Derrida On Screen
Stefan Herbrechter
Coventry University

> I watch a lot of television, both because it fascinates me… but also because I try, at the same time, to analyse this fascination and to know what is going on on the other side. (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 137)

> The specter is also, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects – on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see. Not even the screen sometimes, and a screen always has, at bottom, in the bottom or background that it is, a structure of disappearing apparition. (Derrida, 1994, pp. 100-1)

Some may be surprised to see a chapter on Derrida in a *Handbook on Posthumanism in Film and Television*. There are two reasons for this – one lies in the fact that Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) is not usually related to posthumanism, even though he has certainly influenced a number of writers who do own up to that label (most notably, Cary Wolfe (2010), Neil Badmington (2000) and myself [Herbrechter, 2013]). The other reason is that Derrida's relationship with film and television – despite his undeniable influence on film and media studies more generally – is anything but straightforward. This chapter will argue, however, that Derrida is both, a 'proto-posthumanist' and a 'media philosopher'; in fact it will aim to show that neither posthumanism nor the media, today, would be thinkable, without Derridean deconstruction. In order to spell out the relationship between posthumanism, the media and deconstruction I will proceed by looking at 'Derrida on screen' at three levels: at the level of 'Derrida screened' (i.e. Derrida's appearances on screen, and film in particular); Derrida on being screened (Derrida's comments on becoming a subject to screening, or on being filmed, mediated, etc.); and Derrida on screens (or his thinking about the 'televisual' and mediated representation more generally). At each level the implication for a very specific understanding of posthumanism in Derridean deconstruction should become apparent.

Apart from numerous television interviews, YouTube clips of interviews, seminars and conferences, photographs and portraits, Jacques Derrida appeared as a 'character' (playing himself) in three films: *The Ghost Dance* (1983), *D'Ailleurs Derrida* [Derrida's Elsewheres, 1999], and *Derrida* (2002). 'Derrida screened' refers to the kind of dynamic that partakes in Derrida as a subject of the media, as someone, a 'media-philosopher' who has been 'produced' and has therefore also produced 'himself' on film and television. In all of these appearances Derrida foregrounds the self-reflexivity of 'being screened', or of what it means to become a subject of and subjected to the (televisual) media. While *D'Ailleurs Derrida* is an almost lyrical film that characterizes Derrida as a modern marrano jew on his autobiographic journey 'back' from France to Algeria, his birth place (a journey that traces what he calls his '*nostalgérie'*), Amy Ziering Kofman and Kirby Dick's 2002 biopic tries to picture Derrida, the 'great philosopher' in his everyday routine. Derrida is shown and interviewed in his

house, at work and on his travels around the world. Here, he literally is and plays with the role of being the subject of film. He foregrounds the 'spectrality' that the photographic inscription produces – a theme that goes back to Roland Barthes's work on the relationship between photography and death in *Camera Lucida*, where he shows that the subject of a photograph (very much like the author of any text) is always already 'dead' (if not literally, then at least 'structurally'), since the photograph (and the text) signifies in the absence of its subject.

This idea of spectrality is linked to the question of autobiography more generally, which Derrida foregrounds in *Derrida*, from the beginning. The story I tell myself – my identity – is a form of inscription that is designed, on the one hand, to insure my singular presence and a kind of ownership over my 'experience'; on the other hand, it is necessarily taking 'my' place – it is designed to be able to speak of 'me' and for 'me' (even in my absence). So, in making myself appear to others, I am at the same time giving up my control over my story, which thus becomes subject to interpretation and will have to be countersigned or acknowledged by others (who will necessarily see things differently). I am thus the subject of my autobiography only in the form of a spectre – an absent presence that comes back to haunt me, constantly. The same is true of the lives of others, of course, and especially the ones who have already disappeared, died, but whose influence can still be felt. This is our 'inheritance' which constantly demands of us to be heard, according to Derrida's reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in *Specters of Marx*, in which he creates an analogy between the impossible contemporaneity of Marxist legacy and Hamlet's being haunted by his murdered father's ghost. It is also a rereading of Freudian psychoanalysis and the unconscious as a haunted 'archive'. Memory, despite its material inscription of events, knowledge and information cannot dispense with immaterial, psychic or mental processes that are supposed to guarantee truth and order, but at the same time expose their relativity and disjointedness ('the time is out of joint', as Hamlet says). The bad news is thus that truth is never established once and for all, while the good news is that the spectrality of being necessarily creates a radical opening for a future that is unpredictably other (as Derrida says, in *Ghost Dance*: 'The future belongs to ghosts').

Derrida's more general claim would be that actually all subjectivity works according to this logic of spectrality, which is why, in *Specters of Marx*, he coins the word 'hauntology' – a serious pun that signifies that the entire tradition of ontology (philosophy of 'being') is haunted by the spectral, by the 'ghosts' it continues to repress. And here is thus the first aspect of a Derridean posthumanism in the context of the media: 'our' media – from language to new and hypermedia - have always been 'spectralising', because of the necessarily 'teleological' character of communication (of their message-sending and destinatory character). The reason why Derrida could therefore be called, a media philosopher, and, even more specifically, a thinker of *televisual* media, is closely linked to this idea of a spectral absent presence of a trace or of *différance*, as Derrida calls it, on which 'Western metaphysics' (or, in other words, philosophy and thinking as we know it) is based. In *The Post Card* – itself a symptomatic 'medium' of what Derrida refers to as the 'postal epoch' – he develops nothing else but a deconstruction of the teleological structure of all (media)communication. Since communication (visual, symbolic, oral, written, etc.) is always 'destined' or 'sent', there must be necessarily the possibility of a

message not arriving at its destination, of letters, post cards, and messages in general, going astray. At the same time, the only assurance of a letter arriving at its destination is some form of feedback to the sender. This relay situation is what Derrida refers to as the postal principle:

> As soon as there is [a postal principle], there is *différance* (and this does not await language, especially human language, and the language of Being, only the mark and the divisible trait),and there is postal maneuvering, relays, delay, anticipation, destination, telecommunicating network, the possibility, and therefore the fatal necessity of going astray, etc. (Derrida, 1987, p. 66)

It may be the case that today we are moving away from a lettered and paper-based material support culture towards a computerized, digital culture. However, what the new tele-technological situation of email, instant messaging, video and mobile media does not mean is the end but rather the acceleration and intensification of the postal as such. As Deborah Cook explains:

> The postal era, the era of love letters, literature, metaphysics, history, etc., is coming to an end. The Post, or the Postal Principle, however, will endure, living on transformed, transferred, and translated as the trace… The Postal Principle is the *über*, *meta*, *trans*, and *tele* of all epochs. (Cook, 1987: 293)

To further illustrate this point is a quotation from *Echographies* to illustrate this point. In *Ghost Dance* Derrida is interviewed in his office by a student (played by Pascale Ogier, who died shortly after the film was completed). She asks him, whether he believes in ghosts, and he explains that this is a somewhat difficult question because, right here, right now, she is speaking to a ghost (in the sense outlined above, namely Derrida's filmic presence relying on his physical absence). At the end of the scene, after Derrida's little lecture on films producing ghosts, Derrida returns the question to Ogier and she answers, in a close-up looking straight into the camera: 'Yes, now I believe in ghosts.' Years later, after her death, and upon rewatching this scene, Derrida is struck by its temporal spectrality, as he explains in one of the transcribed television interviews with Bernard Stiegler, 'Spectographies' (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 120):

> Suddenly I saw Pascale's face, which I knew was a dead woman's face, come onto the screen. She answered my question: 'Do you believe in ghosts?' Practically looking me in the eye, she said to me again, on the big screen: 'Yes, now I do, yes'. Which now? Years later in Texas. I had the unnerving sense of the return of her specter, the specter of her specter coming back to say to me – to me here, now: 'Now… now… now, that is to say, in this dark room on another continent, in another world, here, now, yes, believe me, I believe in ghosts'.

This is of course more than just the eerie personal experience of Derrida, the individual subject of a film. It is the experience of film (and all writing – Derrida here exploits the near homophony in French of *écrit* and *écran* [Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 130]) in general. As Laurence Simmons elegantly puts it:

To watch a film is to be in the presence of spectres, the already-dead or the soon-to-be-dead, and it is also to be watched by them as they look back at us and see that we, too, shall die. The spectrality of cinema transforms the spectator of the film into a spectre who can no longer maintain the distance between subject and object, seer and seen, the living and the dead. The film spectator becomes caught up in the becoming spectres of the characters on screen. We the audience can no longer retain a distance, and collapse into the spectral relation. (Simmons, 2011, p. 136)

And this spectral relation, arguably, is at work in all forms of visual and nonvisual media representation. It is at work in representation and communication as such in the form of a 'trace that marks the present with an absence in advance. The spectral logic is de facto a deconstructive logic. It is in the element of haunting that deconstruction finds the place most hospitable to it, at the heart of the living present, in the quickest heartbeat of the philosophical. Like the work of mourning, in a sense, which produces spectrality, and like all work produces spectrality' (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 117).

Here then lies the first important nexus between Derridean deconstruction, media and posthumanism: even though the 'spectral' has always been a necessary part of the 'human', modernity, or the time of the televisual mass medium is characterized by an increasing proliferation of this 'logic of spectrality' to an extent where it has become difficult to ignore the mutual penetration (Donna Haraway [1991] would call it 'cyborgisation') of human and teletechnological forms of representation. As Derrida explains in an interview entitled 'Specters of Media':

There is no doubt that the extraordinary technological development of the media has to do with the unprecedented, unheard of possibilities of spectrality, and that teletechnology is a way of producing, handling, organizing, making profit out of some spectrality. The structure of television, the structure of computerization, has everything to do with spectrality. This has deeply transformed the public space, that is, the political space, not only nationally but also through what is called globalization, *mondialisation*. For that reason, of course, the power and thus the responsibilities of the media are enormous. There is nothing in the world, and certainly no political or economic power, which could avoid being dependent on the media. (Derrida, 2001b, p. 45)[1]

So, as a first summary, we can say that there is in Derrida's work a kind of phenomenological critique of the experience of media-subjectivity which involves a reinterpretation of the 'televisual', or of 'being-screened', 'being-on-screen' driven by the unattained and unattainable ideal of 'telepathy' (of instant, self-present, communication without loss across distances, without spectres etc.).[2] However, what happens in 'televisual' mass media (and arguably even more today and in the future in digital media) is a proliferation and increasing

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[1] On the relationship between religion, media and globalization see e.g. Derrida, 2001a, and Naas 2012.
[2] For a more detailed discussion on telepathy see Derrida, 1988, and Royle, 2008.

autonomy of spectral images. The proliferation of posthuman figures – ghosts, zombies, cyborgs etc. – might therefore be seen in the context of this general spectralisation, as one aspect of our own intensifying engagement with and loss of control over our media representations. This posthumanising trend would thus be closely linked to a form of 'cyborgisation' (Haraway, 1991) that on the one hand produces human-machine and on the other hand human-media assemblages.

So if one agrees with Derrida that media spectralisation has always contributed to the *decentring* of the human subject and continues to do so, this could in itself be seen as a 'posthumanist' scenario or potential. Digitalisation, a further spectre raised by Derrida in the previous quotation ('computerisation') in a sense is merely upping the ante in this respect. More specifically, digitalization and the changes it produces in, amongst other things, our relation to images, also has a fundamental effect on (human) memory and the archive. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida (1996) develops an argument about the necessarily political structure of every archive and the double imperative every process of archivisation has to obey: on the one hand, there is the question of power (and very often of state politics and national sovereignty), including of who the archivists or archiving institutions are. On the other hand, the question is what to archive and how to regulate the access to this externalized public memory. This becomes especially complex in a situation when there is, today, due to digitalization and decentralization of archiving possibilities, a proliferation of archives, as well as a huge increase in information, and thus an increased instability of 'data' and very often a lack of verifiability. The creation of a 24/7, online, mediated, social, and increasingly global public memory that is always 'telepresent' to itself, is not necessarily 'good news', because it also produces a generalization of the 'conundrum' of the archive that Derrida refers to as the *mal d'archive*, namely the structural aporia that underlies any archival desire. Derrida specifically refers to the Freudian archive and to psychoanalysis as an institution in his text, to demonstrate the paradox of memory needing externalization (e.g. an archive, but also other techniques and technologies of remembering, and by implication all technological prostheses, and especially writing and all forms of inscription) and of that process depending on repression (willful forgetting), which makes a politics of memory at once almost impossible (because it would have to involve the individual and collective 'unconscious') but at the same time absolutely necessary (because archives are not only about the preservation of the past, but must also contain all possible futures). As Derrida explains, in *Echographies*:

> Whoever is in a position to access this past or to use the archive should know concretely that there was *a* politics of memory, a *particular* politics, that this politics is in transformation, and that it is a *politics*. We must awaken to critical vigilance with regard to the politics of memory: we must practice a politics of memory and, simultaneously, in the same movement, a critique of the politics of memory. (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 63)

Again, here we find at work a deconstructive logic that has always contained a posthumanist potential and which under current teletechnological, digitalized conditions stresses the relativisation of 'humanity's' control over its own

memory and archivisation processes. And it also poses the question of democracy and the role of the (new) media, of course.

Even more problematically, the question of memory raises the question of technology, media and the human more generally. As Cary Wolfe – one of the chief proponents of a deconstructive posthumanism – explains:

> Indeed, the 'human' is itself a prosthetic being, who from day one is constituted as human by its co-evolution with and co-constitution by external archival technologies of various kinds – including, of course, language itself as the 'first' archive and prosthesis. (Wolfe, 2008: 90)

Wolfe builds here on the work of two other thinkers heavily influenced by Derrida's work – Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time* (1998) in which he develops the history of humans' 'originary technicity'; and David Wills's *Prosthesis* (1995) and *Dorsality* (2008). To understand the history of humanity as a process of hominization that depends on the originary supplement of the technical (from language to hypermedia) means to look at intensification and increasing technicisation. But it also bears the critique of this longterm view and therefore a certain relativisation of human 'cyborgisation' and the idea of the 'posthuman'. On the one hand, technology ironically is what made us human in the first place, on the other hand this 'technological condition' has triggered a metaphysical process that threatens the human with extinction. Here is what Derrida says about the inextricability of this 'bodily condition':

> There is no natural originary body: technology has not simply added itself, from the outside or after the fact, as a foreign body. Or at least this foreign or dangerous supplement is 'originarily' at work and in place in the supposedly ideal interiority of the 'body and soul'. It is indeed at the heart of the heart. (Derrida, 1995, pp. 244-5)

The history and future of technology and media is therefore closely linked with human self-understanding in the form of an externalization (of memory) and a prosthesisation that produces what might be called 'culture' in the widest sense (including science as a human practice and institution). This is because the originary prosthesis is that of 'auto-affection'. Deconstruction shares with psychoanalysis an idea of identity formation that is based on a desire of the other. The 'of' in this phrase plays on the ambiguity of this other having aspects both of auto- and hetero-affection. In other words, an 'I' needs an 'other' who precedes it, at the same time this 'other' serves for identification and thus auto-affection purposes and fires the desire to 'become who I think I am'. This 'other' who is neither real nor fictional (if anything he/she/it is 'virtual') is thus necessary but also uncontrollable. The 'price' for auto-affective 'self'-identity is therefore also an auto-immunitarian defense mechanism (Derrida, 2003). This is true for all significant others – be they humans, nonhumans, objects, ideas or institutions.

And this is where another nexus between deconstruction, media and posthumanism can be identified, namely in the fact that the auto-affection and auto-immunity mechanism is necessarily 'mediated' by an otherness that gives rise to desire but always escapes it – be that at an individual or a social level.

Again, in this insight, lies the potential for a posthumanism that takes the relativisation of human agency and a non-anthropocentric understanding of communication and human-environment interaction as its starting point. However, it also connects quite problematically to the history of technicisation and media in the sense that contemporary forms of teletechnological and computerized media raise the stakes of auto-affective and auto-immunitarian practices so to speak.

At the same time they also lead to an extension of the realm of the 'virtual'. Derrida's response to this is the coining of the words 'artifactuality' and 'actuvirtuality', which are connected to a call for a heightened responsibility of the media in the light of their increased virtualizing power (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 3). There is thus in Derrida also an analysis of the screen as such, of the process of representation involved in the mediated 'message'. In this sense, Derrida is a media-critic, who sees the crucial political stake for the media in their relation to and their implication in the archivisation of the 'event'. How can the dynamics of spectralisation and thus virtualization of (hyper)media continue to guarantee the 'event-ness of the event'? In other words, how can 'we' continue to take responsible decisions in the absence of trustworthy media representations (which, arguably, is the question that ultimately underlies all forms of 'media studies' and 'media critique')? Derrida formulates this problem in *Specters of Marx*, by linking it back to his idea of the ghost, spectrality and hauntology:

> If we have been insisting so much since the beginning on the logic of the ghost, it is because it points toward a thinking of the event that necessarily exceeds a binary or dialectical logic, the logic that distinguishes or opposes *effectivity or actuality* (either present, empirical, living – or not) and *ideality* (regulating or absolute non-presence). This logic of effectivity or actuality seems to be of a limited pertinence. The limit, to be sure, is not new; it has always been leaving its mark on anti-Marxist idealism as well as on 'dialectical materialism'. But it seems to be demonstrated today better than ever by the fantastic, ghostly, 'synthetic', 'prosthetic', virtual happenings in the scientific domain and thus the domain of the techno-media and thus the public or political domain. It is also made more manifest by what inscribes the speed of a virtuality irreducible to the opposition of the act and the potential in the space of the event, in the event-ness of the event. (Derrida, 1994, p. 63)

The awareness of the media's 'construction' of actuality, of the virtual and therefore entirely political nature of the mediated event, raises the question of the media's responsibility and also calls for a media pedagogical emphasis on critique. The 'task' (for the philosopher, but also any subject of or to the media, today) is thus the following:

> Today, a philosopher who 'thinks his time' must, among other things, be attentive to the implications and consequences of this virtual time [of 'actuality' or the 'event']. To the innovations in its technical implementation, but also to what the new recalls of much more ancient possibilities. (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 6)

Derrida, as media philosopher, thus clearly sees the potential but also the dangers of the increasing and intensifying mediation of (human and nonhuman) life on this planet, and, maybe most importantly, he also sees the necessity for a critique that does not neglect the long term, a critique that does not forget to 'inherit' in the face of tele-technological acceleration and globalization:

> A new ethics and a new law or right, in truth, a new concept of 'hospitality' are at stake. What the accelerated development of teletechnologies, of cyberspace, of the new topology of the 'virtual' is producing is a practical deconstruction of the traditional and dominant concepts of the state and citizen (and thus of 'the political') as they are linked to the actuality of a territory. I say 'deconstruction' because, ultimately, what I name and try to think under this word is, at bottom, nothing other than this very process, its 'taking-place' in such a way that is happening affects the very experience of place and the recording (symptomatic, scientific, or philosophical)of this 'thing', the trace that traces (inscribes, preserves, carries, refers, or defers) the différance of this event which happens to place [*qui arrive au lieu*] – which happens to take place, and to taking-place [*qui arrive à l'avoir-lieu*]... (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 36)

Deconstruction – and its powerful and critical commentary in Derrida's work – thus bears the closest possible affinity with the analysis of the interlinked processes of mediatisation and hominization. In this sense, deconstruction has always been (proto-)posthumanist. The important thing, however, is that it stresses both the continuity *and* the complexification, the inheritance *and* the newness of today's situation (with its specific potentials and dangers). So, even though Derrida died before the advent of the so-called 'new media' and web 2.0 his work leaves many threads to be taken up.[3] In terms of an understanding of posthumanism, however, Derridean deconstruction also teaches us that the one humanism that we will not be able to escape here is the one of auto-hetero-affection contained in this very work with the proper name 'Derrida'. This work may not often be cited today, either in connection with (new) media studies or with techno-media-centred theories of posthumanism, but without this inheritance (and the inheritance before it) our responsibility in the face of new and ever greater challenges seems frightfully limited. Deconstruction has in fact always happened, with and without humans. Derridean deconstruction 'taking place' continues to haunt our increasingly mediated selves, environments, bodies and socialities, as we are beginning to see ourselves, from imagined post-anthropocentric futures, as 'posthumans'.

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[3] On an early link between the work of Derrida to digitalisation and the database see Bennington, 1993.

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