224.) Creative mimesis constructs its own models. For Nietzsche, it did not mean a repetition of what the Greeks had done, but the recovery of their power and potential. This relation belongs to the sublime instead of the beautiful, because the exemplarity of the Greeks is defined by their incomprehensibility. Nietzschean proper mimesis was an imitation of the incommensurable (IM, 108; Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 227).

Lacoue-Labarthe (IM, 125) claims that German thought of that time followed an "agonistic imperative" to imitate the Greeks without imitating them and replicate the political function of the ancient Greek drama in a way that would surpass it. This was achieved through the foundation of Bayreuth but was pushed much further by the Nazis, who seized the power of theatricality. In the notion of original imitation, antagonism is inverted; it involves always an exit from oneself (disappropriation), but the return to oneself (appropriation of the proper) is never guaranteed. The construction of identity is a desperate attempt to repeat something that has never occurred.

 While the notion of a divided Greece traversed the whole speculative and idealist tradition, it was brought to the fore especially by Hölderlin and Nietzsche, who both were essential to Heidegger's treatment of the topic in his writings about art. After the rupture with National Socialism, this question became most urgent for Heidegger, because it touched upon the question of *techne*, in which the National Socialist aesthetization of politics culminated. The double bind structure of imitating the Greeks without imitating them delivered Germany to a psychotic destiny that culminated in the Third Reich (IM, 105; Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 224–225). By imitating ancient Greece, Germany was supposed to achieve its own inimitable greatness in a more original way than the Renaissance or Neoclassicism. Through a violent translation of Sophocles's plays, *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, Hölderlin attempted to appropriate the foreignness of ancient Greece into modernity. However, in Lacoue-Labarthe's terms, the shadow of the Greeks turned the German Enlightenment into a twilight (IM 71–72; TYP2 236–237). In this schema, the double bind is manifested historically in terms of one culture imitating and surpassing another. Lacoue-Labarthe demonstrates how the categories of the ancient and the modern, as well as foreign and national, function in terms of the proper and improper. This analysis reveals the Aristotelian

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[100]   This corresponds to Kantian differentiation between inspired exemplarity (*Nachfolge*) and servile imitation (*Nachahmung*) in *Critique of Judgement*, §46–47 (Kant 1974, 241–246; 2000, 186–189).

concepts of *physis* and *techne* beneath the double bind. When a double bind is built upon the juxtaposition between the proper and the improper, the process of self-identification proceeds through their dialectical sublation. If mimesis is understood as perfecting instead of copying, the exemplary model can be overcome. The production of modern Germany relied on such a twist in the mimetic process. This schema takes its form from Aristotelian mimetology: a conception of art, in which on the one hand, art imitates nature, but on the other, accomplishes what nature is incapable of realizing. I return to Aristotelian mimetology with the notion of hyperbologic, but here I am going to focus on the exchange between property and improperty.

Gameplay is built upon this juxtaposition, because the codified foundation of the rules is dissimulated behind the opaque surface of the game's fiction. At the level of computer operations, there are no models that would allow direct measurement. The antagonistic relationship with the developer is played out on this imperceptible ground, in which improvisation gains access to surpassing the mastery of the developer. If digital gameplay is investigated as a process of appropriation, through which the player attempts to surpass the developer's mastery by manipulating the computational system on their behalf, then gameplay is an attempt to sublate the foreignness of the computer process and to overcome the artistry of the developer. The action of gameplay is the completion of an otherwise uneffectuated gamic system, a *techne* that accomplishes *physis* and makes it appear. By maintaining the tension between the proper and the improper – the pre-programmed nature of the game cannot be mastered without resigning oneself to its rules complying with the algorithmic structure – gameplay results in a paradoxical situation, where the player's own action is determined by the computational system.

The proper origin never corresponds to what is known of it, and the present never exists as such, but is in a constant state of becoming. A culture as a community of language and memory can come to itself only if it has previously gone through its own alterity and foreignness. To appropriate itself, a culture must be initially disappropriated, hence only *difference* is original. Lacoue-Labarthe remarks that Hegel's view, according to which appropriation would be the result of an originary disappropriation, presupposes the very possibility of appropriation itself. The notion of originary differentiation corresponds to *Unheimlichkeit*, disorientation (*le dépaysement*) and estrangement (*l'étrangement*) (IM 79; TYP2 243) – the appropriation of the foreign corresponds to *Ent-fernung* (*é-loignement*): the distancing of the near as the law of (dis)appropriation (*(dé)propriation*) which refers to the foreignness of that which is innermost to the self (IM 80–81; TYP2 244–245). What is proper to a culture, or a person, is in its essence improper and differentiated. The subject can come to itself only through a foreign material, and its identity rests upon self-difference. This is not some kind of definitive moment where the self is injected with a dose of uncanny exteriority, but a condition that is always already there, before the experience of any kind of self-awareness. Instead of just being exposed to others, the subject extends from them. Mimesis is also a continuous process of double binds and

antagonisms, through which self-identity constantly forms and deforms into new kinds of variations. Gameplay is one of such processes, but through its codified functioning it exemplifies the question of identity in informatic societies.

The attempt to create a properly modern reinterpretation of the ancient resulted in a repetition of what had happened there without ever taking place, an echo or a resonation of an unpronounced utterance. Lacoue-Labarthe stresses that the operation is not hermeneutical and has no proper definition: to make Greek art say what was said, but as that which was not said: as the same in its difference. "[...] de faire dire, tout simplement, ce qui était dit (mais) *comme ce qui n'était pas dit* : la même chose, donc, en différence. « En diaphéron héautô »" (IM, 53–54). For Hölderlin, the most properly Greek tragedy was available only as a repetition of what has not been, as the distortion of its ungraspable identity. As a construction of personal identity, the subject forms through imitation without models, the repetition of something that has not been. The constitution of the subject relies on previous models that are perpetually escaping, resulting in an endless reference that constitutes the same by differing from itself. The subject of gameplay is constructed in a double bind with an absent model because a digital game as a system of codified rules does not provide a figural exemplarity. Identifying as the subject of gamic action corresponds to the situation where the origin of imitation can be confronted only in a deconstructed form that is always an inevitable misinterpretation: the experimental process of play and improvised action, of which the player is the subject.

4.1.3 Allothanatography

Before concluding with the aspect of struggle, I will consider one more thematization of rivalry as the condition of the subject. Developing further the problematic of the double bind, Lacoue-Labarthe argues that autobiography is not a narrative of one's life, but a story of a dead other, *allothanatography*. This argument is constructed upon Lacan's analysis of the mimetic relation, which reworked the Freudian Oedipal scenario from a triangular relation into a quaternary system (see Lacan 1979). I do not follow Lacoue-Labarthe's argumentation in detail, as it focuses on Lacanian theory in a manner that is not completely relevant here. The notion of allothanatography is elaborated in a complex and lengthy essay, *The Echo of the Subject*, which will be examined again in section 4.3 in relation to the notion of rhythm. The notion of allothanatography is inspected here separately, because it is related directly to the double bind and the absent origin of the subject.

Lacan claimed that because the real father figure cannot completely fulfil its symbolic function of regulating desire, paternity is split into the real father and an imaginary father, who is capable of taking on the symbolic function. However, this results in a splitting of the subject itself, its alienation from itself, in which the self oscillates between the doubled figure. Lacoue-Labarthe finds Lacan's account comparable to Girard's theory of mimetic rivalry. (SP, 254–255; TYP2, 168–170.) In addition to the subject and the doubled father, the fourth element in Lacan's quaternary structure is imaginary death. In a Hegelian manner, it is

essential in the constitution of the subject: for the dialectic of agony to function, death must not be realized, but imagined and speculated (SP, 256–257; TYP2, 171–172). Lacoue-Labarthe claims that the imaginary constantly breaks down, destroying or altering what it helps to construct. The subject in the mirror is always a subject in *désistance* and the subject can come to itself only by losing itself. Lacoue-Labarthe's conclusion is that the figure is never only one, because the figural has no stability. The imaginary has no essence, no proper image with which to identify, and the subject must confront at least a doubled figure, or even a plurality of figures (SP, 261; TYP2, 175).

Lacoue-Labarthe claims that autobiography can be written only *specularly*, through a mirror figure as a novel of the other. This results in a modification into *allo*biography, a story of the other's life instead of the self. Affected by the structure of the double bind, in which the other is both a model and a rival, this novelistic intrigue turns into a struggle, or even *agony*, which makes it a writing of the dead other, because only through the fall of the exemplary figure can the subject retain its proper originality. Hence *bio-* is substituted with *thanato-*, modifying all autobiography into *allo-* or even *heterothanatography*, supposing that the other is always plural (SP, 265–266; TYP2, 179). This formulation is a result of Lacoue-Labarthe's readings of Girard and Lacan, whose theories of identification he finds similar. How the doubled figure transforms into a dead other is not entirely clear in Lacoue-Labarthe's reading because the references to the function of death in Lacan's texts and their interpretation as a post-Hegelian thought are not elaborated thoroughly.

Martis (2005, 63) interprets that the "I" is always already dead, because all of its actions and enunciations are mediated through an other. Autobiography produces a fiction, which doubles the presentation of the self as the writer and that which is written, between which the subject is lost. The mimetic struggle over proper identity is agonizing, because it can be a painful experience, and because it is literally a death struggle, in Lacoue-Labarthe's terms "the most basic narsissistic assurance" of "I am not dead" (TYP2, 195). The idea of the innermost of the self as already dead and most distant evokes a strong uncanniness, which Lacoue-Labarthe discusses in terms of *Unheimlichkeit* (SP, 282–283; SP2, 193–194). When the dead past is returned to the present, it distorts the present and renders it dislocated and uncanny (Martis 2005, 61–62).

While Lacoue-Labarthe's formulation of allothanatography can seem pessimistic, it must be understood as a critique of identification process in general. The idea of an already dead "I" refers to the impossibility of rendering present that which constitutes the self. Autobiography produces a copy of the other that does not correspond to the origin of the self, which in turn can be presented only through mimesis. The external means of writing introduce otherness to the narrative, which turns out to be of a dead other in a perpetual struggle over proper identity. Here even death does not properly belong to the subject: important is not the idea of death as a part of the self, but the point that autobiography is in its essence a narrative of agony. Moreover, Lacoue-Labarthean mimesis functions as an active and living force of production and

birth – its disturbing and uncanny quality rises more from grotesque than macabre effect.

On a general level, gameplay is agonistic – Roger Caillois famously used the term *agon* to describe the competitive nature of games (Caillois 2001, 12–13, 14–26). The relation between the player and the game is determined by the structure of the double bind. Digitality does not change this fact considerably, but human-computer-interaction alters the notion of allothanatography. The subject of digital gameplay is produced through allothanatography, because the subject is doubled into the original agent of gamic action and the presentation of that agency through the computational system, which disperses into multiple momentary forms. In digital gameplay, autobiography is the player's attempt to appropriate gamic agency within the gameworld. However, because the agency is produced in terms of the gamic system, it becomes a story of the other: gamic action as self-presentation is always contaminated by the foreignness of the computer, which produces a subject that differs from the original. In relations with other humans, the subject internalizes the death of the other as part of itself, but in human-computer-interaction, the other's death is replaced by the inhumanity of the machine. As a narrative of agnoy, digital gameplay brings forth the significance of technology in relation to subjectal self-presentation. It is not merely a competitive situation but a struggle for appropriation of the gamic agency, which as self-presentation determines the player's being as a subject.

This subchapter presented three Lacoue-Labarthean thematizations of the conflict between the subject and the source of its identification. They emphasize digital gameplay as a relation between the subject and its model through rivalry, in which the source of identification must be surpassed in order to appropriate its position. Mimetic copying of the self-presentations of others leads to a struggle over the proper identity. In digital gameplay, this struggle occurs as the attempt to appropriate the gamic structure and replace the developer's mastery by revealing the algorithmic system. However, the other is as unreachable as the essence of the self, and imitation is always a result of misinterpretation, a copy of something that did not occur in the first place. This misinterpreted otherness replaces the subject's being, which can be presented only as the story of the other's death. In human-computer-interaction, the presentation of the self is determined by the algorithm, which introduces the machinic otherness of the computer process into the player's subjectivity that is produced as the subject of gamic agency. The next part will develop the notion of mimetic struggle between the player's and the computer's actions towards Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of paradox as the general structure of mimesis.

4.2   The Paradox of Gameplay

Gameplay is not an imitation of the developer or the playable character, not even of the represented action, but a presentation of the player's self, an autobiographical act which the machinic otherness of the algorithmic system

renders as allothanatography. The player does not imitate a character represented as the agent of the action but acts through it (see Cremin 2016, 103). There might not be a character at all, or multiple characters viewed from a distance, in which case the player acts through the representation of action. This is what ultimately happens in gameplay; mimesis without models, as Lacoue-Labarthe would put it. Gameplay is a manifestation of the player's will, a creative process in which the player acts through extending her- or himself into the gameworld. The game responds to the player's inputs and decisions, which result in the audiovisual representation of the changes made in the state of the machine. The act of walking in a game is not only a representation of walking, but a command that causes the code to react, resulting in a spatial change in the audiovisual representation. More than a simulation of an act in the physical world, an act within a digital game is a representation of the player as the subject of gamic action (see also Mason 2014).

From this perspective, a digital game is not a *model* of identification. The affectivity of the action-based medium does not mean that the player would absorb an ideology from the game's programming. Neither does it mean that there would be a correlation between the action represented through the figural level of the game and everyday behaviour: shooting people in a game is not necessarily a process of identification with that kind of behaviour. The notion of gamic mimesis does not concern the figural level or direct influences, which would be very difficult to define. This does not exclude the possibility that the repeated representation of a certain kind of behaviour would not influence the player, but that question belongs to a completely different kind of discourse[101]. Exemplarity of the game as an object stems from its programming, which implies certain types of acts that will enable the player to reach the game's goal. While the player has no access to the game beyond the figural surface, actions represented through it always indicate the responsiveness of the underlying system. Because the player has no access to the pre-programmed algorithm itself, all decisions concerning gamic action are related to the figural representation and to an interpretation of its algorithmic functionality. However, the grasp of the system upon the player's actions remains unseen.

Lacoue-Labarthe's characterization of the double bind as a contradictory double imperative becomes more radical with the notions of paradox and *hyperbologic*. These terms describe the logic of mimesis, the principle of its functioning as the oscillation between the agent and the product of enunciation (which encompasses all kinds of acts, including gamic action). This paradoxical logic is constituted as an unresolvable contradiction between the two opposites. With the notion of the hyperbological, Lacoue-Labarthe refers to a multiplication of hyperbolic exaggeration and an excess of representation; *representational doubling*. As Martis explains, the loss of the subject is mediated through an excess of subjectal representation rather than through its deficit. According to Martis, the difference between *hyperbolical* and *hyperbological* is that hyperbolical subjectal loss does not bring forth representational doubling but is actually its

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[101]   For example, see Williams and Clippinger 2002.

opposite. Hyperbolical refers to a subjectal loss as a representation of excess, whereas in representational doubling the loss of a subject results from an excess of representation. Hyperbological means locating this doubling within the hyperbolical, meaning that the representations of the subject are multiplied and opposed to each other. (Martis 2005, 95–96.) The speculative desire towards the absolute infinitization of the subject is hyperbolic, but the hyperbological removes the possibility of speculative solution.

In more tangible terms, this means that the subject's excessive attempt to enunciate its proper identity (the hyperbolic) results in the excessive duplication of identities (the hyperbologic), because the enunciated subject invalidates the presence of the enunciator and vice versa, according to the abyssal logic of subjectal loss. Lacoue-Labarthe demonstrates this through readings of Diderot and Hölderlin, in which the abyssality of Hölderlin's speculative-dialectic matrix in regard to the subject is similar to Diderot's formulation of acting; both show how the enunciator and enunciated reciprocally displace each other. Here the Aristotelian notion of productive mimesis (*poïesis*) reverts to restricted mimesis (*imitatio*) and in the end reveals itself as Platonic mimesis (Martis 2005, 98).

In this section, I investigate Lacoue-Labarthe's characterization of mimesis through the notions of paradox and *hyperbologic*, which is based on his analyses of Diderot and Hölderlin and will lead to a distinction between active and passive mimesis. Regarding gameplay, this elucidates the relation between the player's conscious actions and involuntary performance of the algorithm. Finally, the logic of paradox is related to Hölderlin's conception of the caesura as an arrhythmic interruption.

4.2.1   The Gift of Nothing

In *Le paradoxe et la mimesis* (*Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis*), Lacoue-Labarthe analyses Denis Diderot's text *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (*The Paradox of the Actor*), which proposes a theory of acting that contests the idea of the actor's identification with the performed role. Diderot says that to successfully and sensibly imitate every character with a similar aptitude, an actor must have no sensibility and no real properties of their own. To portray feelings on the stage, the actor must have no real ones themselves. The paradoxicality of the claim lies between the ability to imitate and the insensibility towards what is imitated. With gameplay, the paradox could be referred to as the paradox of the player, according to which a perfect mastery of the game would require complete coolness and detachment from the performance of gameplay. However, the theatrical context cannot be directly applied to gaming because theatrical and gamic performance differ from each other, both in their methods and purpose. The paradox becomes relevant in regard to gameplay when Lacoue-Labarthe shows that a more general philosophical structure underlies Diderot's text.

In Diderot's paradox, the actor must have penetration and no sensibility; a great deal of judgment but the role of a disinterested onlooker. A perfect actor never empathizes with the character but retains a disinterested and emotionless attitude towards it. At the same time, the actor must of course imitate the

character's feelings with the greatest precision and skill. This means that to imitate everything properly, the actor must have no proper qualities. The paradox is not only a convergence of contrary opinions, but a hyperbolic movement that establishes the equivalence of contraries, pushed infinitely to the extreme as a double superlative (IM, 20; TYP2, 252). Lacoue-Labarthe denominates this paradoxical logic *hyperbological*, which he defines as properly abyssal and unstoppable, because in its movement it envelops itself and cannot be resolved, especially not by dialectical logic.

It is important to note that Diderot does not define hyperbologic, which is rather the cause for his insights in the first place and engulfs also the subject of his writing (IM, 21–22; TYP2, 252–254). In fact, Diderot's text functions itself as the paradox it tries to describe, emphasizing the problematic status of the subject of its enunciation. It is a dialogue in which one interlocutor does most of the talking, while the other acknowledges his ideas. Incongruously, Diderot is identified as both the external narrator and the interlocutor. In this narrative rupture between the mimetic and diegetic (dialogic and narrative) forms, the "I" intrudes on the text and instead of being an effect of autography and the author's appropriation of the text, makes its whole status tremble. The enunciator of the paradox is at the same time himself and the other, and in consequence occupies no place, becoming a no one. The enunciation for which the subject is responsible becomes something that cannot anymore be considered its own enunciation. Lacoue-Labarthe states that this disappearance of the subject of enunciation is of a general sort and asks whether the logic of paradox inevitably carries the enunciation of any paradox beyond itself to the movement that would engulf the subject of that enunciation. (IM, 17–19; TYP2, 249–251.)

Representation of the subject results in a duplication: one pole is the enunciating subject, the other what is enunciated. According to Martis (2005, 97), the hyperbole undoes the event of the subjectal agency of the enunciator. If the performed subject undoes the performer, then it also invalidates its own truth because the lack of the agent of the performance results in the lack of the truth of the performance. A subject should guarantee what it says, but if the event of saying removes the guarantor, the truth of it is also removed. The subject is lost in the abyss, as both the content and the agent of enunciation. This is why the subject's ability to be everything is tied to its own absence; the absence of the agent-subject results from the production of the subject and leads to the disappearance of the truth of the work that is the produced subject. If the truth of the work disappears, then it can be anything and cannot be appropriated. This suggests that gamic actions do not belong properly to the player because the act of gameplay results in the representational doubling of the player into the one who plays and the one who is played. This doubling is not divided by the screen into the actual player and a playable character because gamic action occurs on a level that is not reducible to the surface of the fictional gameworld. Instead, the player as a subject is always already dispersed into multiple representations, of which gaming is only one iteration. In gameplay, the otherness that the subject

must face through its own self-presentation is brought about by the assembly of the developer's work and the machine's autonomous functioning.

The paradox of the actor is derived from two propositions, which Lacoue-Labarthe recognizes as an echo of the Aristotelian determination of mimesis as a relation between nature and art. First, artistic practice is the perfection of the gift of nature, which bestows personal qualities to human beings. Second, art functions always according to a fixed system of principles and thus the events on stage fundamentally differ from nature. (IM, 22–23; TYP2, 254–255.) *Physis*, the gift of personal qualities, is incomplete and mimesis, the actor's artistry, perfects it. In *Physics*, Aristotle provided two formulations of mimesis: The first one is restricted mimesis, *techne*, the reproduction and copying of what is already presented by nature. The second is general mimesis, *poïesis*, which does not merely reproduce, but *supplements* and *substitutes* [102] nature's incapacity to produce everything. The idea of art as perfection allowed Diderot to elevate art as being superior to nature, in accordance with the metaphysics of modernity and Diderot's own theory of the genius, says Lacoue-Labarthe. But in the second proposition, Diderot resorted to the restricted interpretation of mimesis as the reduplication and representation of nature within the constraints of dramatic principles. This comes down to an old argument against pure imitation and the naive conception of art as something spontaneously natural: because the stage is not life, it can never be a pure and simple imitation.

According to Lacoue-Labarthe, this means that theatricality justifies the general function of supplementation that is given to art: dramatic mimesis represents the general function of supplementation. Art substitutes nature and replaces it with representation, which Lacoue-Labarthe identifies as theatre, a presentation of something that was not given or present. This explains why Aristotle privileged theatre and Diderot gave such an exorbitant role to the actor. The same movement is found also in Hölderlin's work, but Lacoue-Labarthe notes that it points to a more archaic determination of mimesis behind Aristotle, which also prompted Plato to condemn mimesis: ritual and sacrifice. (IM, 24–26; TYP2, 255–257.) Martis (2005, 50) argues that Diderot's anti-Platonic view is in the end itself Platonic, which applies at one level also to Aristotelian mimesis.

The paradox states the law of impropriety: the artist must have nothing proper and thus must be nothing in order to imitate everything and have the same aptitude for every character. In musical terms, the great actor does not have a pre-defined pitch but is capable of taking any pitch or tone. Lacoue-Labarthe generalizes the paradox by stating that only the subjectless subject, deprived of self, can present or produce in general:

> The paradox states a *law of impropriety*, which is also the very law of mimesis: only the "man without qualities," the being without properties or specificity, the subjectless

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[102]   In French *suppléer*; Lacoue-Labarthe's editors point out that this carries an echo of Derrida's notion of *supplément* (TYP2, 255–256).

subject (absent from himself, distracted from himself, deprived of self) is able to present or produce in general.[103] (TYP2, 258–259.)

Based on this generalization, he reconstructs Diderot's argument: nature gives the qualities of a person and art perfects this gift of nature. Here art is not anymore only acting, but a presentation of the self in general, an auto-formation of the subject. Consequently, if the gift of nature bestows personal qualities that are perfected through art, then the gift is *that of nothing*, or *of being nothing*:

> But what do we find at the conclusion? This: *the gift of nature* is the *gift of impropriety*, the *gift of being nothing*, even, we might say, *the gift of nothing*.[104] (TYP2, 259.)

Nothing is the site of the gift of *the thing itself* (la *chose même*); not something already there or presented, but pure *poïesis* (IM, 27; TYP2, 259). Ungraspable and withdrawn, the nature's gift of itself is a pure productive and formative force, natural energy. It is also the gift of mimesis, because it gives nothing but the ability to present, substitute nature and carry out its production. Because the gift of nature is not of any property or quality, its subject is a multiplied and infinitely plural subject: the gift of nothing is the gift of everything, or more precisely, "…the gift of impropriety is the gift for a general appropriation and presentation"[105] (TYP2, 260). According to Lacoue-Labarthe, this hyperbolic exchange between nothing and everything, between the subject's absence and its proliferation, is finally the paradox of the subject.

The hyperbolic oscillation between two extremities characterizes the subject as a hollow site traversed by multiplying identities. However, through the gift of mimesis, the subject is constantly appearing, even though its appearance immediately risks dispersion and withdrawal. Performing a role, a fictional character in a play, or the character that a person identifies themselves to be, is based on the empty ability of presenting something, mimesis without models. The general paradox of the subject emphasizes that there is nothing substantial beneath self-presentations and subjective identity, which is produced through acts of imitation of misinterpreted models, possibly even unbeknownst to the subject itself. When transformed into the paradox of gameplay, it means that to appropriate the gamic structure and gain mastery over the gamic action, the player must become disappropriated through the disciplinary nature of learning what games require in order to overcome their obstacles. The game is playing the player as much as the player is playing the game, and the more the player attempts to master the game, the more he or she must submit to its pre-

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[103] "Le paradoxe énonce *une loi d'impropriété,* qui est la loi même de la mimesis : seul « l'homme sans qualités », l'être sans propriété ni spécifité, le sujet sans sujet (absent à lui-même, distrait de lui-même, privé de soi) est à même de présenter ou de produire en général." (IM, 27)

[104] "Or que trouve-t-on à l'arrivée? Ceci : ce *don de nature* est le *don de l'impropriété*, le don de n'être rien, voire, à la limite, *le don de rien*." (IM, 28.)

[105] "…le don de l'impropriété est le don de l'appropriation générale et de la presentation" (IM, 29).

programmed structure.[106] However, also the game is empty without the player's supplement of play, through which the tension between the player's and the machine's actions remain in an unresolvable oscillation between the sense of control and its loss.

Lacoue-Labarthe explores the relation between mimesis and the paradox of the subject further: *hyperbologic* is the structure of mimesis, *mimetologic*, which is the logic of *semblance*, a "…division between appearance and reality, presence and absence, the same and the other, or identity and difference"[107] (TYP2, 260). He emphasizes that this division both grounds and unstabilizes mimesis. Resemblance is always differing, because the sameness of the same is already the other, which in turn cannot refer to itself as itself:

> At whatever level one takes it—in the copy or the reproduction, the art of the actor, mimetism, disguise, dialogic writing—the rule is always the same: the more it resembles, the more it differs. The same, in its sameness, is the other itself, which in turn cannot be called "itself," and so on infinitely…[108] (TYP2, 260.)

In other words, semblance and truth are alike: mimesis corresponds to *aletheia*, and there is no difference between re-presentation and presentation in the incessant exchange between the same and the other – the innermost of the subject is most distant to it (IM, 29–30; TYP2, 260–261). Hyperbologically, the more the subject attempts to resemble itself, the more this results in difference from itself. The more a player attempts to appropriate themselves through mastery of the game, the more he or she becomes disappropriated by the game's mastery. The similar appearance of both semblance and truth means that truth is constructed according to the logic of mimesis, where truth as semblance or verisimilitude is increasingly dissimilar in its pursuit of similarity. If *aletheia* is infected by mimesis, it can reveal only incessant reproduction and substitution. The gift of nothing is the abyssal ground of the self, an empty chamber of echoes which cannot sustain a stable identity but allows the free play of roles. When the self is determined as a subject of gamic action, the gift of nothing is given by the machinic nature of the digital game as a space of possibilities and improvisation.

4.2.2 Active versus Passive Mimesis

While the actor's paradox is hyperbological, Diderot failed to connect it to the paradox of the subject and did not carry out its consequences. He emphasized an emotionless attitude in which the actor must keep a distance both from the role

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[106]   This observation is not especially novel, as it has been made by Gadamer (2004, 106) and has also been considered in previous digital games research (e.g. Murray 1997, 77; Aarseth 1997, 162; Arjoranta 2015, 39).

[107]   "…le partage de l'apparence et de la réalité, de la présence et de l'absence, du même et de l'autre ou de l'identité et de la difference" (IM, 29).

[108]   "A quelque niveau qu'on la prenne : dans la copie ou la reproduction, l'art du comédien, le mimétisme, le travestissement, l'écriture dialogique −, la règle est toujours la même : plus cela ressemble, plus cela diffère; le même, dans sa mêmeté, est l'autre lui-même, qu'à son tour on ne peut pas dire « lui-même », et ainsi de suite à l'infini..." (IM, 29.)

and her own emotions. This state of inspiration is a form of possession, a construction of a mannequin which the actor can inhabit, elaborating outside oneself as another, in perfect mastery. It contrasts activity with passivity, because this mode of inspiration requires active self-alienation, a voluntary doubling of the self. Conversely, a passionate actor becomes self-alienated passively, in a state of uncontrollable possession. Diderot condemned passive self-alienation, claiming that the actor's possession by the role should be active, deliberate and calculated being-outside-oneself. Without calculated self-alienation, a role is taken passively and affectionately, and the subject becomes prey to affective influences. In a Platonic manner, Diderot took this view of theatricality to a societal level, where bad mimesis implies political danger, because roles can bear ideology and take hold of the masses. (IM, 30–33; TYP2, 261–264.)

In terms of gameplay, such a distinction would be easy to make: the player must practice active self-alienation in order to double the self into being-in-the-world and being-in-the-gameworld. Vella (2015a, 57–58) suggests that the experience of gameplay is determined by two perspectives in respect to the gameworld: internal, which focuses on completing gameplay tasks, and external, which views gameplay from a critical distance. The player is doubled into the playable figure and the player. This could be contrasted to passive gameplay, involuntary self-alienation and complete submission to the programming of the game. However, Lacoue-Labarthe insists that the decision between active and passive mimesis is impossible because mimesis affects the subject always before the moment of decision. In fact, gameplay is organized around the distinction between passivity and activity, through the interplay of control and its loss.

Unlike Plato, Diderot did not condemn mimesis altogether – he rejected only frenzied possession in favour of cool reflection and mastery. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that by condemning sensibility and enthusiasm, Diderot halted the paradox in an attempt to control it. Moreover, he recognized passive mimesis as femininity, denouncing it as possessed and hysteric, which follows the old tradition of elevating rectitude over instability and assigning them with male and female attributes. Lacoue-Labarthe notes that involuntary obsession in terms of passion and passivity in fact corresponds to the state of being a subject. Martis (2005, 48; 52–53) distinguishes two kinds of withdrawal at play here: a general one, which always already prefigures subjectivity, and an active withdrawal, which Diderot describes as the actor's work. Lacoue-Labarthe does not explicitly make this distinction, and as Martis (2005, 40–41) also notes, in accordance with Derrida's commentary, subjectal *désistance* marks the middle voice between active and involuntary withdrawal.

A critique of digital gameplay, according to which the player's subjectivity becomes interpellated by the game's ideology or otherwise affected by the values implied by the rule-system and its programming (see Charles 2009), resorts to the notion of the passivity of the subject as a malleable matter. My intention is not to refute the possibility of this kind of identification. However, it should be always countered with criticism of particular games, not games in general. Instead of being only disciplinary systems that compel the player to blindly obey their

procedures for the reward of a false sense of power and mastery, digital games can also function as stages of active withdrawal that give space for endless modification of the emptied subject through the open-ended nature of gameplay. To decide that gameplay is characterized either of these would arrest the hyperbological oscillation that governs mimesis. For example, Turkle thinks that tinkering with computers and writing code can have emancipatory effect, but suggests that playing digital games has a possessive quality: computers have "holding power", which is crucial for the fascination for digital games as a culture of rules and simulation (Turkle 2005, 65–67). The relationship between the person and the machine is characterized by this holding power – however, instead of addiction, she emphasizes seduction as the force that makes digital media compelling (Turkle 1996, 30). Writing code is unquestionably an act of creation, whereas gameplay is characterized by interaction with a system that someone else created. However, the holding power of digital games can result equally from both the possibility to play with different types subjective agencies and the possessive nature of the goal-oriented system.

The point of Lacoue-Labarthe's critique is that Diderot had no justification to make this decision between passivity and activity, which caused him to be in conflict with the very principle of the paradox. Lacoue-Labarthe points out ironically that while Diderot closed the paradox for himself, he opened for others "the enigmatic possibility of thinking the identity without identity of contraries" [109] (TYP2, 263). According to Lacoue-Labarthe, enthusiasm and ferociousness actually resemble mimesis, which Plato knew when he condemned both at once. However, Lacoue-Labarthe immediately adds that in fact possession greatly differs from mimesis. Possession is passive and presupposes a *suppositum* (*sûppot*), a subject as a malleable matter, in which an imprint can be stamped. Mimesis, however, presupposes a pure no one ("une pure *personne*"), a subjectless subject, which means that it is by definition active. Possession, on the contrary, is passive mimesis, monstrous, dangerous and uncontrollable. It works through a subject, imprinting a stamp upon it and making it passive. The dangerousness of this is political because it can evoke the fury of the masses: a madness. Active mimesis, on the other hand, works through an empty place, through the already withdrawn subject.

Lacoue-Labarthe's text gets confusing with two different interpretations of mimesis – the passive form of identification could be better called *mimetism* than mimesis. Rather than two existing forms of identification, this division refers to different interpretations of mimesis; passive, which works through a predetermined subjectivity, and active, which functions on the basis of an empty subject. The active form is more fundamental because it is the condition of any subjectivity, which could then function as a basis for passive identification. Hence, even though determined as active, mimesis contains also the possibility of passively adapting pre-given roles and identifying with exemplary figures. In fact, passive mimesis can be enticing, because it provides a sense of permanence

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[109] " …cette énigmatique possibilité de penser l'identité sans identité des contraires" (IM, 33).

and order, at the expense of locking into possibly restrictive models and double binds. This explains also in part the appeal of gameplay, which can be constructed upon a simple mechanism of rewarding the player for following pre-given instructions. Such gameplay would correspond to what Cremin (2016, 24; 61–63) calls an arborescent structure.

The division between proper mimesis and passive imitation was recognized also by Nietzsche who claimed that the Germany of his time did not exist because it had lost its proper being (or never had it in the first place). Lacoue-Labarthe notes that this conception of Germany's nonexistence was organized by a theatrical metaphor: in opposition to Plato, Nietzsche praised the art of the comedian, but claimed that Germany's theatricality was passive mimesis. Germans were passive spectators of history, refusing to recognize their own art. Their imitation became depropriation and prevented access to the proper being of Germany. Lacoue-Labarthe remarks that Nietzsche acknowledged the Platonico-Aristotelian determination of art as mimesis, but opposed Plato and followed Aristotle, believing that properly artistic mimesis is not passive imitation. He considered productive, artistic and active mimesis as virile, in opposition to the passive, which Nietzsche determined as femininity, similarly to Diderot. Nietzsche converted mimesis by virilizing it, in order convert the passive relation to history into a creative one. (IM, 99–102, Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 220–222.)

This view of history is a movement of development and education, historical formation in the sense of *Bildung*. Nietzsche claimed that the essential life-force of man was in conflict with history, likening the philosopher's task to that of a doctor, tracking down and healing the symptoms of the historical malady that threatens the dynamic life-force of humanity (IM 88–90; Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 209–211). Memory and language constitute a historical sense, which defines humanity and differentiates men from animals, but life constitutes the essence of man as a living thing. If historical sense is not suppressed, it becomes a malady of finitude; Nietzsche saw this as a modern sickness that was caused by the Hegelian attempt to define the human being as essentially historical. Without limitations, historicity becomes overwhelming and harmful and destroys the creative will of the individual and culture. When controlled and dosed properly, history becomes a drug (*pharmakon*) necessary in small dosages, but can become poisonous and deadly if abused, drugging entire nations. (IM, 91–93; Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 212–214.) With the exception of onto-typological motifs, such as masculine and feminine roles, and the possibility of deciding between active and passive modes, Lacoue-Labarthe builds upon Nietzsche's and Diderot's accounts. The threat of madness in passive mimesis is thus an ethical concern – it can cause people to take on and assign roles in an epidemic manner, of which violent political movements are a typical example. Digital information and communication networks can allow the spread of such epidemics at a considerably greater speed and scale through their algorithmic efficiency but provide also the means of distorting totalizing figural orders.

Lacoue-Labarthe interprets Diderot's move against involuntary dispossession as an attack against the Platonico-Socratic and Rousseauistic tradition of rejecting mimesis altogether in favour of social transparency and appropriation of the subject. Diderot's strategy is a re-theatricalization of the passive social theatre, a gesture of the staging of mimesis, in which active mimesis is played against its passive counterpart, culminating in a catharsis. Renunciation of the subject purges mimetic passivity, a passion that is either pity and compassion (i.e. identification), or its reverse: the terror and panic evoked by the mimetic contagion. This conversion of mimesis is in perfect accord with Aristotle, adds Lacoue-Labarthe. In other words, the sensible and passionate subject, who is affected by pity and terror, is purified through the renunciation of the subject. The Platonic gesture against masks and dissimulation condemned the actor for assuming a character that is not their own and forgetting completely their own place. Diderot turned this over by stating that the actor's lack of original character enables imitation in the first place, but his conversion of mimesis conflicted with the absolute undecidability concerning passive and active imitation. According to the very logic of the paradox, the highest degree of activity is the highest passivity, because the subject's aspiration for autoproduction already results from the fact of being produced by others. While mimesis without models is the basis of identification, an attempt to completely secure artistic production from mindless imitation – the proper from the improper – violates the logic of paradox.

Active mimesis indicates freedom from models, but mimetic force alone enables autoproduction in the first place. Martis interprets this as follows:

> The subject, then, absents itself ''from itself'' during mimesis, thereby becoming unpossessable by the mimesis that transforms ''it.'' It is this paradoxical hollowed figure that emerges from Lacoue-Labarthe's excursion into Diderot's paradox. (Martis 2005, 52.)

This means that active mimesis is a volitional becoming-nothing, which allows mimesis to function as a productive force inside the self emptied from all substance. The subject on the one hand suffers withdrawal as the always fleeing "I" of writing and lived experience, but on the other, deliberately withdraws and allows the free play of mimesis. According to Martis (2005, 53), the volitional withdrawal of the subject collapses the distinction between literature (what is fictioned) and philosophy (what is true), because it concerns similarly both the performing and the thinking subject:

> The *désistance* of the subject who creates the ''text'' of his or her *stage* acts is related to the *désistance* of the subject who creates the ''text'' of his or her ''real life'' acts. The thrust of the deconstructive enterprise corresponding to *désistance* is the claim that the event of fictioning is the event of the withdrawal of the (presumed) ''real'' subject who is the agent of the fictioning. (Martis 2005, 54.)

The player of a digital game is similarly a withdrawn subject on the computational stage, which corresponds to the withdrawal suffered by the player's persona. Both the paradox of the actor and the paradox of gameplay

reflect the general paradox of the subject. However, whereas Diderot's text concerns primarily actual acting and refers to performing roles in everyday life only with the vague notion of social theatre, digital gameplay is directly relatable to everyday life in today's world.

4.2.3 Aletheic Hyperbologic and the Paralysis of Representation

Lacoue-Labarthe finds a more profound manifestation of the hyperbological in Hölderlin's theory of the relation between a tragic character and its author. Here it appears as the paradox of the dramatist: the more the tragic poet wishes to express his own interiority, the more he must rely on foreign material as a mediator. In regard to gameplay, this form of the paradox emphasizes the player's action as an expression of her or his identity as the subject of action. As an expression of the developer's interiority, a digital game can be understood as the foreign material through which the developer's proper identity becomes displaced, especially because the computer functions independently of the developer. However, as my focus is on the act of gameplay, I exclude the developer's creative action from the investigation and focus on the digital game as the foreign material, through which the player's exteriority is expressed.

Martis (2005, 100) emphasizes that the artificiality of expression corresponds to the Platonic subject of mimesis, which is threatened to be lost in writing. The dramatist's paradox refers to the impossibility of the self-presentation of the subject: the more the experiencing subject becomes undifferentiated from the poetic force of enunciation, the more the content of this enunciation shows the subject's separation from its own experience. When Lacoue-Labarthe speaks of theatre, it is important to note that he interprets the structure of tragedy as the structure of mimesis and the mechanism of (re)presentation, which refers to a more general functioning of mimesis (IM, 50; TYP2, 218). Nevertheless, Lacoue-Labarthe's writings on Hölderlin are mainly focused on the history of philosophy and the problem of philosophical presentation, which in all its importance must be cut off from my reading because it is not directly relevant to digital gameplay. It is important to note that Lacoue-Labarthe's arguments are based on complicated analyses of the relation between the Aristotelian theory of tragedy and classical German philosophy, which cannot be reproduced here. Hölderlin occupies a special place within Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophical characters, because through the failure of his painful theoretical endeavour and the impossibility of carrying it out, he managed to dislocate the speculative thought from within, which resulted in a definitive characterization of the hyperbologic.

Hölderlin exhausted all available dialectical resources to propose the dramatic figure as "…a mediation for the paradoxically adequate expression of the author or the subject…"[110] (TYP2, 230) but could not arrive at a conclusion. For Lacoue-Labarthe, this indicates that the subject can become itself only by

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[110]   …la figure dramatique comme moyen ou médiation en vue de l'expression paradox-
        alement adéquate de l'auteur ou du sujet… (IM, 63.)

taking on a purely external agency, which manifests its identity as something that has rejected the natural elements of that identity; the subject is characterized by its passage through foreign material. The survival of this foreignness distinguishes Hölderlin from Schelling, because Hölderlin's account retains simultaneously both freedom and determination in accordance with the paradox. (Martis 2005, 101.) Lacoue-Labarthe describes this as an immobilized weakening of the dialectical process, at a standstill in the unending oscillation between two poles in opposition, always infinitely distant from each other:

> [T]he closer it is, the more distant it is; the more dissimilar it is, the more adequate it is; the more interior it is, the more exterior it is. In short, the maximum of appropriation (for the perpetual comparison here originates in a movement of passing to the limit, and proceeds necessarily from a logic of excess — of the superlative) is the maximum of disappropriation, and conversely. "The more infinite the interiority . . . the more rigorously the image must differentiate the human being from the element of his sentiment . . ."[111] (TYP2, 230–231.)

The hyperbolic excessivity of self-presentation, which amounts to the infinization and absolutization of the subject, a capacity to complete itself by exceeding itself, is distorted by the hyperbologic, which turns the excessive appropriation into depropriation. Instead of a reversal, it is a ceaseless oscillation between the two; an exchange between the excess of presence and the excess of loss. The more a person tries to perform an identity, the more it is lost in that very performance. However, even the hyperbologic is not a principle that would adequately describe how mimesis works. If mimesis is truly undefinable, it cannot be captured by any concept. Lacoue-Labarthe remains suspicious even towards Höldrelinian hyperbology, suspecting that the effect of mimetology eventually returns to the discourse of truth and presence. (IM, 63–64; TYP2, 230-231.) Martis (2005, 102) interprets the hyperbologic as a reference to "an inner logic" of hyperbolization of excess but notes this interpretation of hyperbolic as "a paralysis between opposite representations, by which the subject of enunciation is lost, remains inside the conceptual framework that it also subverts."

Heidegger searched in Hölderlin for a possibility to return underneath the speculative assumption of truth as adequation and tried to find an exit from within onto-theology. The logic of *aletheia* functions in terms of *Ent-fernung* (*é-loignement*, (dis)distancing), but Lacoue-Labarthe suspects that this very logic might still be subject to mimetology. In other words, the truth of *aletheia* could be a paradoxical combination of the logic of the alternation between appropriation and depropriation (the hyperbologic), and truth interpreted as adequation. What dislocated the speculative thought from within would thus also dislocate

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[111]   [P]lus c'est proche, plus c'est lointain; plus c'est dissemblable, plus c'est adéquat; plus c'est intérieur, plus c'est extérieur. Bref, le maximum de l'appropriation (car la comparaison perpétuelle, ici, s'origine dans un passage à la limite et procède nécessairement d'une logique de l'excès — du superlatif), — le maximum de l'appropriation est le maximum de la dépropriation, et inversement. « Plus l'intériorité sera infinie, plus l'image, en toute rigueur, devra distinguer l'homme et l'élément de sa sensibilité. » (IM, 63.)

Heidegger's thought, precisely because he turned to Hölderlin in order to exit onto-theology (IM, 64; TYP2, 231). Or as Martis puts it:

> "hyperbology presumes an affinity of Hölderlin's hyperbolic with Heideggerian *entfernung* (dis-distancing): a stepping back so as to come nearer—or, more accurately speaking, to allow truth, as *aletheia*, to come nearer, in unconcealment."

He adds that this understanding of the hyperbologic is inevitable but limited because it confirms the possibility of the adequate representation of *aletheic* truth. Martis stresses that Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of hyperbologic is more sophisticated (for example concerning different self-representations in *The Echo of the Subject*) because it elaborates the paralysis of representation itself, removing the possibility for representational truth (Martis 2005, 102–103). However, Lacoue-Labarthe does not develop this reference to Heidegger further, leaving it open to interpretation.

The unresolvability of the hyperbological oscillation is exemplified by the caesura, which usually means a break in a verse, but in Hölderlin's writings gains a more definitive function in the general structure of tragedy. Lacoue-Labarthe interprets the caesura as a moment of pure representation, which shows the unpresentable middle ground of the hyperbologic. For Hölderlin, it meant a moment where the dialectical organization of tragedy confirms itself upon empty articulation or the lack of articulation, which suspends the catastrophic process of alternation. The caesura indicates the tragic *transport* (the transportation of the character towards the disaster), which is properly empty. In the rhythmic succession of representations, the caesura is a pure word, an anti-rhythmic interruption, which is needed for culminating the alternation of representations in such a way that there remains not alternation, but representation itself. It does not remove the logic of exchange and alternation, but simply halts it, re-equilibrates it and prevents the representations to be brought into one sense or the other. The caesura represents *active neutrality*, an empty moment or the absence of a moment. This (dis)organization of the dialectical logic leads to a caesuraed moment, an equilibrium in which the oscillation between extremities is not sublated, but not completely disorganized either. (IM, 67–69; TYP2, 234–235.) Lacoue-Labarthe accepts Hölderlin's interpretation of the caesura as a figure of representation itself, an absence of resolution to hyperbolic oscillation (Martis 2005, 104). The player's attempt for appropriation of the gamic system, which would result in a mastery over the subject of gamic action, is inevitably confronted by the disapproptiation of that action into the foreignness of the computer process. This is not restricted to digital games, but touches all interaction with digital technology, as the paradox of the subject is of a general sort and functions also outside classical art forms. In the next section, I inspect further Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of rhythm as it becomes detached from the Hölderlinian context as the condition of the subject.

4.3   Playstyle and the Rhythm of Being

The paradox refers to the insurmountable undecidability that places the subject between the enunciator and the enunciated in a situation where the attempt to appropriate a model results in disappropriation of the "proper" self. This situation does not take a permanent form because the subject forms over time through multiple relations to different others and can take on multiple roles, which traverse and decompose the self. Whereas a double bind as a relation between master and apprentice is a distinct situation of which the self can be aware, the subject is also affected by unconscious traces that make their imprint underneath conceptual language and imagery. This is also the aspect of gameplay that I wish to focus on; the player's relation to the affective level of gameplay that arises from its algorithmic foundation. In discourse, nonconceptual meaning is carried through stylistic nuances and manners of speaking that escape the subject's conscious intention. In gameplay, this phenomenon manifests through playstyle, in contrast to narrative choices and visual aesthetics. It should be noted that these aspects can be difficult to separate from each other, both in the use of language and in the act of playing, which Lacoue-Labarthe emphasizes by describing style as a doubled phenomenon.

Lacoue-Labarthe discusses style in relation to rhythm, by which he refers to the repetitive nature of mimesis. He explores this theme in *L'écho du sujet* (*The Echo of the Subject*), which takes as its starting point an inexplicable connection between autobiographical compulsion and musical obsession. This question is investigated with Nietzschean and psychoanalytic theories of a musical ground of subjectivity by focusing to a single text: psychoanalyst Theodor Reik's *The Haunting Melody* (Reik 1983), the last chapter in Reik's autobiographical book of the same name that combines psychoanalytic theory with musical experiences. Lacoue-Labarthe quotes Hölderlin, who said that all is rhythm, and Mallarmé, who said that every soul is a rhythmic knot (SP, 119–220; TYP2 139–140).

Through the motif of music, Lacoue-Labarthe transforms mimesis into auditory register, detaching it completely from pictorial interpretations. As usual, his text is a complex and delicate operation, which blurs the borders between poetic and philosophical writing. In any case, reproduction of his argument would be cumbersome and possibly even a futile attempt – this is a text that must be read (and re-read), experienced in its nuances and tones. I highlight from it the motif of style, which refers to nonconceptual self-expression that is not reducible to the figural order and to a double status of the autobiographical subject as both the subject of tragedy and the subject of *Bildungsroman*. This develops further the problematic of active and passive mimesis. Style is the mode of self-presentation that can touch upon the unpresentable mimetic scenario, which now can be understood in terms of rhythm.

In terms of gameplay, the phenomenon occurs as the style of play, which characterizes all events of play as the player's own. The player's added craft into the mechanical system of the game results in a performance that creates meaning

through stylistic variations, which result from the player's freedom within the constraints of the gamic structure (see also Väliaho 2014, 116–117). The player cannot affect the narrative aspects of the game or can only choose between predetermined forking paths – in the same manner, the visual aesthetic of the game is predetermined, and even if customizable, is always based on pre-given models. Only modification of the codified game resources allows further freedom of modulation. However, creating or choosing audiovisual and narrative features is irrelevant in respect to gameplay itself, which is determined by the player's interaction with the computational system that comprises the gamic structure. Modifying the game through external means is not gameplay. Hence, playstyle is the mode through which the hyperbological movement of appropriaton and disappropriation occurs in gameplay. The notion of rhythm is Lacoue-Labarthe's characterization of mimesis as improvised repetition, which reproduces identity as difference from itself. In gameplay, the player's rhythm is contrasted with the computer, which encompasses both the developer's otherness and the foreignness of the computational medium.[112]

While I do not intend to fixate on the context of Lacoue-Labarthe's argumentation, a short elaboration is necessary. In *The Haunting Melody*, Reik attempted to figure out why the chorale from the final part of Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 2* (the *Resurrection Symphony*) begun to obsess him after hearing about the death of his senior colleague and friend, Karl Abraham. The chorale is based on Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's hymn, also named *Resurrection* (SP, 236–237; TYP2, 154). Mahler heard Klopstock's poem at the funeral of his predecessor, Hans von Bühlow, which gave him the inspiration to complete his unfinished symphony about death and mourning (see Reik 1983, 259–266; 297–302). When informing Reik about Abraham's death, Freud asked him to write a funeral eulogy. During that night, Mahler's chorale begun to play in Reik's mind, which then happened every time he thought about his departed friend.

Attempting to explain this phenomenon through autoanalysis, Reik established a parallel between his rivalry with Abraham and Mahler's rivalry with von Bühlow. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, he carried psychoanalytic discourse to its limit, touching upon mimesis, but ultimately retreated and broke off his investigation without finding answers to his questions. Lacoue-Labarthe follows this 25-year-long self-torturing quest that *The Haunting Melody* presents and, in the same manner as with dialectical logic in Hölderlin's case, finds the most important insight about mimesis through the very failure of Reik's theoretical endeavour.[113] Reik tried to explain the recurring melody through the words of the chorale, reducing the acoustic to the verbal (SP, 238; TYP2, 155). Lacoue-Labarthe demonstrates that the constraints of theory itself, the attempt to categorize, conceptualize and make visible, distorts the attempt to grasp mimesis, which operates outside of theoretical thought. In Reik's case, the failure of the

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[112]   Rhythm and style in gameplay have previously been examined by McDonald (2014).
[113]   Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe explore the relation between dialectical logic and psychoanalysis in regard to Lacan and Hegel in *The Title of the Letter* (Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy 1973, 124–128; 1992, 121–124).

theoretical evinces that mimesis is untheorizable, and hence a certain success can be found through this very failure. Lacoue-Labarthe's gesture of thematizing mimesis outside the theoretical results in the notion of rhythm as the condition of the subject.

This reading of Lacoue-Labarthe proceeds in three movements: the first introduces Lacoue-Labarthe's shift from the visual to the auditory register, which detaches mimesis from the figural and conceptual spehere of theoretical thought. This is of course a constant theme in his writing, but in *L'écho du sujet* it is elaborated most clearly. Next, I will introduce Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of style and its relation to mimesis, producing an interpretation of playstyle. Finally, I examine the notion of rhythm as the temporal side of mimesis and the condition for the emergence of subjectivity in general, which governs also the emergence of the subject of gamic agency.

4.3.1   From Reflection to Reverberation

Through music, Lacoue-Labarthe makes a distinction between the visible and the audible. The focus on the musical ground of the subject is a move to the other side of theory, visible forms and concepts, where the lexicon shifts from figures and models to catacoustic reverberations, resonances and echoes. Lacoue-Labarthe describes this as a shift from Narcissus to Echo[114], which means to inspect the subject not as someone obsessed with its own image, but as someone who can only repeat the voices of others. (SP, 225–227; TYP2, 144–146.) Through rhythm, mimesis can be described without the notions of mirror and copy, as a repetition of something that cannot be seen or theorized. This is the unpresentable and unconscious stage where the mimetic scenario is played. Even though Lacuoe-Labarthe ultimately detaches rhythm from being a strictly musical category, his starting point is a discourse that associates music with the innermost sense of the self. Lacoue-Labarthe says that music primes, *la musique en amorce* (SP, 232; TYP2, 150): it sets up the autobiographical gesture of self-theorization. This musicality is an echo that reminds the subject of the unattainable origin of self-identity. If the self, as autobiography, is constituted by the loss of origin and can be understood as a trace of something that has never occurred, musicality thematizes this constitutive loss as an inner echo, a certain conversion of Derridean *trace* to acoustic terms. This acoustic sense refers to sound and rhythm instead of verbal discourse and must not be confused with the opposition between writing and speech.

Proceeding from Plato's conception of music as a contribution to the formation of the infantine soul, Lacoue-Labarthe focuses on music's capacity to form and articulate the subject. Lindberg notes that Hegel considered music the art of time and subject; it makes affective and pure resonance emerge in the subject as *logos*. However, instead of accomplishing it, it can only suffocate it.

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[114]   For an interpretation of the disembodied voice of the Echo as a specifically feminine voice, see Felicia Miller Frank (1995, 55–63). Again, Lacoue-Labarthe seems to describe mimesis through characteristics that have been assigned to the female role.

Music has a violent, elementary power, a primordial affectivity that works below *logos*: for both Hegel and Heidegger, music is the realm of a pure affective state. Thus, either music reveals the subject as such, resounding the loss constitutive to its being, or the subject, deprived of its *reason*, is carried away by the musical stream and blended into others in an enthusiastic musical community. The latter option is found also in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Lindberg notes that in both cases, music touches upon the pure existence of the subject and creates a community of beings beyond or below *logos*. In addition, it can stir up and manipulate determined affects. If music is capable of anesthetizing the critical faculty, it can tune and adjust (*accorder*) enthusiastic masses to dubious or terrifying ends. For Lacoue-Labarthe, this is mimetism, passive mimesis that has taken the form of totalitarianism. (Lindberg 2010b, 239–241.)

With acoustic sense, Lacoue-Labarthe refers to *signifiance*[115] rather than signification. It affects the musical and melodic part in the use of language; the voice and its nuances, such as intonation, tone and rhythm. Lacoue-Labarthe associates it with what Roland Barthes called "grain" or colour of voice (Barthes 1991, 269–270). This understanding of language breaks the theoretical divisions between semiotic and semantic, and matter and form (SP, 243–246; TYP2, 159–161). The acoustic sense must not be understood in terms of gestures or mimicry, because it would convert listening to seeing. Confusing musical resonance with optical reflection converts the auditory character of language into the figural – Lacoue-Labarthe calls this a theoretico-specular reduction of the acoustic (SP, 246–248; TYP2, 162–163), which indicates a theoretical desire to enclose everything within the figural and conceptual order. In Reik's case, the attempt to understand musical reminiscence was constrained by the failure to inspect the acoustic sense on its own terms (SP, 252–253; TYP2, 167–168). To understand the compelling and possibly even obsessive power of gamic mimesis, the desire to reduce it to the pictorial or narrative level must be resisted. If there is a level of meaning that does not signify verbally, it should be found also in digital gameplay. Moreover, because gamic action is at its core unseen and happens on a stage hidden from sight, its primary meaning is generated through musical *signifiance*.

Understanding gameplay through Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of rhythm emphasizes its aesthetic quality in terms of movement, repetition and improvisation, which means that gamic action is closer to playing a musical instrument or dancing than it is to theatrical performance, or reading or telling a story. It can be compared with playing the piano: someone composes the piece, another person plays it, and an audience[116] listens to the performance. In this situation, the work of the pianist is closest to gameplay because only the pianist's skilful action brings the composition into life. A classical piano performance must

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[115]   See TYP2, 160 and Benveniste 1985, 43–66.
[116]   My conception of audience does not require actual spectators, because just like with music, gameplay can also be enjoyed solely by the player. However, gameplay can be performed to an actual audience, as in esports and speedruns. An intriguing example of gameplay performance are *let's plays*, which focus to a narration of the player's experience instead of particularly skilful gameplay (see Kerttula 2019).

accurately follow the notation, but a skilled musician interprets and articulates it by variations in dynamics, tempo, rhythm etc. A digital game player must also produce certain predetermined actions in order to overcome the game's obstacles but has the impression of being in control over the way these actions are carried out. The degree of this freedom varies between games: For example, *Dark Souls* allows a myriad of different ways to confront the opponents, from distinct choices of equipment and character attributes to more subtle variations in movement and position of the playable character. While it often demands exact timing and immediately punishes the player for mistakes, there is also room for different ways to approach the obstacle. *Super Meat Boy* (Team Meat 2010), on the contrary, demands precisely performed choreography to survive its levels, in which one wrong move results in the game being over. The player is nevertheless in control of the character, and even if a level could only be completed through a certain sequence of actions, there is usually room for a slight variation in the movements of the character.

An audience watching someone play a game might in fact be closer to an audience at a sporting event than an audience at a concert.[117] Concerning the difference between the experience of playing a piece of music and playing a game, this is not relevant. However, digital games do not have explicit notation, and the player must figure out the game's choreography through experimentation and improvisation. If a game would have a strict pre-defined procedure to follow, like a musical score, it would become an arborescent structure in Cremin's lexicon. Puzzle games are a borderline case, especially when they have only one possible solution for a puzzle, such as certain puzzles in *The Witness*. Hence, when compared to a musical performance, gameplay often comes closer to jazz than classical music due to its emphasis on improvisation.[118] Music is of course not a privileged site for improvisation and I take the example of musical performance only because Lacoue-Labarthe's argument begins with a musical metaphor. However, eventually he detaches the notion of rhythm from musical determination.

4.3.2   Style between Programming and Presentation

The notion of acoustic sense refers to nonconceptual meaning as the basis of identification, which surfaces as style. If self-presentation inevitably takes the form of autobiography or self-image, but mimesis functions prior to figural and

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[117]   Andrew Kania (2018) provides many objections against comparing gameplay with musical performance – I do not claim such resemblance between them and use playing music only as an example. The comparison to piano playing should be understood as the process of learning to play, rather than virtuoso performance. However, exceptional gameplay, such as a speedrun, should be considered a proper performance.

[118]   Lacoue-Labarthe had in fact a close relation to jazz, which he defended against Adorno's criticism (see *Remarque sur Adorno et le jazz, d'un désart obscur*, Lacoue-Labarthe 2015b, 73–90 and Magun 2013, 154–147). However, he did not explicitly introduce musical improvisation to the rhythmic conception of mimesis, because here rhythm refers to a more abstract principle of improvisation than simply musical practice.

discursive order, the *style* of self-presentation is more definitive to the subject than its *content*. In Lacoue-Labarthe's example, mimetic rivalry is revealed through the style of speech, for example variations in intonation and punctuation. Such stylistic nuances can be practiced deliberately or acquired as unconscious contagion:[119] on the one hand, style reflects the experiences of the subject and the story of one's life, but on the other, it betrays how the subject's experiences are in fact guided by subconscious traces. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that these two faces of style mark the difference between fashioned *figure* and incised *type*, or between autobiographical fiction and prescribed writing. The self is both a subject of *Bildungsroman* (a character that is molded through its life experiences) and a subject of tragedy (a character that is guided by an inevitable fate). (SP 251–252; TYP2, 166–167.)

The subject of *Bildungsroman* is the subject that fashions and figures its identity as autobiography, whereas the actions of the subject of tragedy are programmed from the outset, without knowing. Hence, while style can be sought actively, as a personal style that reflects constructed identity, it can also reveal the unconscious programming of the self. In terms of a singular playthrough of a game, the subject is both the player who learns to master the game by developing a playstyle that contributes towards that goal, and the player who is played by the game to comply with its programming. One session of gameplay or a playthrough do not alone determine the subject but belong to the heterogeneous ensemble of contact with others that leave their traces to echo in the emptiness of the proper self. As aesthetically motivated action that foregrounds subjective agency, digital gameplay can become a significant part of self-formation.

Style is a compulsion to confess something that cannot be communicated with words: for example, in *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud claimed that because it is not our conscious determination that governs the use of our expressions, we are not entirely free to choose the imagery to disguise our thoughts (Freud 1981, 194, 210 & 215–216; Reik 1983, 241). According to this viewpoint, personal style and mannerisms determine the *ethos* and character of the subject, its fundamental determination. Lacoue-Labarthe interprets this phenomenon in terms of *lexis*, a meaning that is carried by the style of enunciation and cannot be communicated as such. Style surfaces as the unconscious repetition of actions, which determine the character of the subject. (SP, 268–272; TYP2, 181–185.) Thus, style is a form of mimesis – repetition of the other that determines the subject before a conscious decision.

Style is part of all actions taken by the subject as a fashion that shapes the action in a certain way, regardless of whether it is experienced by the subject as completely irrelevant or extremely meaningful. Style can be dictated by

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[119]   Reik noted that when giving the funeral eulogy for Abraham, he inconspicuously imitated Abraham's accent, which was confirmed by a slip of the tongue, when he was accidentally called Abraham after the speech (Reik 1983, 235–236). Following Nietzsche, he related the inscription of the type and the plastic constitution of the subject to style (that which is typical or characteristic to a person), under which the problematic of the double and repetition is subordinated (SP, 264; SP2, 177–178).

pragmatic means, or it can have an aesthetic motif. It can be inconspicuous but also a presentation, a deliberately sought manner. In general, fashion can be understood as a deliberately constructed personal style and keeping track of the latest trends, but it is more powerful when it affects without noticing and is acquired nonverbally, without conscious thought. This is most evident in the manners of speech, which can transmit furtively through everyday life.

Style of play means the manner through which the player plays the game. The player's interaction with the computer, which takes place at the algorithmic level below the figurative surface of the computer screen, cannot be completely grasped by examining the audiovisual representation of gameplay, or the rules of the game. The coupling of human player and computer operations is not a visible process and can be understood only superficially by the player, who can contemplate the idea of countless calculations processed by the machine's components, but during gameplay, has no proper access to these processes. Playstyle manifests that part of gameplay which cannot surface otherwise. It is an intrinsic element of all gamic actions, in which the dichotomy between activity and passivity culminates; even when attempting to create a distinct playstyle, the player cannot avoid becoming affected by the programming of the game, which inconspicuously guides his or her actions. As a subject of *Bildungsroman*, the player makes the explicit strategic and stylistic choices through the gameworld and other elements of the interface, but as a subject tragedy, the player repeats certain styles of play suggested by the algorithmic system. Conversely, playstyle can be regarded as an instance of nonconceptual meaning generated by the player within the games' constraints. This conception of style is not unique to games, as style determines the subject of any kind of action. For example, cooking or doing laundry are actions that can have an aesthetic motivation – the style of performing such actions contributes to determining the character of their agent as well as any other activity, including conventional art forms or gameplay. However, contact with deliberately created cultural objects, such as digital games, can bring forth an aesthetic shock that is not encounterd in everyday life. The specificity of playstyle relates to the struggle against the algorithmic system, in which the attempt to appropriate that system through improvised style results in adopting that very style from the system itself, according to the paradox of the subject that was explicated in section 4.2.

Lacoue-Labarthe describes the meaning expressed through style with the notion of *Stimmung*, whose meaning he takes from Heidegger[120] and Nietzsche. This means tuning and tone in a musical sense, to attune an instrument (in French *accorder*), but also the state of the soul and the mood of the spirit[121]. Nietzsche

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[120]   In Heidegger's lexicon, *Stimmung* is a fundamental existential, the first opening of being-in-the-world, which is always already determined or in tune. *Stimmung* cannot be grasped through comprehension and speech but is heard in the affection that shows being-in-the-world. However, Heidegger did not consider it a natural state that would simply precede consciousness and language – rather, it emerges in the present moment from an originary *techne*, without author. (Lindberg 2010a, 539; 2010b, 234–235.)

[121]   Attunement has been used to describe gameplay by Nicoll (2016, 27–28) and Ash (2013).

used *Stimmung* to refer to Dionysian chaos: a musical and affective state that precedes the Apollonian order of concepts, images and figures. In Nietzschean interpretation, the subject is formed from this chaos in transition to Apollonian phenomenality. Under the Apollonian, music reveals itself as a symbolic image, a second mirroring, which creates subjectivity as a myth or fiction. Nietzsche believed that a musical experience can reproduce the originary chaos, which cathartically discharges an unbearable and painful affect, overwhelming the subject in masochistic pleasure. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that such an experience can produce a caesura, in which subjective consciousness is momentarily suspended. (SP, 272–277, 285; TYP2, 186–189, 196.) However, he finds the emphasis on melody too figurative and wishes to detach the notion of *Stimmung* from a purely musical determination. This is where rhythm is introduced to mimesis.

4.3.3   The Rhythm of Gameplay

To understand what Lacoue-Labarthe means by rhythm, the notion of onto-typology must be revisited. In onto-typological interpretation, mimesis is understood as identification through a type, in which the subject presents a mirror image of itself. Rhythm characterizes mimesis as a varied repetition of the model: not pure simulation and exact copying but misinterpretation, substitution and supplementation (Lindberg 2010a, 538–539). Lacoue-Labarthe considers rhythm and mimesis interlaced, because both belong to a constellation where mimesis is the fundamental character of existence, which itself is only a pure and empty ability to all forms; rhythm is its characterization and becoming to something (Lindberg 2010a, 536–537). Hence, repetition of the self produces identity always differently. In the onto-typological interpretation of mimesis, the subject is conceived as a malleable matter, upon which the stamp of identity is imprinted. Rhythmic interpretation of mimesis emphasizes that the stamp is always produced differently, not as a monotonous repetition of the same figure, but as a pulsating beat that disfigures its product to the point where there is nothing substantial upon which the stamp could attach. In this way, rhythm is a metaphor for improvised repetition, the pluralized presentation of roles upon the absence of an originary essence of the self.

In general, rythm is temporal repetition, schematization, categorization or a constraint that enables phenomenality and appearance, and without which, nothing would occur. Lacoue-Labarthe uses dance as a metaphor: It is figural movement that imitates a model of musical rhythm, without which dance becomes disorganized and disfigured. If a dance is perceived without hearing the music, its rhythmic clue is missing, and the resulting figural movement is defamiliarized and disturbed. The dance becomes a repetition of a missing model. When the rhythm that gives order to mimetic repetition is removed, the result is uncanny mimesis without a model, in which the division between real and fiction is lost because imitation loses its ground of reference. In Lacoue-Labarthes' terms, this absence of rhythm reveals "*the mimetic itself*", which paradoxically is indifferentiable and imperceptible. Imitation or repetition as such is unrevealable

and can be revealed only through the absence of the basis of imitation, a moment where *nothing* occurs. This revelation is uncanny, in the sense of *Unheimliche*, because it shows the innermost property of the self as the most distant and foreign, effacing the differentiation between fiction and reality. Hence, rhythm sets up the figural order that allows identification and coherent self-image. (SP, 282–258; TYP2, 193–195.) Rhythm characterizes how repetition produces the self as a copy; without it, the subject has no possibility to appear. It models the subject, not as a rigid imprint or a monumental shape but as a constantly changing figure, like a dancing body without stationary form, or a series of masks behind which the subject as such disappears (McKeane, 154–155).

The visible surface of gameplay is similarly organized by repetition that gives it order: the procedural functioning of the algorithm. This rhythm organizes gamic action around the repetition of gameplay tasks, which determine the subject of gameplay as the agent of that action. Because the player's self has no proper origin and occurs only as the subject of allothanatography, which is characterized through the unconscious repetition of others in an agonistic struggle over appropriation of self-presentation, there cannot be a self that is separate from the subject of gameplay (cf. Vella 2015a). The subject of digital gameplay is formed in the artistic mode of play, which contains the paradox intrinsic to the structure of the subject. The player's contact with the computer takes place at the level of the algorithm, a non-representational stage, in which the game's rhythm is contrasted with that of the player.

The absence of rhythm during a gameplay act, a caesuraed moment which renders the action uncanny, could correspond to a failure event that abruptly halts gameplay, such as computer hardware malfunctions. According to Shinkle (2012, 103), such failures rupture the player's bond with technology and consequently cause a loss of the "posthuman, technologically enabled self." In this moment, the posthuman subject is disabled with the player's in-game agency, and the player confronts the incommensurability and otherness of the computer's machinic power. Shinkle's viewpoint focuses only on interface failures that result from forces that are external to the game itself, not interruptions that are part of the gamic system. However, in Galloway's (2006, 28–31) view, these moments belong to the same category of "nondiegetic machine acts" than interrupting forces that are internal to the rule-system, of which "game over" is most emblematic. "The moment of gamic death" halts gameplay, producing a moment in which "[t]he code of the machine itself is celebrated, with all its illegibility, disruptiveness, irrationality, and impersonalness" (Galloway 2006, 28). While such "disabling acts" may destroy the whole logic of the game – for example when the code is so badly optimized that gameplay is constantly disturbed, when defects in the game's programming entirely block progress, or when the game's difficulty becomes overwhelming – Galloway notes that especially the death act is constitutive to games. Digital games are structured upon the repetition of gameplay tasks, even to the point of boredom (Shinkle 2012, 99–100), abrupt stops and moments where the control is taken away from the player, and repeated attempts to avoid them.

Juul describes the essential nature of such interruptions as "the paradox of failure", according to which gameplay implies deliberately sought experience of failure, even though we generally tend to avoid it (Juul 2013, 2; 33). Juul stresses that failure in games does not bring about a catharsis of unpleasant emotions, but produces such emotions in the first place, because it results in an experience of humiliation and inadequacy (Juul 2013, 4). The experience of failure is personal and indicates that the player was not competent enough to overcome the game's obstacles – the reason to play games, according to Juul, is that they give a promise of repairing the personal inadequacy (which they caused in the first place). In this way, digital games are built upon the caesuraed moment, in which the subject of gameplay is suspended, and the machine's otherness revealed. The paradox of failure corresponds to Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of mimesis; mimesis heals the wound it has always already caused. The subject is haunted by an echo of the absent origin, an originary rhythm that dislocates the proper self. Mimetic identification is the attempt to heal this essential impropriety, but its rhythmic constitution repeats identity as difference-from-itself. The act of gameplay is an attempt to overcome the personal deficiency of inadequate playing skills through mimetic repetition of a playstyle that is adequate for mastering the game. In this process, the subject's rhythmic constitution meets the rhythms of the algorithmic procedures, which organize the figural appearance of the game.

A final interruption of gameplay is not defeat, but success, which in fact results in the proper game over. Unlike failure, which prompts repetition, success indicates that the game has ended. [122] Cremin (2016, 124–125) makes an interesting observation about the Freudian death drive and its Lacanian reinterpretation in regard to the goal of a computer game. This drive derives pleasure from the loss of the object, inhibited by the aim that circulates around the missing thing. Cremin claims that the pleasure of the goal-oriented structure of games is not in the attainment of the object, but in the aim itself – whenever the goal of a game is attained, the game ends and a new goal must be sought from another game or a different playthrough. The moment of success indicates that mastery is achieved and that the player has adopted the rhythm of gameplay, becoming the technologically enabled subject of digital gameplay. Following the paradox of gameplay, this moment highlights the situation where the striving for mastery results in being mastered by the game.

Lacoue-Labarthe stresses that if the subject is defined in terms of rhythm, rhythm must be detached from music and located in the division between the spatial (the representational sphere) and temporal (repetition)[123]. When rhythm

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[122] This viewpoint applies primarily to games that have completable goals instead of transient goals (tied to a particular game session which can be repeated indefinitely) or improvement goals (getting a new high score) (Juul 2013, 85).

[123] Prieto (2007, 27–29) claims that Lacoue-Labarthe ends up admitting that his notion of rhythm is completely detached from musicality and instead carries visual, figurative and schematic meanings; the attempt to escape the onto-typological determination of the subject fails because rhythm itself belongs to onto-typology. I think that the openness of Lacoue-Labarthe's text to this kind of critique results from his insistence that figuration is unavoidable, while the rhythmic essence of mimesis is untheorizable.

establishes the differentiation between the visible and the audible, it governs also the distinction of inscribed and fictive, i.e. that which distinguishes tragedy from *Bildungsroman*. Hence, Lacoue-Labarthe thinks that rhythm bears a relation to Derrida's notion of archi-writing (SP, 289; TYP2, 199). He elaborates this comparison by inspecting the Greek term *rhuthmos* in Benveniste's and Heidegger's interpretations.

Heidegger considered *rhuthmos* as *morphe*, rendering rhythm as the pulse of being and non-being, or appearing and disappearing (Lindberg 2010a, 530–531). It gives form to protean things and separates them from the arrhythmic and unstructured elementary ground of being, similar to Aristotle's differentiation between *hyle* and *morphe*. In the Aristotelian interpretation, *rhuthmos* meant schema: form, figure and differentiation. Lacoue-Labarthe notes that Émile Benveniste found a more ancient definition of *rhuthmos*: the configuration of the signs of writing, which is highlighted also by the German translation of *rhuthmos* as *Gepräge*, which means imprint, seal or type. This insight leads Lacoue-Labarthe back to the notions of *inscription* and *character* and the question of *style* as incision (SP, 289–290; TYP2, 200): rhythm is related to imprinting a character and *Stimmung*, instead of musical cadence. However, schema refers to a stable form, *Gestalt*, whereas *rhuthmos* is form in movement, momentaneous and modifiable, without organic consistency. Lacoue-Labarthe says that in the Kantian lexicon, rhythm would be form necessarily broached by time, which, if understood as a repetition of difference, would be a condition of rhythm's possibility. Rhythm is not a stable form, but a perpetual process of formation.

Lindberg claims that identifying *rhuthmos* with *morphe* loses its implication to dance and the dancing body, which Aristotle considered as a representation solely by means of rhythm and the barest form of mimesis. Dance differs from visage (*eidos*) in that as an art, it can only exist in its own measure and count, whereas the appearance of *eidos* as visage is absolute and allows no counting. Lacoue-Labarthe shows that the emphasis of this thought has shifted from body to language after the Romantics' thought on "character". The shift towards language replaced the dancer with an actor and transformed rhythm into an ambiguous literary question. (Lindberg 2010a, 535–536.)

Plato considered music as an equivalent to enunciation (*lexis*), but maintained that musical *lexis* is strictly mimetic, because music mimes the discourse it accompanies and must therefore accommodate itself to speech. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that if music must be brought into homogeneity with the discourse, it itself has signifying power. Music imitates, in the case of harmony, ethical traits, and in the case of rhythm, characters. Plato wished to get rid of rhythmic irregularities and impose the criterion of simplicity to musical imitation, because it determines enunciation as *haple diegesis* (straight first-person narration) and helps to protect the speaking subject against dissimulation and dissimilation. "Rhythm manifests and reveals, gives form and figure to, perceptible, the

Prieto finds Lacoue-Labarthe reluctant to provide strict definitions of the musical ground of the subject.

ethos"[124], says Lacoue-Labarthe (TYP2, 202). It can be either undissimulated, as unity, simplicity and proper bearing, or heterogeneous, plural and lacking proper bearing. (SP, 291–292; TYP2, 201–202.) Lacoue-Labarthe concludes that rhythm is not simply a musical category, nor a figure:

> Rather, it would be: something between beat and figure that never fails to designate mysteriously the "ethical"; for the word (and perhaps already the concept) already implies — at the very edge of what of the subject can appear, manifest, or figure itself — the type and the stamp or impression, the pre-inscription which, conforming us in advance, determines us by disappropriating us and makes us inaccessible to ourselves. A pre-inscription that sends us back to the chaos that obviously was not schematized by us so that we should appear as what we are. In this sense, perhaps, "every soul is a rhythmic knot." We ("we") are rhythmed. (TYP2, 202.)[125]

The subject is rhythmed, because the self is always already characterized by the echo of an absent origin, which programs it as the subject of tragedy. Lacoue-Labarthe suspects that the fundamental echo that resonates in human existence and gives it rhythm is the voice of the mother and the rhythm of her heartbeat (SP, 296–297; TYP2, 205–206), but because rhythm does not stagnate into fixed forms, the subject is constantly modulated in contact with pluralized rhythms. In social adaptation, different personal rhythms are brought together (SP, 287–289; TYP2, 199–200). In this way, rhythm is a *measure* – not something calculable by reason, but *metron* (meter, poetic measure) in itself. It is a measure of the measure (*mesure*) and excess (*démesure*) that constitute *ethos* (Lindberg 2010a, 537). The rhythm of being manifests a singularity that is discernible through its relationship to other rhythms; it is a manifestation of singularity in a multiplicity of rhythms, which are all varied and temporalized repetitions of models (Lacoue-Labarthe 1979, 102; Lindberg 2010a, 542–544). Mimesis and rhythm are inseparable and cannot be discussed individually: rhythm is irreducible to spatiality but informs how mimesis is determined by a temporal dimension.

The musical ground of the subject is not based on a melodic essence of self-identity, but on rhythm as a repetition of self-difference. Lacoue-Labarthe remains suspicious of whether the closure of narcissism could be overcome even if its specular model can be shaken. The untheoretizability of rhythm means that there can be no proper explanation of it, merely vague references to the voice of the mother and the regular rhythm of the mother's heart, which are Lacoue-Labarthe's last remarks on the theme of reverberation and reminiscence. Rhythm is given already in the womb, which is something that always determines the self in advance to its own becoming. The self echoes different rhythms, through

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[124]   "Le rythme manifeste et révèle, donne forme et figure, rend perceptible l'*èthos*." (SP, 292.)

[125]   "Mais entre battement et figure, quelque chose qui ne manque jamais de désigner mystérieusement l'« éthique », parce que, au bord même de ce qui peut apparaître ou se manifester, se figurer du « sujet », le mot (et peut-être déjà le concept) aura impliqué le type et la frappe, la préinscription qui, nous conformant d'avance, nous détermine en nous dépropriant et nous rend inaccessibles à nous-mêmes. Nous renvoyant à ce chaos qu'il ne nous appartient évidemment pas d'avoir schématisé pour apparaître comme ce que nous sommes. En ce sens, peut-être, « toute âme est un noeud rythmique ». Nous (« nous ») sommes rythmés." (SP, 292–293.)

which the traces of others traverse and (de)constitute its identity as the subject of self-presentation.

The musical obsession that was Lacoue-Labarthe's starting point is tied to an autobiographical compulsion through the *Stimmung* that musical experience can produce, far beyond the tonal system. Lindberg (2010b, 231–232; 238) calls this *affective tonality* the elementary ground of music, a preliminary articulation that cannot be heard, but renders possible hearing, accord and meaning (*l'entente*). It describes being-in-the-world and the world itself as sonority, that something in us hears and understands (*entend*), before we can "see" anything. This sonority designates the birth of sense before phenomenality and the possibilities it opens, especially comprehension, speech, work and truth. These echoes of the subject are purely temporal, never fully present resonances of the sounds that were, and sounds that are to come (Lindberg 2010b, 244).

Against this ground, the elementary ground of digital gameplay has its own *Stimmung*, the rhythm of the computer, which can touch directly the player's being as the subject of gamic agency. Whereas the experience of music is in this context considered a powerful and affective sensation, gameplay fuses the sense of awe with frustrating repetition and even banality. However, its grasp on the self can be much more powerful and obsessing as it emphasizes the antagonistic struggle over appropriation. Gaming as obsessive and compulsive behaviour is a common assumption, according to which playing games takes over one's personal life, disturbing social relations, work, and even the capability of carrying out everyday tasks.[126] In my view, gaming should be understood as a manifestation of mimesis. The gamic double bind, the antagonism between the developer's and the player's artistry that is played on the imperceptible stage of machinic procedures, constitutes the intrigue of gameplay. Gameplay is defined by an obsession that touches the very foundation of the self, the autobiographical intrigue, a wound that is both caused and healed by mimesis. It can undeniably transform into a compulsive behaviour, but there is no clear indication of how gameplay differs in this respect from other forms of activities that can take hold of one's life.

4.4   Gameplay as an Experience of the Sublime

The sublime is the last aspect of gamic mimesis that this research introduces. Games and digitality have been described with the notion of the sublime before and while my perspective relates to these approaches, Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of the sublime also differs from them. Most importantly, it summarizes the difficult relation between *physis* and *techne* and all the

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[126]   In the 2018 revision of the International Classification of Diseases, the World Health Organization defined Gaming Disorder as a behaviour that results in "significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning" (http://id.who.int/icd/entity/1448597234; see also van Rooij et al 2018).

terminology that links it with mimesis, such as origin and fiction, truth and simulation, being and appearance etc. While the previous aspects of gamic mimesis have considered the act of gameplay itself as the production of the subject of gamic agency, here the perspective will expand also to the game itself as a work of art that might have the power to reveal being.

Works of art can produce the caesura, arrhythmic interruption that reveals mimesis. They can allow comparison of different rhythms by providing them a space for resonating freely, but also interrupt rhythmic variations into a repetition of fixed models. Lacoue-Labarthe is critical towards Heidegger's conception, according to which an artwork installs the truth of a world, for repeating the Kantian idea of the schema of transcendental imagination through the notion of world. A work of art is an aspect or a face of an emergence of a world and allows the schema to appear. Lacoue-Labarthe finds a political danger in Heidegger's thought because an artwork could establish a world according to a fundamental constitution of a figure. Figuration cannot be disposed of, but the stabilization of its movement can (and should) be prevented. Lindberg interprets that for Lacoue-Labarthe, transcendence is a space of figuration, and the movement of figuration is rhythm, i.e. transcendence as rhythm. Lacoue-Labarthe criticizes Heidegger for thinking of the origin of scansion as sacred, because it sanctifies a figure as the truth and sense of the world. (Lindberg 2010a, 541–542.)

According to Lindberg (2010a, 542–543), Heidegger believed that transcendence can be accessed only by an experience of the shock of the work, the shock of its being and the experience that there is something instead of nothing. Lacoue-Labarthe opposes Heidegger's thought that a work would be a sign of a higher truth, a mimeme (i.e. that which his imitated) of being. Instead, he focuses on the being-as-work of the work, which he tries to expose as an "originary mimeme" or "mimeme as such", which would be a mimeme of nothing. This is based on Hölderlin's remarks on his translations of Oedipus and Antigone, where the shock is interpreted as a caesura, an arrhythmic interruption – hence a transition from the melodic to the rhythmic conception of work (Lacoue-Labarthe 2000, 125–128). The caesura interrupts the alternation and struggle of representations and prevents any representation to gain a stability and a position of truth. The interruption comes as a "pure speech" or a "pure word", which refers to speech that is reduced to its function. Pure speech is only structure without any reference to a higher meaning; it manifests the affective force of speech and destabilizes the ground of stabilized meaning (Lindberg 2010a, 543).

Here, the notion of speech results from the context of Lacoue-Labarthe's argument, theatrical and poetic texts, but it should be understood as a more general structure of meaning. If artwork is considered as such an interruptive force, which manifests the emptiness at the ground of mimesis, its function is to destabilize all given measures of being. It gives an archi-ethical demand to criticize that which introduces itself as a figure of the good. (Lindberg 2010a, 543–544.) In its destabilizing function against all truths, mimesis demonstrates the

plurality of the sense of being-in-the-world. Mimetism, on the contrary, is a force that stabilizes figures into fundamental order. Lacoue-Labarthe does not elaborate which kind of art would cause the shock to appear or convert being into a figure, other than the works he examines.[127]

In my interpretation, it is not particular kinds of artworks or some quality of an object of aesthetic appreciation that is important in regard to mimesis, but art as the subject's manner of presenting itself. Rather than appreciating or creating works of art, it is a continuous aesthetic activity that determines the subject itself as a work of mimetic production. Digital gaming is one such activity in which the plurality of being and the groundlessness of identity is confronted through the paradoxical antagonism intrinsic to the structure of gameplay.

The notion of rhythm as both the subject's condition and as a quality of art risks creating confusion between art as an object and art as the mode of the subject's appearance. Insight into this problem can be sought from Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of the sublime, which revolves around the concepts of *physis* and *techne* and the notion of truth as unveiling. Examining gameplay through the notion of the sublime focuses on the experience of the unperceivable rhythm of the computer, which can be contacted only by comparing it to the rhythm of the player. In *Sublime Truth*, Lacoue-Labarthe interprets Heidegger's conception of the beautiful as a characterization of the sublime, which manifests the truth of being. Notions of digital sublime and ludic sublime have been explored most notably by Shinkle (2012) and Vella (2015b).[128]

My focus on Lacoue-Labarthe does not allow a detailed investigation of these theories, but it is important to note that the relevance of the sublime to gameplay can be justified also from other perspectives. Vella (2015b) argues that the "ludic sublime" can be located in the gap "…between her [the player's] experience of the game, her understanding of the game as system, and her awareness of an underlying implied game object…" My investigation locates sublime play similarly between the unpresentability of *physis* and its supplementation through *techne*, but with Lacoue-Labarthean terminology. Vella focuses on the player's phenomenal experience of the gameworld as a cosmos, which can never be proven to completely correspond with the noumenal game system, by following Aarseth's understanding of digital games as allegories of space.

Shinkle's viewpoint relates the experience of the sublime more directly to the limits of the subject, joining the notions of sublime and banal in a characterization of technology as both "a posthuman other and a part of everyday life" (Shinkle 2012, 99). The repetitive nature of playing leads to an

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[127]   For example, a series of autoportraits from 1974 by photographer Urs Lüthi, titled *Just another Story about Leaving*, in which Lacoue-Labarthe recognizes total instability and disappropriation: In this artwork mimesis itself is at play. Truth is installed by difference, and everything that is unveiled, displaces itself immediately. (Lacoue-Labarthe 2009, 46–48.) Poiana (2013b, 433) recognizes here Heidegger's motif of self-showing through the movement of retreat.

[128]   Mosco (2004) inspects the digital sublime in relation to computation and myth, but his viewpoint is wider and not specifically related to digital gameplay.

experience of boredom that is amalgamated with the shock produced by the incomprehensible complexity of the procedural system. Following Sianne Ngai, Shinkle calls the intertwining of these two affects *stuplimity*, contrasting with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's notion of *flow* (Shinkle 2012, 99–102; see also Ngai 2005; Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

Whereas stuplimity holds boredom and astonishment in tension without resolution that would lead to affirmance of the self or its euphoric dissolution, a state of flow is total immersion in the gameplay task, combining experiences of release and control. Shinkle finds flow comparable to the Kantian conception of the beautiful, rather than sublime. However, both affects "imply uninterrupted ludic activity in which the technology itself – software and interface – disappears into functionality, and in which the merger between player, interface and game content appears seamless" (Shinkle 2012, 102). Shinkle locates the experience of the sublime in the moments where the player is forced to confront the technology underlying the gamic structure in a way that challenges the self, i.e. the disabling acts, which can be identified with Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of arrhythmic interruption. In the event of failure (of the interface in Shinkle's view, but in my view also of the player), the incomprehensibility and unpresentability of the computer processes are manifested. In Shinkle's terms, "the subject is confronted with a mute technological artefact – a featureless surface that bears no decipherable relationship to the unimaginably complex workings that it conceals" (Shinkle 2012, 104). Shinkle argues that the computer, as a mass-produced artefact, empties the sublime from transcendence into a banal encounter with a material artefact, which elevates only frustration.

In my view, the sublime is not only a result of hardware failure, but a part of gameplay itself, because the gamic action is characterized by the player's incapability of understanding the computation beneath it. This is manifested most clearly in the moments where the player fails to complete the actions required by the game. Naturally, not all moments of failure result from not understanding the inner workings of the game but can instead be caused by the lack of motoric or strategic skills. For example, *Dark Souls* requires precise controlling even after the player knows the intricacies of its gamic system. However, perhaps the greatest struggle with it stems from the complete lack of explanation of many of its game mechanics, which are left for the player to uncover through playing (see Vella 2015b). As Vella argues, even after the player has finished the game and unravelled its mechanics, the result is not a complete understanding of the game as such, only a contingent and singular experience of it – the structure of digital games as concealed computational nature and its figural representation render all interpretations of them incomplete. Lacoue-Labarthe's characterization of the sublime provides an insight into what this gamic structure means in terms of the subject as a product of gaming.

Lacoue-Labarthe takes his starting point the canonical definition of the sublime, which Kant followed in *The Critique of Judgment*[129]: "the sublime is the

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[129] In § 25, Kant wrote: "That is sublime which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses [Erhaben ist, was auch

presentation of the nonpresentable or, more rigorously, to take up the formula of Lyotard, the presentation (of this:) that there is the nonpresentable"[130] (VS, 97–101; ST, 71–74). Instead of the classical problem of representation as reproduction and imitation, in which presentation is considered as a figure, form or image, Lacoue-Labarthe inspects it as unveiling. In regard to digital games, presentation can be considered in two ways. First, as the presentation of the gameworld, the portrayal of its geography, architecture and inhabitants and their responsiveness to the actions of the player, which communicates the rules of the game to the player – this viewpoint focuses on the game as an artefact. Second, digital games can be understood as a site for the presentation of the player. Even if gameplay would not be directly relatable to performing art forms, it can be considered as a presentation of the player's self. Examining digital games as something that is unveiled by the player through exploration of the gameworld would concern only the surface of visible appearances. Gameplay itself, in its essence, is nonpresentable, because it does not appear solely through the visible and verbal domain. When playing, the player appears through the gamic apparatus as the agent of gameplay. This does not correspond to a playable character, as not all games are centred around one. When connecting the player to computation, gameplay presents its nonpresentable essence and in this way corresponds to Lacoue-Labarthe's characterization of the sublime.

The interpretation of the sublime as a presentation of the nonpresentable follows the theme developed in *The Unpresentable*, which deconstructed the opposition between the sensuous and the spiritual, and its imposition to female and male roles. Lacoue-Labarthe's conclusion was that there is only the truth of the sensuous, which shows truth as properly abyssal: truth (i.e. how things are) can be seen only through a veil of its appearance, not as such. In regard to the subject, this proposition was then developed to the notion about the impossibility of presenting the self as such, outside discourse and figuration. Here the unpresentability of truth is exemplified by the sublime, which brings it closer to the hyperbological paradoxicality in the relation between *physis* and *techne*. The unpresentability of the player's proper being is brought to the fore through the unpresentability of gamic action, which occurs in the circuitry of the computer. The *physis* of gameplay is contacted through *techne*, which is its representation through fiction.

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nur denken zu können ein Vermögen des Gemüts beweiset, das jeden Maßstab der Sinne übertrifft]" (Kant 1974, 172; 2000, 134).

[130] Christian Moraru claims that Lyotard's interpretation of the sublime goes hand in hand with the proceeding of the text, even though it does not directly refer to Lyotard after the initial notion of the canonical definition of the sublime. The figure of Michelangelo's Moses, according to Freud's interpretation, epitomizes the paradoxical status of the sublime as the representation of the taboo against representation, where the aporia of the sublime is embodied: negative presentation amounts to negation of presentation. For Hegel, the beautiful is an accord between form and content. Because the sublime is their incongruity, beautiful completes the sublime, which in turn precedes and warrants the representation performed by the beautiful. Kant already anticipated Heidegger's breaking away from the mimetic-representation understanding of art as adequation, towards unconcealedness. (Moraru 2005, 197–198.)

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4.4.1 Being and Appearance

Plato differentiated an entity from its appearance, distinguishing between *idea* and its *eidos*. This was later thought of in terms of content and form, most notably in the Aristotelian terms *hyle* and *morphe*. Heidegger considered a work of art as that which shows itself according to its *eidos*, which he referred to as *phainestai*.[131] That which authentically shows itself is *ekphanestaton*, which Heidegger interpreted as a characterization of the beautiful. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that the relation between matter-form and the predetermination of being as *eidos* is self-evident, because when an entity is thought of in terms of an aspect or a figure, it is thought of in terms of delimitation and cutting. While Plato did not invent the determination of presence as appearing, Lacoue-Labarthe credits him as responsible for the inaugural gesture of philosophy and aesthetics: that an entity should appear according to its *eidos*. (VS, 102–104; ST, 75–76; Heidegger 1985, 93–94; 1991, 80.) The notion of *ekphanestaton* itself does not directly relate to the question of the subject, but Lacoue-Labarthe's examination of essence and appearance can be read as a characterization of the subject. When Lacoue-Labarthe speaks of works of art, it concerns also the subject, which he thematizes in terms of artistic production. In regard to digital games, the problematic of *ekphanestaton* concerns the unveiling of the unpresentable scene of gameplay, which is the locus of the player's self-presentation as the subject of the game.

Ekphanestaton is related to Heidegger's definition of the beautiful. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger states that truth is at work in the work of art: the self-concealing Being is illuminated (*gelichtet*) as shining (*Scheinen*[132]), which is the beautiful. Beauty is a way for truth to occur as unconcealedness. (Heidegger 1977a, 43; 2002, 32.) In Heidegger's phenomenological treatment, this interpretation of *Scheinen* carries the meaning of *phainesthai*; both refer to appearing, showing itself, glittering and glowing[133]. *Phainesthai* and *ekphanestaton* are the basis for Lacoue-Labarthe's hypothesis about the non-representational and non-eidetic interpretation of the sublime. According to Martis (2005, 166), the term has a twofold meaning: "[e]k-phanestaton can mean 'showing-out-of itself' but also 'outside showing' or 'without showing.'" Lacoue-Labarthe aims to bring forth the latter two meanings, but also to show how the former has dominated philosophical discourse since Plato. By deconstructing the texts of Pseudo-Longinus, Kant and Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe finds a means of inspecting the possibility for another understanding of the *ekphanestaton*.

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[131] Lacoue-Labarthe translates *phainestai* as "the self-showing or the appearing of the entity, its Being-luminous and visible [le se-montrer ou le paraître de l'étant, son être-lumineux et visible]" (VS, 103; ST, 76).

[132] From *Scheinen* are derived also *Ershceinen* and *Vorschein-kommen*, which refer to both appearance and shining, coming to light.

[133] This emphasis draws from the Derridean notion of *heliotropism*, which refers to the motif of light, brilliance and refulgence as constitutive to the metaphysical discourse that associates knowledge with seeing (Martis 2005, 164–165; Derrida 1872, 298–299).

In opposition to Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean[134] interpretations of Kantian disinterestedness as indifference and suspension of the will, Heidegger reinterpreted it as letting the object produce itself purely as itself and relating it to oneself (VS, 78; ST, 106). The lack of interest allows an essential relation with the object itself come into play – its appearance as a pure object constitutes the beautiful. This reinterpretation of Kant through *Scheinen* and *ekphanestaton* sought a non-aesthetic and non-eidetic determination of the beautiful, a break from the tradition of philosophical aesthetics (VS, 106–107; ST, 78–79). According to Lacoue-Labarthe, Heidegger accepted Hegel's dictum of the end of art, according to which art ceases to be great when it "…forfeits its essence, loses its immediate relation to the basic task of representing the absolute, i.e., of establishing the absolute definitively as such in the realm of historical man"[135] (Heidegger 1991, 84). As a direct consequence, he regarded great art and aesthetics as mutually exclusive: the theory of art eradicates great art, which must be anterior to all thought and conceptual reflexion. Lacoue-Labarthe finds this naïve because it is difficult to detach art from at least some kind of thought. (VS, 109–111; ST, 80–81.) Even though Kant must be included in the Hegelian closure of aesthetics – because he formulated the problematic of the sublime and beautiful in terms of eidetic presentation, i.e. imagination – Heidegger's interpretation of the beautiful as pure *Scheinen* causes a rupture with metaphysical eideticism (VS, 112–113; ST, 82–83).

Lacoue-Labarthe relates the conceptuality of aesthetics to the eidetic determination of being. A simplified interpretation of *techne* as know-how and fabrication had led to thinking of art in terms of a creator and an amateur instead of the artwork itself. Through the notion of the sublime, a possibility of renouncing the eidetic determination of aesthetics entered Kant's thought. Heidegger remained silent about the sublime, because since Pseudo-Longinus, it has been related to the distinction between the sensible and the supersensible, inherited from Platonism, of which it is an ethico-aesthetical or theologico-aesthetical translation. This interpretation of the sublime reduces it to a counterconcept of the beautiful, in Hegelian terms as the first degree of the beautiful. (VS, 119–116; ST, 83–84.)

This is the background of Lacoue-Labarthe's investigation, which follows closely Heidegger's argumentation. The core of the problematic is whether a thing has an essence that it should reflect through its outward appearance. If this claim is accepted, beauty is defined as correspondence between essence and appearance. However, if the true nature of things is considered to be hidden from sight, under the veil of misleading appearances, only objects that illuminate this concealed essence can be regarded as beautiful. In Heidegger's view, the truth of

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[134]   Lacoue-Labarthe does not relate Nietzsche's Dionysian aesthetic to his treatment of the sublime and mentions Nietzsche only in passing, even though the relation between Apollonian and Dionysian would be highly relevant to the relation between *techne* and the sublime (Gordon 2001, 27–28).

[135]   "…ihr Wesen, den unmittelbaren Bezug verliert zur Grundaufgabe, das Absolute darzustellen, d. h. es überhaupt als solches maßgebend in den Bereich des geschichtlichen Menschen zu stellen" (Heidegger 1985, 99).

being is revealed through this kind of shining in an artwork. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that Heidegger's interpretation of the beautiful corresponds to the concept of the sublime.

4.4.2 Unveiling Veiling

Whatever is said about programming languages and computation as the ground of digital gameplay, it does not negate the fact that digital games are experienced through representational content, without which there is no game, only code. In general, the possibility to conceive a non-eidetic presentation, where art would present something other than a form or a figure, outside the order of *eidos*, aspect or view, is questionable. Lacoue-Labarthe quotes an inscription in the Temple of Isis, which exemplifies this problem: "I am all that is, that was, and that will be, and no mortal has lifted my veil." In rationalist discourse this was interpreted as the nonpresentability of the metaphysical, the essence of *physis*. Isis was considered as the spokesperson of truth, who declares itself to be non-unveilable. Nature cannot appear as such, and consequently neither can the subject, not even to itself. In the Heideggerian interpretation of Aristotle, unveiling truth is *apophantic*, i.e. declaratory, rendering something manifest or patent. It *lets appear* (*phainesthai*) *on the basis of* (*apo*) that of which it speaks. Lacoue-Labarthe elaborates:

> [T]hat telling the truth about itself, telling the truth of the truth and unveiling itself as the truth, truth (unveiling) unveils itself as the impossibility of unveiling or the necessity, for finite (mortal) Being, of its veiling. Speaking of itself, unveiling itself, truth says that the essence of truth is nontruth–or that the essence of unveiling is veiling. The truth (the unveiling) unveils itself as veiling itself. [136] (ST, 91.)

If truth itself tells the truth about truth, and the truth of the truth is its unveiling, then it is contradictory for truth to declare itself non-unveilable. Thus, the essence of truth becomes nontruth and the essence of unveiling becomes veiling. "*The truth, in its essence, is nontruth*" [137] (ST, 92), Lacoue-Labarthe adds. A digital game presents itself initially as an opaque surface of the gameworld, whose nature the player unveils through experimenting the possibilities of action within it. When mastering the game, the player has discovered its underlying rule-system through skilful action. In other words, the *physis* of the game is revealed through *techne*. However, because the rule system functions in terms of a programming language, gameplay never unveils it in its proper essence. The player's interpretation of the game's rules is an abstraction of a considerably more complex system of codified behaviours that remains concealed. The player's skill operates inescapably on the representational level of the game, because

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[136] "[Q]ue disant la vérité sur elle-même, disant la vérité de la vérité et se dévoilant comme la vérité, la vérité (le dévoilement) se dévoile comme l'impossibilité du dévoilement ou la nécessité, pour l'être fini (mortel), de son voilement. Parlant d'elle-même, se dévoilant, la vérité dit que l'essence de la vérité est la non-vérité — ou que l'essence du dévoilement est le voilement. La vérité (le dévoilement) se dévoile comme se voilant." (VS, 125.)

[137] "*La vérité, en son essence, est non-vérité*" (VS, 126).

uncovering the game's codified foundation is dependent on code literacy, not gameplay skill. While the nature of digital media can be exposed with adequate knowledge about programming (given that access to the code is available), the nature of being remains veiled. Human existence is characterized by the incapability of accessing its programming, because the truth of being can expose itself only as nontruth.

The paradox of *aletheia* must not be understood in the sense of a liar's paradox – here truth does not mean adequation but the truth of being, the essence of things, nature, or the proper self. Revealing the non-revealability of this essence is possible to conceive only as a paradox, which corresponds to the attempt of revealing and grasping mimesis in theoretical terms. In gameplay, the paradox obviously occurs in the dichotomy between the imperceptible codified foundation of the game and its visual representation, which reveals the truth of the game through its dissimulation. In a less obvious manner, the paradox informs how the player's subjectivity is played by the code: in gameplay, the mimetic scenario occurs within the electronic circuitry that comprises the unpresentable stage of gameplay. There, the paradoxical lack that is intrinsic to the subject meets the general collapse of truth that the digital game exemplifies through its dissimulated nature.

According to Heidegger, it belongs to the nature of truth as unconcealedness not to give itself, but beauty as the shining joined in the artwork is a way in which truth occurs as unconcealedness. The clearing of everything familiar, ordinary and reliable, is pervaded and diffused by a refusal (*Versagens*) and dissemblance (*Verstellens*). In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger writes:

> In the immediate circle of beings we believe ourselves to be at home. The being is familiar, reliable, ordinary. Nonetheless, the clearing is pervaded by a constant concealment in the twofold form of refusal and obstructing. Fundamentally, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extra-ordinary, uncanny. The essence of truth, i.e., unconcealment, is ruled throughout by a denial. This denial is, however, neither a defect nor a fault – as if truth were a pure unconcealment that has rid itself of everything concealed. If truth could accomplish this it would no longer be itself. *Denial, by way of the twofold concealing, belongs to the essence of truth as unconcealment.* Truth, in its essence, is untruth.[138] (Heidegger 2002, 31.)

Artwork can illuminate being and bring it into unconcealment by revealing the fact that it is. By letting its object be engrossed authentically in its nature, artwork illuminates its self-concealing being. Heidegger believed that through beauty, in which a being shows itself authentically, truth can occur as unconcealedness (Heidegger 1977a, 43; 2002, 32).

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[138] "Im nächsten Umkreis des Seienden glauben wir uns heimisch. Das Seiende ist vertraut, verläßlich, geheuer. Gleichwohl zieht durch die Lichtung ein ständiges Verbergen in der Doppelgestalt des Versagens und des Verstellens. Das Geheure ist im Grunde nicht geheuer; es ist un-geheuer. Das Wesen der Wahrheit, d. h. der Unverborgenheit, wird von einer Verweigerung durchwaltet. Dieses Verweigern ist jedoch kein Mangel und Fehler, als sei die Wahrheit eitel Unverborgenheit, die sich alles Verborgenen entledigt hat Könnte sie dieses, dann wäre sie nicht mehr sie selbst. *Zum Wesen der Wahrheit als der Unverborgenheit gehört dieses Verweigern in der Weise des zwiefachen Verbergens.* Die Wahrheit ist in ihrem Wesen Un-wahrheit." (Heidegger 1977a, 41.)

In Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation, the double concealment or reserve means that the essence of the clearing where being comes to hold itself, is itself concealed. The essence of *aletheia* is thus *lethe*, which means that *veiling* is the essence of unveiling and that the unveiling of being does not give itself. Being cannot present itself and appear as such without the uncovering (*ouverture*), which is in its essence covering (*couverture*). The uncovering of being is no-being, an open centre that instead of being surrounded by what is, encircles all that is as nothing. (VS, 126–127; ST, 92.) Heidegger conceived this as follows:

> And yet: beyond beings – though before rather than apart from them – there is still something other that happens. In the midst of beings as a whole an open place comes to presence. There is a clearing. Thought from out of beings, it is more in being than is the being. This open center is, therefore, not surrounded by beings. Rather, this illuminating center itself encircles all beings – like the nothing that we scarcely know.[139] (Heidegger 2002, 30.)

Truth is unstabilized and dissimulated because a thing is necessarily veiled by its appearance. This concerns being in *what it is* (*Washeit, quidditas*). Unveiling truth confronts a refusal that affects the being in *that it is* (*Dassheit, quodditas*). It is finitude; not only the limit of knowledge, but the condition of possibility of unveiling, says Lacoue-Labarthe. The disclosed being of being appears not as a state, but as an occurrence, pure temporality and historicity. What occurs, Lacoue-Labarthe thinks, is the clearing itself, that is *aletheia*, as concealment, or unveiling in its essence. While it cannot signal its appearance or present itself in any way, it nevertheless takes place and signals itself by the estrangement of the familiar, the becoming-uncanny and de-familiarization of the being. (VS, 127–128; ST, 92–93.) This is the non-representable affective space, in which the mimetic scenario is played out, unbeknownst to the subject but resonating in the rhythm of being.

Lacoue-Labarthe stresses that the clearing is not a negative presentation; the essence of truth as nontruth does not mean that truth is falsity or that truth is dialectically always also its contrary. The estrangement affects the presented in such a way that presentation itself, the fact that there is presence, comes to present itself, or rather happens or occurs. Lacoue-Labarthe says that this is what Heidegger meant by *Ereignis*. This happening of *aletheia* as defamiliarization of being is produced essentially by a work of art, by the stroke or shock it provokes. It is added to the given being as a supplement or addition and shows itself as created and shows that it simply is, indicating that there is such a thing as being. The work opens itself as the uniqueness of the fact that it is rather than is not.

The more a work opens itself and cuts all ties to human beings, the more simply the shock comes into the openness of being, says Heidegger. This transport into the openness transports also us into it, beyond the ordinary. When

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[139] "Und dennoch: über das Seiende hinaus, aber nicht von ihm weg, sondern vor ihm her, geschieht noch ein Anderes. Inmitten des Seienden im Ganzen west eine offene Stelle. Eine Lichtung ist. Sie ist, vom Seienden her gedacht, seiender als das Seiende. Diese offene Mitte ist daher nicht vom Seienden umschlossen, sondern die lichtende Mitte selbst umkreist wie das Nichts, das wir kaum kennen, alles Seiende." (Heidegger 1977a, 39–40.)

we submit to this derangement, we restrain our usual doings and dwell within the truth happening in the work. Lacoue-Labarthe points out that Heidegger's vocabulary of derangement, shock and retreat is the vocabulary of the sublime: "the *ek-static* comportment of *Dasein* and *ek-sistence*", the shock produced by the work is ecstasy. This corresponds to Edmund Burke's characterization of the sublime affect as "precipitation beyond oneself". (VS, 128–130; ST, 93–35.)

> The work of art is a paradoxical being that nihilates the being in order to make Being itself appear and come to light. The work opens the clearing, the luminous opening in which, as a being, it holds itself, and on the (empty) ground–the groundless ground–of which the being comes to manifest itself. The work presents ἀ-λήθεια, the no-thing, luminous with an "obscure illumination," which "is" the Being of what is. And this is sublimity.[140] (ST, 95)

Lacoue-Labarthe believes that Heidegger verified the Hegelian determination of the sublime, according to which "the manifestation of the infinite annihilates the manifestation itself"[141] – in Heidegger's view, this manifestation corresponds to the eidetic presentation of a being, its quiddity (ST, 95). The presentation of the presentation does not annihilate, but nihilates the presented being, which cuts a figure into the background of what is in general. This presented being is only thinkable as an *eidos*, because it always figures itself, makes a stature and a *Gestalt*. The work of art is not merely a being, but just as *Dasein*, it is the opening of the fact that there are beings. Anterior to the cutting of a figure is the *Dassheit* of the being, that there are beings. The work offers this, but the offering is a pure appearing: *Scheinen*, *phainesthai*, pure epiphany of the being as such: "That which is, insofar as it is, does not cut (any figure) but glows and scintillates in the night without night, in the beyond-night of the void, which is the clearing itself"[142] (ST, 96). Lacoue-Labarthe concludes that this is the reason why there is no negativity in Heidegger's motif of reserve and retreat, and why the phantic apprehension of the sublime cannot be dialecticized. The Heideggerian sublime is not the presentation of the fact that there is the nonpresentable, but that there is presentation. His treatment of the *ekphanestaton* as a passage from *Washeit* to *Dassheit* sought a more original determination of the beautiful than the Platonic eideticism that had dominated the discourse of philosophical aesthetics.

Through the paradox that results from the *aletheic* interpretation of truth, Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation twists Heidegger's conception of the beautiful into a characterization of the sublime. When brought to the context of digital games, it means that the game cannot appear but through veiling itself behind the figural representation on the computer screen. Gameplay as an affective and nonconceptual relation between human and machine is cut off from the truth

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[140]   "L'oeuvre ouvre la clairière, l'ouvert lumineux dans lequel, comme étant, elle se tient, et sur le fond (vide), le fond sans fond duquel vient à se manifester l'étant. L'oeuvre présente l'*a-létheia*, le né-ant lumineux, mais d'une « obscure clarté », qui « est » l'être de ce qui est. Et c'est cela, la sublimité." (VS, 130.)

[141]   "[L]a manifestation de l'infini anéantit la manifestation elle-même" (VS, 131.)

[142]   "Ce qui est, en tant qu'il est, ne se découpe pas mais brille et scintille dans la nuit sans nuit, dans l'outre-nuit du néant, qui est l'éclaircie même" (VS, 131).

about the code and the algorithm, which can be presented only through the veil of the gameworld. This does not indicate that computers generally are beyond human understanding, but that the experience of gameplay includes a certain sublimity of the imperceptible computer operations whose magnitude exceeds the player's capacity of understanding during gameplay. Moreover, a thorough examination of the game's rules, their structuration in computer code and the principles according to which the machine's components operate, simply does not equal the experience of playing the game, which on the contrary requires putting these aspects aside and concentrating on playing the game and letting it unfold through gamic action.

4.4.3 Apophantic Mimesis: The Clarity of Being

Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of "sublime truth" concerns the truth of being, the fundamental condition of the subject. Hence, instead of the artwork, in this case the digital game, my focus is on the player. Digital games as aesthetic objects can be characterized as sublime due to the complexity of the code and its unpresentable functioning, but sublime as the structure of being arises from the action of play, through which the unpresentable proper self is elaborated as a temporal and transient occurrence. In Lacoue-Labarthe's texts, the subject itself is continuously considered as a work, a literary product that effaces the border between truth and fiction. The subject of gameplay is the product of gamic action, which brings forth the sublime character of its being through the paradoxical structure of being and appearance. Drawing from Kant and Pseudo-Longinus, Lacoue-Labarthe characterizes the sublime as the relation *physis* and *techne*:

> In other words, only art (τέχνη) is in a position to reveal nature (φύσις). Or again: without τέχνη, φύσις escapes us, because in its essence φύσις κρυπτεσθαι φιλεί, it loves to dissimulate itself.[143] (ST, 99.)

Techne renders things present and produces knowledge through mimesis, without which everything would be dissimulated and encrypted. The technic supplement, which destabilizes meaning but is also its condition, gathers together the senses of *techne*, mimesis and representation, which Lacoue-Labarthe describes as the general condition of the fact that there is something instead of nothing:

> Μίμησις ("representation"), in other words, is the condition of the possibility of the knowledge *that* there is something (and not nothing), a knowledge which is, in turn, the condition of the possibility of the multiple knowledges of the beings that are. For this reason–and because μίμησις defines the relation of this singular knowledge with φύσις–μίμησις renders apparent or discloses φύσις as such.[144] (ST, 100.)

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[143] "Autrement formulé : seul l'art (la *technè*) est à même de révéler la nature (la *phusis*). Ou encore : sans la *technè*, la *phusis* se dérobe, parce qu'en son essence la *phusis kruptesthai philei*, elle aime se dissimuler." (VS, 136.)

[144] "La *mimèsis*, autrement dit, la représentation, est la condition de possibilité du savoir *qu'*il y a de l'étant (et non pas rien), savoir qui ensuite seulement, peut se monnayer

The subject as a work can come to being only through the destabilizing uncontrollability of mimesis, which reveals the proper self by substituting it with something else. In the restricted sense of *techne*, mimesis is interpreted as resemblance, perfection of the beautiful aspect (*eidos*). On the contrary, sublime mimesis does not seek *eidos* or anything that could be reproduced but exceeds the limits of seeing and verbal thought by revealing affect, natural *pathos*. Through this apophantic function, sublime *techne* effaces itself: when *techne* seems to be *physis*, it accomplishes its purpose, and conversely *physis* succeeds when it encloses and hides *techne* from view. *Techne* becomes the same thing as the *physis* it reveals: decrypting *physis*, *techne* encrypts itself. This is the very play of *aletheia*, Lacoue-Labarthe says, a paradox of the effacement of *techne* that is inscribed in the oxymoron of natural art. It entails the hyperbological movement:

> The more τέχνη accomplishes itself, the more it effaces itself. The height of μίμησις is in its veiling and its dissimulation."[145] (ST, 104.)

When the player decrypts the computer's algorithm through gameplay, the player's action becomes encrypted and fused with the algorithm, and the player becomes dissimulated in the gamic structure. The structure of a digital game can be understood as a relation between the *physis* of the game, i.e. its programming and the digital computer that powers it, and the *techne* that makes it appear. However, the gameworld and its functions within the rule-system of the game do not comprise *techne* by themselves. Without the player's input, the game remains a space of possibilities, a computer process that does nothing. Only the assemblage between the player and the machine can make the *physis* of the computer appear through the veil of gamic action within the gameworld. This process does not reveal the computer alone, but a hybrid, a technologically enabled self. If we accept Lacoue-Labarthe's claims about the loss of the subject, there is no being-in-the-world that would be possible to separate from the being-in-the-gameworld, because the subject can occur, even to itself, only through mimesis, of which playing a digital game is a contemporary manifestation.

Pseudo-Longinus believed that *techne* effaces itself as the effacement of the figure (*schema*), which is hidden by the very brigthness and shining. Pure mimesis cannot be perceived or thought, because it cannot show anything substantial in its perpetual movement of concealment and unconcealment.

> This light is by no means due to the genius of comparison. One must take it literally: it is the sublime light, i.e., the light the sublime is when the sublime is thought in its truth as the unconcealing, the ἀλήθεια of what is (φύσις). Τέχνη–μίμησις–is the illumination of φύσις: this is, literally and in all senses, the truth of great art. And this is of course why great art cannot be seen–the light it throws casts it into shadow. It makes essentially no "form," "figure," or "schema" come into presence. It presents, while im-

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en savoirs multiples de l'étant. A ce titre, et parce que la *mimèsis* définit le rapport de ce savoir avec la *phusis*, la *mimèsis* fait paraître, décèle la *phusis* comme telle." (VS, 137.)

[145] "Plus la technè s'accomplit, plus elle s'efface. Le comble de la mimèsis est dans son voilement et sa dissimulation." (VS, 142.)

presenting itself [*s'imprésentant*], that there is the existent-present [*de l'etant-present*]. And it is a bedazzlement.[146] (ST, 104.)

Even the presentation of the fact that there is presence is unpresentable, because pure and inviolable presence can never occur as such. Rendering present is always a representation, deferred by the difference that repetition entails. When mimesis uncovers being, nothing occurs. This is what Lacoue-Labarthe referred to with the caesura and the absence of rhythm, the occurrence of the unpresentable that does not halt the hyperbologic but demonstrates its unresolvability in disquieting uncanniness. The *ekphanestaton* is a *besides-light* (*outre-lumière*), a strange clarity of being that can be shown only without showing, because it is beyond all light.

Gameplay does not make figures or schemas to appear, but presents that there is the existent-present, through bedazzlement. Thus, the sublimity of the computer operations, when revealed in the act of playing, dissimulates itself, and presents only the fact of presentation. Gameplay fuses two *technai*: the game itself as an object, and the act of playing it. Representation of the gameplay process through the figural surface of the gameworld is a veil that covers simultaneously two kinds of *physis*: the computer's procedural functioning, and the player's existence as the agent of gameplay. Neither can present itself as such, because the flow of electric current and its transformation into binary code is revealed through the representational interface that consists the playable game, and because the player as a subject can exist only as a representation of its fleeting essence. Hence, interaction with a digital computational system addresses the condition of the subject.

If a digital game is taken as a simulation or a representation, it is considered beautiful only in terms of the beautiful aspect. In practice, this means visually compelling and realistic gameworlds with lively characters and gamic actions that mimic the physical reality. Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of the sublime fits to digital gameplay as *mimesi*s that has nothing to do with figural appearances. Here we must move from conceiving the game as a work to understanding it as a work produced by the *techne* of both the developer and the player. Thus, imitation in digital games does not concern so much the game as imitation of the real world, but the mimetic relation between the player and the game, because the game as art becomes alive only through this relationship, which is more characteristic of digital games as an art form than their relation to the reality they (re)present.

While the sublime concerns usually the effect produced by works of art or wonders of nature, Lacoue-Labarthe's examination guides it towards the

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[146] "Cette lumière n'est en rien due, ici, au génie de la comparaison. Il faut la prendre lit-téralement : c'est la lumière sublime, c'est-à-dire la lumière qu'est le sublime, dès lors que le sublime est pensé dans sa vérité comme le décèlement, l'*alétheia* de ce qui est (*phusis*). La *technè* — la *mimèsis* — est l'illumination de la *phusis*, tel est, littéralement et dans tous les sens, la vérité du grand art. Et c'est bien pourquoi le grand art ne se voit pas — la lumière qu'il jette l'assombrit —, il ne fait venir à la présence, essen-tiellement, aucune « forme », « figure » ou schème » ; il présente, s'imprésentant, qu'il y a de l'étant-présent. Et c'est un éblouissement." (VS, 143.)

appearance of the subject. When Lacoue-Labarthe discusses the sublime as a work of a genius, we are reminded of the Aristotelian mimetology that was the basis of the paradox of the subject. The physis that mimesis reveals through techne, is not the physical reality as such, even though this idea finds its emblematic expression in Kantian schematism. Physis refers here especially to natural pathos, the affect. The sublime does not merely show that there are things, but that there is existence and presence, without any form or figure. It shows the inexpressible and unpresentable abyssal ground, which precedes any formation of subjectivity as an image or a narrative. *Techne* is the artistry through which identity is presented and the self formed, the mask without which the self cannot be shown.

Techne is the artistic mode of the appearance of the subject. A digital game reveals, through its interplay between veiling and unveiling, the player as the subject of the gamic action. The status of the figural-narrative surface as the necessary veiling of the machinic essence of the game touches the unpresentable ground of the subject. The otherness intrinsic to the intimacy of the self is confronted through the rhythm of the computer, where the appropriation of gameplay confronts always the otherness of the developer and the machine, through which the subject becomes disappropriated.

4.5   Chapter Summary

This chapter conflated readings of Lacoue-Labarthe with a theoretical understanding of digital gameplay. Hence, it has carried out the research objective that was stated in the introduction: to investigate digital gameplay through my interpretation of Lacoue-Labarthe's early texts in terms of the aesthetic formation of the subject. This resulted in four characterizations of gamic mimesis as 1) a struggle for mastery in antagonistic double bind, 2) a paradox between appropriation and disappropriation, 3) a rhythmic constitution of the subject and 4) a relation between *physis* and *techne* in the experience of the sublime.

The self is constituted through a struggle in which the subject attempts to appropriate its identity from others. Lacoue-Labarthe characterizes this process through René Girard´s theory of mimetic rivalry and the double bind but remains critical towards Girard´s views on religion. Proceeding from a contradiction found in Girard's text, Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that it might be possible to consider representation outside the domain of perception. If mimesis as the condition of the subject functions prior to visual forms, figures and conceptual thought, gamic mimesis must be located primarily in the unpresentable functioning of the algorithm. In this process, the origin of imitation is fundamentally absent, and the subject is produced as a copy of something that was never there in the first place. The focus on the antagonistic struggle caused by the double bind leads Lacoue-Labarthe to reformulate the notion of autobiography, a story of one's life, into allothanatography, a story of the dead

other or the other's death. This means that gameplay as self-constituting action is in fact action of the dead other; the developer's mastery replaced by the player leads to a situation where the subject of gamic action is constituted through the computer process.

According to Lacoue-Labarthe, the logic mimesis functions as a paradox: the more the subject attempts to resemble itself, the more it differs from itself. This is not a stabile dissonance between two opposites but an unresolvable oscillation between excessive appropriation and disappropriation, which Lacoue-Labarthe calls hyperbologic. In gameplay, the hyperbologic affects the player through the pursuit of mastery, which results in being mastered by the game. In its excessive attempt to appropriate the agency of gamic action, subject of gameplay becomes programmed by the game. The hyperbologic is also oscillation between activity and passivity; mimesis means both the unconscious imitation of models and the deliberate performance of roles. In gameplay, the interplay between activity and passivity occurs in terms of control and its loss, or the player's freedom and the game's restrictions. In mimesis, the subject oscillates between these opposites with no possibility of resolution.

With the notion of rhythm, Lacoue-Labarthe seeks to dislocate mimesis from the figural order. He changes the lexicon from visual reflection to acoustic resonance and begins to inspect a connection between music and autobiography. Eventually, rhythm is detached also from a strictly musical determination and is located at the difference between the visual and the musical. Rhythm characterizes the repetitive essence of mimesis, which does not produce the same as similar, but the same as differing in itself. Rhythm characterizes the subject as a pulsating and improvised movement between different forms, whose alteration disfigures the original self into nothingness. The experience of music can touch the affective basis of the subject because it is directly related to its rhythmic essence. Digital gameplay functions similarly, because through the allothanatographical scene of agony that is implied in the gamic structure, it also touches this affective foundation.

While the presubjective affective state cannot be touched directly, it surfaces through nonconeptual meaning making, which Lacoue-Labarthe discusses in terms of style. The subject of writing is characterized more by how it enunciates its being than what it presents. In gameplay, style surfaces as playstyle, which determines the player's interaction with the algorithmic rule-system. However, mimesis itself cannot appear, but shows itself only through absence. Lacoue-Labarthe calls this the absence of rhythm: a caesuraed moment which reveals the intimacy of the self as the most distant and uncanny. In gameplay, the caesura occurs as an interruption of gameplay, which forces the player to confront the unpresentability and incomprehensibility of the computer process. Such interruptions can be produced by malfunctions of the computational system itself, but also by the failures of the player, which are constitutive to gameplay as a process of gaining mastery over its system. However, the final interruption of gameplay is success, in which the mastery of the game is in fact a result of accommodating to the rhythm of the computer.

Digital gameplay as a relation between an unpresentable computational rule-system and the action visible on the screen has been characterized by notions of the digital and ludic sublime. Lacoue-Labarthe investigates the notion of the sublime through a reinterpretation of Heidegger's conception of the beautiful. The digital sublime occurs through a relation between a numbing repetition of gameplay tasks demanded by the gamic structure of interruptions and repetitions and a shock that is produced by the incomprehensible complexity of the computer process. Continuing the theme of *The Unpresentable*, Lacoue-Labarthe discusses the sublime in terms of the impossibility of presentation, but this time through Heidegger's notion of the beautiful. This discussion is centred around the hyperbological relationship between *physis* and *techne*. Lacoue-Labarthe follows Heidegger's analysis in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in which the nature of truth as unconcealedness is defined in terms of refusal and dissemblance. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that Heidegger's interpretation of the beautiful sought to go beyond Platonic eideticism. In terms of digital gameplay, this means first of all that the game cannot appear but through a veiling that is the gameworld. Secondly, gameplay itself is characterized by this structure, because the sublime is also a relation between the proper self and its dissimulation through its appearance. The subject of gamic action is produced as a technologically enabled self, through which the player's origin is rendered uncanny by the machinic otherness of the computer process.

5   CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the notion of mimetic subject formation in Lacoue-Labarthe's writing and its relevance to digital gameplay. The central problematic has been the subject's inability to present itself as such, which different theories have approached through various dichotomies, such as truth and fiction, unconcealment and dissimulation, or being and appearance. The main task of this research has been to examine the formation of the subject as art on a Lacoue-Labarthean basis and to justify the relevance of this position to a theoretical investigation of digital gameplay. This operation has produced an interpretation of digital gameplay as gamic mimesis, an endless process of formation and deformation of the self through the composite agency of the player and the computer. While the intriguing quality of gameplay stems from the promise of control and subjective agency within the figural representation of the gamic system, players can present their identity as the subjects of gameplay only through the otherness of that system.

In the first part, I focused on Lacoue-Labarthe's main problem, (re)presentation of the subject through his readings of Kant, the Jena Romantics, Hegel, Hölderlin, Nietzsche and Heidegger, whose thoughts comprise the most important context for Lacoue-Labarthe's texts. Then I examined Lacoue-Labarthe's pivotal text, *Typographie*, which presents his interpretation of mimesis as the abyssal origin of the subject. Finally, I elaborated the loss of the subject through Derrida's interpretation. The purpose of Chapter Two was to develop an understanding of Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of the notion of the subject, which he derives from the concept of representation and the problematic status of the subject as both a product and a producer of itself. With the notions of (re)presentation and writing, Lacoue-Labarthe examines the subject's origin as a loss of something that it has never had, which leads him to the notion of (de)constitution.

While this can essentially be understood as a critique against the interpretation of the subject as an originary substantiality or a stable structure, Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of mimesis puts the focus onto the persistent return of the subject through endless production and circulation of roles. The

subject is always already in withdrawal, but it is also always forming and presenting itself. In my interpretation, Lacoue-Labarhte's thematization of the subject through mimesis means that instead of focusing on the groundlessness of the subject, we should look into the perpetual process of production as the mode of human existence which shapes the subject always anew. Even though its manifestations can be uncanny, the loss of the subject is not a condition that should be lamented or dreaded but embraced as a freedom from suffocating exemplarity and totalizing systems of identification, such as constrained interpretations of nationality or gender. While this chapter contributed to the existing research on Lacoue-Labarthe, its purpose was to set out the theoretical background of this investigation and present my interpretation of Lacoue-Labarthe, which would guide the subsequent chapters.

The second part presented my understanding of digital gameplay, which I constructed upon a differentiation between the computational system and the gameworld. I elaborated my interpretation of these terms through new media and digital games research literature. Lastly, I focused on the notion of gameplay through the concepts of interactivity, agency, gamic action and an interpretation of gameplay as artistic action. As such, Chapter Three did not produce any new knowledge, as its purpose was to provide rationale for my usage of the notion of digital gameplay and the concepts related to it. Theories explored in this chapter comprised my conception of gameplay and supported the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of gamic mimesis. Approaching gameplay from the Lacoue-Labarthean position that was established in the first chapter meant focusing on the player's agency as a self-constituting act, because in this way playing digital games could be understood as writing. However, my focus was not on how the player constructs a narrative out of the game's fiction or how the player identifies through a playable character, but on the interaction with the algorithmic system of rules. Even though the dominance of the figural order is unavoidable because the subject can come to appear only through it, mimesis functions always prior to it and collapses everything it helps to construct. As unconscious imitation, repetition, instability and improvisation, the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of mimesis as the truth of being fits better to the computational basis of gameplay than to a simple identification with a character in the gameworld. However, because the algorithmic system cannot come to being without being represented and interpreted through the audiovisual apparatus, the figural representation and the computational essence are inseparable from each other. The readings of Lacoue-Labarthe in Chapter Four focused on this interdependence and constructed the notion of gamic mimesis through it.

The final part of this investigation presented my interpretation of gamic mimesis, which brought readings of Lacoue-Labarthe to the context of digital gameplay. First, gameplay was inspected as a struggle in terms of Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretations of the notions of mimetic rivalry, absence of proper origin and allothanatography. Introducing the notion of the hyperbologic, I elaborated gameplay through the paradox of the subject between activity and passivity. Then, through Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of the Hölderlinian

conception of the caesura, I moved to inspect rhythm as the temporal dimension of mimesis in relation to gameplay and playstyle. Lastly, by reading Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of the sublime, I focused on the notions of *physis* and *techne*, which govern both Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of (re)presentation of the subject and my conception of gameplay. Whereas Chapters Two and Three focused on distinct topics, Lacoue-Labarthe's early writings and digital gameplay as a relation between computation and the graphical interface, Chapter Four engaged in the experimental task of interweaving these areas. Gameplay has already been characterized through the notions of struggle, paradox, rhythm and sublime. My goal was not merely to indicate that these terms can be used to describe digital gameplay, because Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretations of these concepts through the logic of mimesis distinguishes them from the general usage. More than proving that gameplay is something to which the meanings of these terms apply, the task was to simultaneously stay committed to the intricacy of Lacoue-Labarthe's writing and elaborate its implications through an example that differs from the context of his writing. In the end, this gesture has made apparent that digital gameplay is in fact very close to Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of mimesis.

As I noticed on the introduction, Lacoue-Labarthe's evasive gesture makes it very difficult to conduct a reading of his text while simultaneously retaining one's "own" voice. If we take seriously his critique of the subject of writing, such attempt seems impossible – the more the subject of writing attempts to produce a correspondence between thought and its presentation, the more this presentation becomes detached from the original agency. Hence, instead of an attempt to remain as the proper subject of the text, perhaps the operation in Chapter Four could better be described as letting the voices gathered in Chapter Three resonate with Lacoue-Labarthe's dissimulated thought. It is difficult to determine whether this procedure has resulted in using Lacoue-Labarthe to describe digital gameplay or vice versa; while the aspects of gamic mimesis draw heavily from close readings of Lacoue-Labarthe's texts, my repetition and interpretation of them has been guided by the attempt to investigate the subject of gameplay.

A possible criticism against the relevance of Lacoue-Labarthe to digital games concerns the generality of his claims: if mimesis is the general condition of the subject, it governs any action taken by the subject and relates to digital gaming only by this generality. The idea of a subject as an excess of representation that oscillates between multiple figures and loses itself to otherness the more it struggles for appropriation, concerns the (de)formation of the self in general. I have attempted to indicate that Lacoue-Labarthe's texts have the potential to characterize digital gaming in a way that puts a special emphasis on the player's experience of being a subject whose identity is torn between being the agent and the product of representation. This observation was initially based on the notion of antagonism as a basis for constructing subjective identity. Lacoue-Labarthe's formulations of the paradox of the subject and hyperbologic as an excess of representation do not merely repeat established theoretical

positions but deconstruct the very notions of repetition and imitation. Understanding digital gameplay through such a position allows us to relate gameplay to human life as a process of self-formation. From the perspective of game studies, this outcome might be disappointing, as it does not help distinguishing digital gameplay from other kinds of cultural and aesthetic activities. In my view, gameplay on a fundamental level does not differ from other manifestations of mimesis. However, despite the generality of Lacoue-Labarthe's claims, they fit exceptionally to an investigation of gameplay as formation and deformation of the self – demonstrating this has been the purpose of this dissertation.

Lacoue-Labarthe's views have similarities to many philosophical and theoretical movements of the 20th century, such as existentialism, phenomenology and psychoanalytic theory, which, as noted during this work, have also been used in game studies. A detailed investigation of the differences between these approaches and the Lacoue-Labarthean perspective would be valuable but has not been within the scope of this research. This would also be difficult, given that Lacoue-Labarthe's writing stresses, through its exhausting gesture of renouncing the subject, the fundamental dependence of thought itself on others, who always constitute language and thought before the emergence of a subject, which is characterized by the dissonance between its endless freedom amid these echoes and the totalizing grasp of the figural onto-typology. The uniqueness of Lacoue-Labarthe's thought lies in its insistence upon this condition and its even stubborn suspicion against the figure.

While the structure of this dissertation might have resembled a conventional application of a theory to a research material – a process in which the theoretical foundations are first laid out, then the research object is determined and lastly theory is applied to the object – I should stress again that it would be an inaccurate characterization for this investigation. As I stated in the introduction, calling Lacoue-Labarthe's texts a theory would not do justice to his relentless suspicion against the notions of theory, work and system. My investigation of Lacoue-Labarthe's texts should have made this much clear, as instead of producing a theory, they criticize theories and demonstrate the inevitable failure of the attempts to describe mimesis or to reveal the unpresentable. However, instead of halting in the face of a frustrating inconclusiveness, I have chosen to go forward and brought these texts into contact with digital gameplay. Producing a complete theory of gameplay would be impossible on a strictly Lacoue-Labarthean basis – the aspects of gamic mimesis are singular openings to the (de)constitution of the subject in digital gameplay. Through their incompletion, they have a possibility of evading the impossibility of seizing mimesis.

Lastly, I would like to bring forth the notion of self-formation as an aesthetic activity. If digital gameplay is considered as mimesis, then it is both the molding and the pre-inscription of the subject of gamic agency, constituted by the player's will to master the game and the instructions of the computer. This pertains to the subject of gameplay as the agent of gamic action, which is constructed through

the struggle of attempting to understand the rules of the game, take control of the automated system beneath them and develop from an apprentice to a master, substituting the mastery of the developer. The accomplishment of this goal is inevitably undermined by the gamic system itself, whose appropriation results in the disappropriation of the player's agency. While there is a strong correspondence between the structure of digital gameplay and the (de)constitution of the subject, the question of digital gameplay as self-formation requires further research. Two other topics that have not received the attention they deserve are politics and ethics, which are deeply rooted in Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of the subject and mimesis. Lacoue-Labarthe's criticism against male and female roles would also require a focused investigation of its own. In an effort to sharpen the focus of this investigation, I have not included detailed examinations of these themes, even though they surface in almost all of his texts I have read during this research. As a future perspective, digital gaming should be investigated as self-formation from a wider theoretical standpoint, but also through a deeper focus on the ethical and political implications of Lacoue-Labarthe's writing.

This investigation has explored the theoretical ground of art education in terms of formation of the self as art, but within the context of philosophical texts and digital game theory. Based on Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of mimesis, playing digital games is not related to the (de)constitution of the subject in terms of identifying with a playable character or with the fictional elements encountered in the gameworld, but in terms of the act of playing as a composite of human and machine agency. Gamic action touches the unpresentable mimetic scenario, which determines the subject as an echo of others. Hence, in relation to the formation of the self, gameplay rather resembles a musical and rhythmic experience than a visual experience. Paradoxically, this experience is possible only through the visual appearance, the gameworld. It is possible that the game's fiction functions as exemplarity and that the player might identify with playable characters and their actions, but with the Lacoue-Labarthean interpretation of mimesis, it should be clear that identification is never a simple process of being molded as a malleable matter, because there is no possibility of decision between passively taking on roles and actively distancing oneself from the action. While mimesis is the structure of imitation of models, it functions primarily beyond the figure. In regard to digital gameplay, this means that gamic mimesis functions beyond the figural representation, through the rhythm of being that destabilizes the presentation of the self.

YHTEENVETO (FINNISH SUMMARY)

Tässä väitöskirjassa tutkitaan ranskalaisfilosofi Philippe Lacoue-Labarthen ajatusta subjektin mimeettisestä (epä)muodostumisesta ja sen yhteyttä digitaalisten pelien pelaamiseen. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on muodostaa Lacoue-Labarthen teksteistä tulkinta, jonka kautta pelaamista voidaan tarkastella subjektia tuottavana toimijuutena. Tutkimus on luonteeltaan teoreettista ja tähtää tieteenalan teoreettisen perustan rakentamiseen. Keskeinen tutkimusmateriaali koostuu valikoimasta Lacoue-Labarthen tekstejä ja digitaalista pelaamista tutkivaa teoriakirjallisuutta. Tutkimusstrategia yhdistää lähilukua, analyysia, teorianmuodostusta ja filosofista kirjoittamista. Tutkimuksen keskeinen huomio on, että subjektin muodostumista määrittää tiedostamaton toisten jäljittely, joka tapahtuu visuaalisen ja verbaalisen ajattelun tuolla puolen. Visuaalisen hahmon tai kirjallisen tarinan sijaan subjekti muodostuu ensisijaisesti rytmin, tunnelman ja tyylin kautta. Tässä tutkimuksessa subjektin rakentumista pelillisessä toimijuudessa lähestytään näistä lähtökohdista; digitaalisen pelaamisen subjektia määrittää näkyvän pelihahmon ja pelimaailman tapahtumien sijaan toimijuus, joka perustuu pelaajan vuorovaikutukseen tietokoneen muistiin ohjelmoidun, autonomisesti toimivan sääntöjärjestelmän kanssa.

Tutkimus rakentuu johdannon (Luku 1) ja kolmen pääluvun varaan. Luku 2 keskittyy Lacoue-Labarthen ajattelun filosofiseen kontekstiin ja esittelee keskeiseltä osin hänen tulkintansa subjektin ja mimesiksen käsitteistä. Luvussa keskitytään Lacoue-Labarthen tulkintaan Immanuel Kantin, Jenan romantikkojen, G. W. F. Hegelin, Friedrich Nietzschen ja Martin Heideggerin ajatuksista, joihin hänen keskeiset tekstinsä perustuvat. Lopuksi luvussa nostetaan esiin Jacques Derridan tulkinta Lacoue-Labarthen ajattelusta. Luku 3 siirtyy tarkastelemaan digitaalista pelaamista ja muodostaa siitä teoreettisesti perustellun käsityksen, jota voidaan käyttää pelaamisen ja Lacoue-Labarthen filosofian välisen yhteyden tutkimiseen. Tässä luvussa keskitytään pääosin Jesper Juulin, Espen Aarsethin, Janet Murrayn, Geoff Kingin ja Tanya Krzywinskan, Ian Bogostin, Sherry Turklen, Alexander Gallowayn ja Colin Creminin teksteihin. Luku 4 on tutkimuksen kannalta keskeisin, koska siinä digitaalisen pelaamisen teoria tuodaan kosketukseen Lacoue-Labarthen tekstien luentojen kanssa. Tämän perusteella esitellään neljä pelillisen mimesiksen muotoa: kamppailu, paradoksi, rytmi ja ylevä, jotka muodostavat Lacoue-Labartheen perustuvan tulkinnan pelaamisesta subjektin mimeettisenä (epä)muodostumisena. Päätäntöluku kokoaa yhteen tutkimustulokset, joiden perusteella argumentoidaan, että pelillisen toimijuuden subjekti muodostuu ensisijaisesti pelien visuaalisen pinnan alla, rytmisenä improvisaation liikkeenä, tietokoneen ja pelaajan yhteisenä toimijuutena.

Termi *subjekti* viittaa tässä tutkimuksessa minään eli itseen: ajattelun, puheen, kirjoituksen ja toiminnan agenttiin. *Mimesis* puolestaan tarkoittaa jäljittelyä ja taiteellista tuottamista. Lacoue-Labarthen mukaan subjekti on jatkuvassa muodostumisen ja hajoamisen tilassa, koska mimesis, jonka kautta

subjekti tulee olemassaolevaksi ja muodostaa olemuksensa, ei voi tuottaa pysyviä hahmoja, vaan jatkuvasti sekä rakentaa että purkaa niitä. Tämä ihmisen olemassaoloa määrittävä loputon esiin tulemisen ja vetäytymisen liike tapahtuu tiedostamattomasti, sillä mimesis edeltää tietoista toimintaa ja tuottaa subjektin aina jo ennen tarkoituksenmukaista identiteetin rakentamista. Lacoue-Labarthe erottaa toisistaan tietoisesti itseään tuottavan subjektin ja subjektin aina jo tehtynä; subjekti, joka ranskan kielessä voi tarkoitta sekä *tekijää* että *kohdetta*, samanaikaisesti *tuottaa itsensä* jäljittelemällä muita ja *on tuotettu* muiden toimesta. Ennen kuin subjekti voi muodostaa kuvan itsestään peilaamalla toisia, ovat toisten äänet jo määrittäneet subjektin olemuksen pinnanalaisena värähtelynä ja rytminä, joka toistaa jäljittelyn malleja aina erilaisina ja uudelleentulkittuina. Kaikkein sisin osa itseä on häilyvä ja tavoittamaton; se mikä on kaikkein ominaisinta subjektin identiteetille, on pohjimmiltaan toisten tuottamaa ja näin ollen paradoksaalisesti kaikkein vierainta.

Lacoue-Labarthe nimittää tätä tulkintaa subjektin olemuksesta siirtymäksi Narkissoksesta, joka rakastui omaan peilikuvaansa, Ekhoon, joka ei voinut puhua itse vaan oli kirottu toistamaan muiden sanoja. Itsen tuottaminen hahmona tai tarinana perustuu sekin toisten jäljittelylle ja omimiselle – Lacoue-Labarthe kutsuu tätä puolta minuudesta *autobiografian* ja kehitysromaanin subjektiksi, jonka asema pyritään kaikin keinoin vakiinnuttamaan. Tämän rakennelman pysyvyyttä ja muuttumattomuutta kuitenkin nakertaa se tosiasia, että subjekti on jo ennen syntymäänsä koostunut toisten ihmisten äänistä, jotka riistävät siltä mahdollisuuden pysyvään ja omaan identiteettiin. Tätä puolta minuudesta Lacoue-Labarthe nimittää *allothanatografiaksi* – kertomukseksi toisen kuolemasta omaelämäkerran sijaan – joka määrittää minän *tragedian subjektiksi*. Kehitysromaanin päähenkilö kasvaa ja kehittyy elämänkokemuksiensa ja valintojensa myötä, kun taas tragedian päähenkilöä ohjaavat tämän tietämättä ennalta ohjelmoidut tapahtumat, joiden etenemiseen hän ei voi vaikuttaa. Subjektin heilahtelu itsen tuottamisen agentin ja kohteen välillä olemisena on ratkaisematon paradoksi, jossa äärimmilleen viety pyrkimys tuottaa oma identiteetti – tunnistautua samaksi – johtaa äärimmäiseen identiteetin purkautumiseen ja itsestään eroamiseen. Lacoue-Labarthe nimittää tätä heiluriliikettä *hyperbologiikaksi*, jossa subjektin ”alkuperäinen” olemus *ei-minään* mahdollistaa loputtoman roolien kierrättämisen ja uuden tuottamisen. Subjekti voi ilmetä vain mimesiksen kautta, peittämällä ”itsensä” loputtomalla naamioiden muuntelulla, joiden taakse ”alkuperäinen” minä katoaa.

Vastakohtaa tälle tulkinnalle mimesiksestä improvisaation *rytmisenä* liikkeenä edustaa Lacoue-Labarthelle mimetismi, valmiiden mallien, esikuvien ja narratiivien passiivinen omaksuminen. Hän nimittää *onto-typologiaksi* ajattelutapaa, jossa oleminen tulkitaan visuaalisten hahmojen, tyyppien kautta. Tässä tulkinnassa ajatellaan, että subjekti on aina jo olemassa oleva muovailtava perusaines, *substanssi*, johon identifikaatio voidaan painaa eräänlaisena leimana, pysyvänä jälkenä. Lacoue-Labarthen tulkinta mimesiksestä rytmisenä muunteluna tarkoittaa sitä, ettei subjektia ole olemassa tätä leimaamista edeltävänä rakenteena, eikä sillä ole mitään pysyvää perustaa, johon roolit

voisivat kiinnittyä. Platonin *Valtio*-dialogi on Lacoue-Labarthelle arkkityyppi pyrkimyksestä aikaansaada pysyvä järjestys, jossa jokaisella on ennalta määrätty rooli. Pahimmillaan mimetismi voi kuitenkin johtaa totalitarismiin, josta natsi-Saksa on äärimmäinen esimerkki. Toisena esimerkkinä voidaan pitää vakiintuneita sukupuolirooleja ja niihin pohjautuvaa eriarvoisuutta.

Lacoue-Labarthe puhuu subjektista usein *kirjoituksen* tai *filosofian subjektina*, tekstin tai esityksen äänenä, joka menettää alkuperäisyytensä sekoittuessaan väistämättä toisten ääniin, joiden halkomaksi tuleminen on itse asiassa subjektin alkuperäisin koostumus. Subjekti ei kuitenkaan ole sidottu mihinkään tiettyyn esitystapaan, vaan voi ilmetä minkä tahansa taiteen muodon kautta. Lacoue-Labarthen esimerkit eivät silti kata eri taiteita laaja-alaisesti, vaan painottuvat esimerkeissään filosofisen kirjoittamisen lisäksi perinteisiin taiteisiin, kuten runouteen, teatteriin ja musiikkiin. Tästä syystä digitaalisten pelien tarkastelu Lacoue-Labarthen kanssa on kokeellista ja haastavaa, eikä kaikkia hänen kirjoituksiaan ole mahdollista tuoda kosketuksiin pelaamisen kanssa. Hänen ajatuksensa subjektin muodostumisesta ja esittämisestä ovat kuitenkin yleispäteviä ja niiden pitäisi päteä itsen muodostumiseen riippumatta siitä, minkä muodon subjektia tuottava taide ottaa. Näin ollen Lacoue-Labarthen ajatus subjektista voidaan venyttää kohti digitaalista pelaamista, vaikka tämä tarkoittaa myös vieraan elementin tuomista hänen teksteihinsä. Samalla tämä ele mahdollistaa Lacoue-Labarthen ajattelun eteenpäin viemisen ja sen alkuperäisestä kontekstista irtaantumisen.

Tässä tutkimuksessa pelaamista tarkastellaan ensisijaisesti mimesiksenä, jonka kautta subjekti saa alati muuttuvan olemuksensa. Lacoue-Labarthe käyttämä termi *kirjoituksen subjekti* muuntuu tällöin *pelillisen toiminnan/toimijuuden subjektiksi*. Digitaalisella pelaamisella tarkoitetaan sellaisten pelien pelaamista, joiden toiminta perustuu tietokoneen laskentatehoon. Tavoitteena ei ole muodostaa tyhjentävää digitaalisten pelien määritelmää, vaan rajata tarkastelu tietynlaisiin peleihin, jotka kuitenkin kattavat suuren osan digitaalisista peleistä. Pelit määritellään sääntöjärjestelmiksi, joiden tarkoitus on asettaa pelaajalle esteitä ja rajoituksia ennalta määritellyn päämäärän saavuttamiseksi. Voittaakseen pelin, pelaaja joutuu kamppailemaan esteitä vastaan ja oppimaan, kuinka ne voidaan ylittää. Tämä prosessi tuottaa pelaajalle esteettistä nautintoa ilman muita, pelin ulkopuolisia päämääriä. Digitaaliset pelit eroavat muista peleistä siten, että niiden toiminta ei perustu luonnollisella kielellä kirjoitettuihin sääntöihin, vaan ohjelmointikieleen, joka viime kädessä käännetään konekieleksi, binäärikoodiksi, jonka avulla tietokoneen keskusyksikkö suorittaa laskutoimituksia ja mahdollistaa pelin toiminnan. Tietokoneet pystyvät käsittelemään laskutoimituksia huomattavasti nopeammin kuin ihmiset ja mahdollistavat monimutkaisien sääntöjärjestelmien toteuttamisen tehokkuudella, johon pelkästään ihmisten operoimat pelit eivät yllä. Olennaista digitaalisissa peleissä on, että tietokone voi vaikuttaa pelin tapahtumiin ilman että pelaaja on tietoinen tästä.

Digitaalisia pelejä määrittää niiden kaksitasoinen rakenne: peli on pohjimmiltaan koodia, jonka tietokone toteuttaa, mutta pelaajalle peli näyttäytyy

visuaalisena representaationa näyttölaitteen, kuten monitorin tai television välityksellä. Pelin tapahtumat sijoittuvat pelimaailmaan, joka on sekä pelin graafinen ulkoasu että käyttöliittymä, jonka kautta pelaaja toimii ohjelmoidun sääntöjärjestelmän kanssa. Mahdollisuutta toimia pelimaailmassa ja osallistua sen tapahtumiin pidetään usein syynä digitaalisten pelien vetovoimaan. Tätä on kuvattu esimerkiksi pelimaailmassa-olemisena, jossa pelaajan olemassaolo tulee reflektoiduksi visuaalisen pelimaailman kautta. Lacoue-Labartheen perustuva tulkinta pelaamisesta painottaa kuitenkin visuaalisen järjestyksen sijaan pinnanalaista ja tiedostamatonta jäljittelyä, jossa pelaaja ei pyri samaistumaan pelihahmon, vaan pelin rakenteen edellyttämän pelillisen toimijuuden kanssa. Koska pelit eivät anna sääntöjärjestelmäänsä pelaajan nähtäväksi, joutuu pelaaja päättelemään, kuinka peliä on pelattava pelimaailmasta saatujen vihjeiden avulla. Tästä seuraava yrittämisen, epäonnistumisen, improvisaation ja oppimisen prosessi on ominaista digitaalisten pelien pelaamiselle. Pelaajan on mahdoton ymmärtää peliä muutoin kuin pelimaailman kautta, etenkin jos hän ei tunne kaikkia ohjelmointikieliä, joita pelin tekemisessä on käytetty, mutta myös siksi, etteivät ihmisen kognitiiviset kyvyt ole riittävät tietokoneen suorittamien laskutoimitusten ymmärtämiseen pelaamisen aikana. Erilaisten toimintojen kokeileminen pelin maailmassa ja sitä kautta saavutettu tulkinta on ainoa keino ymmärtää pelin toimintaperiaatteet – jos pelaaja yrittäisi ymmärtää peliä perehtymällä sen koodiin, hänen toimintaansa ei voitaisi nimittää pelaamiseksi.

Toimijuus pelissä ei ole pelaajan yksinomaisuutta, vaan väistämättä myös tietokoneen toimijuutta, koska ilman tietokoneen toimintaa peliä ei voisi pelata. Toisaalta, peli tulee olemassa olevaksi vasta kun sitä pelataan. Digitaalista peliä voidaan luonnehtia tyhjänä kankaana, jolle pelaajan on maalattava pelillisillä toiminnoilla tuodakseen sen eloon. Tässä prosessissa pelaaja ottaa oppilaan roolin ja voittamalla pelin pyrkii nousemaan uudeksi mestariksi opettajansa, eli pelin luojan tilalle. Digitaaliset pelit ovat toki usein suuren ihmisjoukon yhteisiä luomuksia, eivätkä pelin kehittäjät ole enää paikalla, kun peliä pelataan. Tässä tutkimuksessa pelin kehittäjällä tarkoitetaan hypoteettista tekijähahmoa, joka ilmenee pelin sääntörakenteen ja sitä toteuttavan tietokoneen kautta.

Pelillisen mimesiksen muodoista ensimmäinen on kamppailu hallinnasta. Sen taustalla ovat Lacoue-Labarthen René Girardia, Friedrich Hölderliniä ja Friedrich Nietzscheä käsittelevät tekstit. Pyrkiessään syrjäyttämään pelin tekijän, pelaaja kamppailee pelin toimijuudesta tietokoneen ohjaaman järjestelmän kanssa. Lacoue-Labarthen mukaan kamppailu on olennainen osa subjektin muodostumista: koska subjektilla ei ole mitään omaa olemusta, johon se voisi tukeutua, se joutuu omimaan olemuksensa toisilta. Jotta subjekti voisi tunnistautua itsekseen ja erota toisista, on esikuva hävitettävä. Tätä ristiriitaista suhdetta, jossa esikuva kannustaa samalla jäljittelemään itseään ja eroamaan itsestään, Lacoue-Labarthe kutsuu *kaksoissiteeksi*. Se vaikuttaa yhtä lailla yksilön kuin yhteisön muodostumiseen – Lacoue-Labarthe käyttää esimerkkeinään niin historiallista kansallisen identiteetin kehittymistä kuin yksittäisten ajattelijoiden välistä kilpailua. Hänen suurin esimerkkinsä kansallisen identiteetin muodostamisesta on modernin Euroopan, etenkin Saksan, suhde antiikin

Kreikkaan, jossa se olisi voinut saavuttaa todellisen identiteettinsä toistamalla antiikin Kreikan olemuksen paremmin kuin kreikkalaiset ja tällä tavoin ylittää esikuvansa. Paradoksaalisesti, todellinen antiikin Kreikka oli kuitenkin tavoittamaton ja tämä esikuvan toistaminen imitaatiota vailla mallia. Subjektin muodostuminen esikuvien kautta perustuu samankaltaiseen mekanismiin. Jäljittelyn alkuperä on aina poissaoleva, koska toinen on pysyvästi tavoittamaton ja pohjimmiltaan yhtä tyhjä kuin jäljittelijä. Esikuva voidaan toistaa vain väärintulkintana, jossa vieras toinen tulee osaksi itseä ja muuntaa autobiografian allothanatografiaksi. Pelaamisen kannalta tämä tarkoittaa sitä, että saavuttaessaan pelin hallinnan, pelaaja on menettänyt toimijuutensa pelille ja tullut sen hallitsemaksi. Pelitutkimuksessa onkin todettu, että peli pelaa pelaajaa siinä missä pelaaja peliä.

Toinen pelillisen mimesiksen muoto on pelaamisen paradoksi, joka toimii kaksoissiteen logiikan mukaisesti: mitä enemmän pelaaja pyrkii peliä hallitsemaan ja muodostumaan pelillisen toimijuuden subjektiksi, sitä enemmän hän tulee tietokoneen edustaman toiseuden koostamaksi. Tämä ajatus perustuu Lacoue-Labarthen luentaan Denis Diderot'n tekstistä *Näyttelijän paradoksi*. Lacoue-Labarthen termein voidaan sanoa, että pelin subjekti on hyperbologisessa liikkeessä toimijuutta tuottavan ja tuotetun toimijuuden välillä. Tämä heijastaa yleispätevää subjektin paradoksia: mitä enemmän subjekti pyrkii muistuttamaan itseään, sitä enemmän se eroaa itsestään, koska identiteetin omiminen johtaa sen menettämiseen toisille. Subjektilla ei ole mahdollisuutta vaikuttaa tähän prosessiin, jonka kautta sen syvin olemus tulee kaikkein vieraimmaksi – mimesis on samanaikaisesti roolien aktiivista rakentamista, että niiden passiivista omaksumista. Lacoue-Labarthe kuitenkin korostaa, että mimesis on ennen kaikkea aktiivinen uuden tuottamisen voimavara – vaikka se tuhoaa perustan pysyvältä identiteetiltä, on tämän hyväksyminen eettisesti parempi vaihtoehto kuin pysyvien identiteettien, visuaalisten järjestysten ja narratiivien pystyttäminen ja niiden väkisin tukeminen.

Kolmas pelillisen mimesiksen muoto on rytmi, jonka kautta voidaan tarkastella pelaamista tyylin, tunnelman ja ei-kielellisen merkityksen tasolla. Tulkinta rytmistä perustuu Lacoue-Labarthen kirjoitukseen psykoanalyyttisesta teoriasta, jonka keskiössä on Theodor Reikin teksti *Vainoava melodia* (*The Haunting Melody*), sekä Susanna Lindbergin tutkimukseen, joka vie eteenpäin Lacoue-Labarthen ajatusta rytmistä. Kun subjekti esittää itsensä mimesiksen kautta, olennaista ei ole niinkään esityksen sisältö, vaan esittämisen tapa. Ei-kielellisen merkityksen painottaminen on seurausta Lacoue-Labarthen pyrkimyksestä tutkia subjektin muodostumista kuvallisen ja kirjallisen ulottuvuuden tuolla puolen. Rytmi on mimesiksen ajallinen ulottuvuus, jossa toistaminen tuottaa saman aina erilaisena. Subjekti ei muodostu saman ulkomuodon painamisena olemisen perusainekseen, vaan tyhjyyden peittävän ulkomuodon jatkuvassa rytmikkäässä uudelleenmuodostumisessa. Vaikka mimesis tuottaa subjektin näkyvänä – vaikkakin hetkellisenä – ulkomuotona, tämä tuottaminen on pohjimmiltaan subjektin hallitsemattomissa ja edeltää tietoisia valintoja. Se on pinnanalaista värähtelyä, tunnelmaa ja virittyneisyyttä,

joka on aina jo määrittämässä subjektin olemista maailmassa ja kantaa mukanaan jälkeä subjektin kadonneesta perusolemuksesta (jota sillä ei ole koskaan ollut).

Taiteen kautta subjekti voi kohdata toisten rytmejä – digitaalisen pelin rytmiä määrittää ohjelmoidun järjestelmän autonominen toiminta, jonka kautta pelaaja kohtaa sekä pelin kehittäjän toiseuden että tietokoneen mekaanisen ja konemaisen vierauden. Lacoue-Labarthen mukaan rytmiä, kuten mimesistäkään, ei voida havaita sellaisenaan, koska ne toimivat tietoisen ajattelun ulkopuolella. Kosketus taiteen kanssa voi kuitenkin tuoda ne pintaan ja muistuttaa subjektia sen perustattomuudesta, mikä saattaa olla jopa kammottava kokemus. Lacoue-Labarthe nimittää tällaisia hetkiä rytminvastaisiksi katkoksiksi, *kesuuroiksi*. Pelaamisessa nämä katkokset ilmenevät ensisijaisesti pelillisen toiminnan keskeytyksinä; virheenä tietokoneen toiminnassa tai pelaajan epäonnistumisina. Pelaaminen rakentuu usein tällaisten katkosten varaan, jolloin pelaaja joutuu toistamaan pelin vaatimia toimintoja ja varioimaan niitä saavuttaakseen halutun lopputuloksen. Lopullinen katkos pelaamisessa on kuitenkin pelin tavoitteen saavuttaminen, jonka myötä peli päättyy. Tässä tilanteessa pelaaja on onnistunut hallitsemaan pelin edellyttämän toimijuuden muodon, mutta on samalla – tämän toimijuuden subjektina – tullut pelin ohjelmoinnin määrittämäksi. Tällä tavoin peli tuottaa subjektin tietokoneen ja ihmisen yhdistelmänä.

Viimeinen pelillisen mimesiksen muoto on ylevä, eli subliimi, jonka kautta digitaalista peliä ja sen pelaamista voidaan tarkastella *fysiksen*, luonnon, ja *tekhnen*, taiteen tai taidon välisenä rakenteena. Lacoue-Labarthen tulkinta ylevästä perustuu Martin Heideggerin tulkinnalle kauneudesta ja taideteoksesta olemisen totuuden paljastajana – Lacoue-Labarthe pyrkii osoittamaan, että Heideggerin käsitys kauneudesta palautuu käsitykseen ylevästä sen esityksenä, mitä ei voida esittää. Tämä käsitys ylevästä kuvastaa ihmisen olemassaoloa subjektina, sillä subjekti on aina sen esitys, mikä piiloutuu katseelta. Pyrkiessään esittämään kaikkein omimman olemuksensa – *fysiksen* – subjekti tulee verhonneeksi sen juuri tällä esityksellä – *tekhnellä* – joka on aina jo jotain muuta kuin se subjektin olemus, joka esityksen oli tarkoitus paljastaa. Digitaalisessa pelaamisessa tämä kaava kuvaa sekä pelin että pelaajan ilmenemistä, jotka yhdistyvät pelillisen toimijuuden kautta pelaamisen subjektiksi. Digitaalinen peli joutuu väistämättä verhoamaan *fysiksensä* eli ohjelmointikielillä kirjoitetun sääntöjärjestelmänsä *tekhnen* eli fiktiivisen pelimaailman kautta. Pelaaja puolestaan joutuu väistämättä esittämään itsensä jonkin teknisen täydennyksen, kuten pelaamisen kautta. Pelitapahtumassa tietokoneen ja pelaajan toimijuudet yhdistyvät ja tulevat näkyväksi pelimaailman kautta.

Pelillisen mimesiksen muodot eivät määrittele digitaalista pelaamista tai muodosta valmista teoriaa. Sen sijaan ne tulee ymmärtää avauksina digitaalisen pelaamisen Lacoue-Labarthelaiseen tulkintaa. Lacoue-Labarthen tapa kirjoittaa vastustaa teorianmuodostusta, eikä pyri filosofisen järjestelmän luomiseen, eikä usein edes selkeisiin johtopäätöksiin. Saattamalla Lacoue-Labarthen tekstejä yhteen digitaalisen pelaamisen kautta voidaan kuitenkin osoittaa subjektin muodostumisen kannalta olennaisia rakenteita, jotka myös vievät Lacoue-Labarthen tulkintaa mimesiksestä eteenpäin. Tämä tulkinta antaa suuntaviivoja

pelaamisen tutkimiseen rytmisenä, jopa musiikillisena tai tanssin kaltaisena kokemuksena. Pelaamisen vetovoima liittyy ensisijaisesti subjektin näkymättömään perustaan, jossa ihmisen olemassaolon syvin olemus kantaa aina jälkeä toisista. Koneellisen perustansa vuoksi digitaaliset pelit koskettavat subjektiksi tulemisen teknistä luonnetta ja mahdollistavat leikillisen ja improvisoivan suhteen itsen tuottamiseen.

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