

Derrida, Democracy and the State of Education: Learning, by Design, Perchance

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Will we ever be finished with this law and this secret police between us?
Jacques Derrida, 'Envois'¹

This chapter, in exploring the implications of Derrida's admission of the example of the Clipper chip into the book version of *Politics of Friendship*, desacralises the notion of *khora*, as 'the place of possible substitution', and as 'third genus' between the intelligible and the sensible.² This opens up a 'spectrology' of the in-between in which the importance of design education, design practices and designed entities emerges, as media for formal and informal public education, by extension from Derrida's emphasis on the role of literature and the humanities in the university.³ In doing so, it acknowledges Derrida's emphasis on secrecy or confidentiality for his conception of the relation between the educational and the political. For Derrida, reflection upon the Kantian ethics and politics of friendship should organise itself around the concept of secrecy (PF, 257).⁴ The secret is 'that which one thinks [. . .] must remain secret because an engagement has been entered upon and a promise made in certain non-natural conditions' (259).

It is the in(ter)vention of the third party as witness, however, that prevents the jealous narcissism of the dual, or the $n+1$, relation of the secret from sinking into abyssal self-reflection, opening the possibility of a moral and a political friendship that nevertheless remains, even for Kant's friend of humankind, within the horizon of cosmopolitics as phratrocentrism, a horizon that Derrida affirmatively deconstructs.⁵

It is argued that design pedagogies, design practices and design production may only begin to deliver on their promise in respect of justice and democracy if they are practised as forms of *inventio*, not only in the rhetorical sense of 'an activity of invention concerned with the indeterminate' but also, more importantly, in the Derridean sense of opening to the other, of allowing a space for the in-coming of the other through a deconstructive inventiveness that destabilises structures that foreclose, letting the other come by preparing for its coming.⁶ Design practices are obliged in the name of justice, if justice is taken as a concern for an otherness that cannot either be foreseen or totalised and which addresses itself to the singularity of the other, to keep open the possibility of the surprise of the 'invention' of the other.⁷ Such invention, which may unveil what was already there or produce what was not already there from an existing stock of elements, implies 'both a first time and every time, the inaugural event and iterability'.⁸ Furthermore, if the other is no longer simply another human being, equal to me as a 'brother', but includes other human beings unlike me as well as the non-human others, the outputs of design may then be seen to exhibit agential in-betweenness, where agency lies in the interrelationship of humans with the material world, constituting realities that interweave the human, non-human and more-than-human.⁹

Design then becomes a place where the law one gives to oneself and the position one is given in the order of the other conspire or confide, a place to which the 'altogether other, and every other (one) is every (bit) other, comes [. . .] to upset the order of phenomenology' and ideality (232). The invention of design education, design practice and designed produce may then be capable of enacting public education in the form of a deconstructive inventiveness or an

affirmative deconstruction ‘that is not simply positive, not simply conservative, not simply a way of repeating the given institution’.¹⁰

Necessarily absent from the 1988 and 1993 texts, the Clipper chip is admitted into the book despite Derrida’s reservations about the use of such examples to illustrate or actualise his analyses (272).¹¹ The Clipper chip existed as a designed, socio-technical invention in 1993–6. The Clinton administration in the United States proposed the Clipper chip in April 1993 as a way to give the National Security Agency (NSA) a key to decrypt the content of any telecommunication. Opponents argued that the Clipper chip would eradicate the Fourth Amendment protecting people’s right to privacy and freedom from unreasonable governmental intrusions. By 1996 the White House had backed down and the Clipper chip was never implemented. Nonetheless, soon afterwards, the NSA began anticipating and thwarting encryption tools before they became mainstream, setting up a clandestine programme allowing them to circumvent many of the virtual security systems intended to protect digital telecommunications. By the 2010s, the NSA had accomplished in secret what it had failed to do through political persuasion in the 1990s.¹²

As an invention, the Clipper chip marks, on the one hand, a continuation in thinking about the political: ‘there is nothing new here, despite the leap of technological mutation which also produces structural effects’ (144). On the other hand, acknowledging the political difference or political paradox, the Clipper chip represents a break in politics: ‘the novelty of these structural effects must not be neglected; this is the entirety of the “concrete” in politics’ (144).¹³ These effects, had the device been implemented, would have altered digital encryption-decryption in telecommunications systems in such a way as to ensure there could be no ‘equivallance’ between citizen and state, thereby undermining liberal defences of the security state which argue that citizens are able restrain the state from becoming overbearing.¹⁴

For Derrida, the example of the Clipper chip is intended only to recall that ‘a reflection on the politics of friendship should not be distinguishable from a meditation on secrecy, on the “meaning”, the “history”, and the “techniques” of [. . .] [the] secret’ (145). Montaigne, for example, placed the law of secrecy, the sovereign fraternity of secrecy between two, above the law of the city, the brotherhood of political secrecy, which begins with three; while, moreover, the Kantian ethics and politics of friendship organises itself around the concept of secrecy, marking the ideal of friendship as communication or egalitarian sharing (184, 257). Unlike aesthetic friendship, which is based solely on feelings of love, Kant argues that moral friendship, articulating love (attachment) and respect (detachment), demands absolute confidence, such that two people share not just their impressions but their secret judgements. True friends ought to be able to say anything to each other, a potentially dangerous situation, as there are few ‘who are able to renounce all public profit, all political or institutional consequence, to the possession or circulation of this secret’ (258). Such friends, although rare and improbable, nonetheless may come along.

This tension between two confidentiality draws the double bind of friendship as fraternity out to its limit. Kantian cosmopolitan democracy could not be promised or realised without the figure of the brother: cosmopolitical democracy is cosmo-phratrocentism (264). Hence, the categorical imperative not to betray humanity means not to betray one’s brother, which is another way of saying that only the brother can be betrayed (273). Secrecy is implicated in the oppositions within friendship, with the secret-private-invisible-illegible-apolitical, on one

side, and the manifest-public-testimonial-political, on the other (277). Fraternal friendship thus appears alien to the *res publica* and could never found a politics. Nevertheless, the canonical philosophical discourses on friendship explicitly tie the friend as brother to virtue and justice and to moral and political reason (277). Derrida's deconstruction of friendship as brotherhood, (con)founding the ethical and the political, is extended here to consider the relationships between the ethical-political subject and the pedagogical-educational subject.

This extension is based on the recognition that at the beginnings of the Western philosophical canon both the political and the educational are intimately intertwined with *philos* and *philia*. Plato's reflections on friendship, begun in the dialogue *Lysis*, form the core of a theory of politics that treats the *politeia* as principally an educational force.¹⁵ The political is identified with *paideia*, the moral and cultural education of the members of the polis, as a public space linked to national territory and autochthony.¹⁶ *Paideia* 'is not primarily a matter of books and academic credits. First and foremost, it involves becoming conscious that the polis is also oneself and that its fate also depends upon one's mind, behaviour, and decisions; [. . .] it is participation in political life'.¹⁷

Rather than placing *philos*, as masculine homosociality, at the heart of political-educational association within a unitary, autochthonous polis, Derrida offers instead the promise of a non-foundational, non-dialectical, relational *philoxenia*, derived from the 'Athenian political philosophy of hospitality [. . .] which commanded one to receive the stranger, the *xenos*, and treat him as a friend, an ally, a *philos*' (278).¹⁸ Thus, for Derrida, 'there is no politics without [. . .] an open hospitality to the guest as ghost, whom one holds, just as he [sic] holds us, hostage'.¹⁹

Assumptions about the close relationship between the political and the educational in *paideia* have long persisted in European thought.²⁰ Thus, in the eighteenth century, it was a fundamental assumption that 'the overall goal of pedagogy should be the production of a moral and civic-minded citizenry', while in the nineteenth century, 'classical liberal theory sees democracy not just as a system of government, but also as a system of education'.²¹ This educational humanism and political liberalism, with their implicit masculine homosociality, is deconstructed by Derrida when he insists that the humanities should create a culture that questions and resists 'all the powers that limit democracy to come' (279).²² The university should be a place where nothing is beyond question, so as to become 'a vital public sphere for critical learning, ethical deliberation, and civic engagement', wherein 'a social commitment to the notion and the practices of justice is instilled'.²³ This does not, however, imply a pedagogisation of politics such that, as proposed by Heidegger in his 1933 rectoral address, the university provides the spiritual leadership that guides the nation's political leadership, a conception of the education-politics relation that joins Heidegger with Plato, Fichte with Nietzsche.²⁴

Notwithstanding the importance of the university for democracy, Giroux points out that the sites of education and pedagogy in the contemporary world extend far beyond those of formal education, to include 'a range of other spheres such as advertising, television, film, the Internet, video game culture, and the popular press', broadening and deepening the meaning and importance of public pedagogy.²⁵ Reflexively, those sites of public education must become a central concern for formal education, so that 'students can be educated to understand, engage critically, and transform those dominant spheres of public pedagogy that are largely shaping their beliefs and sense of agency'.²⁶ For these reasons, design pedagogy

in higher education must put the progeny of design practices, as major elements of the *res publica*, into question.

When Derrida talks of artifactuality and actuvirtuality, it is initially mass media outputs to which he refers.²⁷ Actuality, Derrida argues, is actively ‘sorted, invested and performatively interpreted by a range of hierarchising and selective procedures – factitious or artificial procedures which are always subservient to various powers and interests of which their ‘subjects’ and agents [. . .] are never sufficiently aware. The “reality” of “actuality” [. . .] only reaches us through fictional devices’, that is, technical and poetic inventions.²⁸ This calls for ‘a work of resistance, of vigilant counter-interpretation’, and a responsibility to develop ‘a critical culture, a kind of education’.²⁹ Crucially, such deconstruction of artifactuality must not ‘be used to neutralise every danger by means of [. . .] a denial of events, by which everything – even violence and suffering, war and death – is said to be constructed and fictive, and constituted by and for the media, so that nothing really ever happens, only images, simulacra, and delusions’. Actuvirtuality implies that ‘Virtuality now reaches right into the structure of the eventual event and imprints itself there; it affects [. . .] everything which connects us to actuality, to the unappeasable reality of its supposed present.’³⁰

If it is through artifactual, actuvirtual inventions that the ‘reality’ of ‘actuality’ reaches us, then, it is argued here, it is not simply in the form of literary, textual and media resources, ‘writing’ in the narrow sense, but rather through ‘inventions’, some in textual form, but many more in the form of designs, from symbols to artefacts and from actions to systems – ‘writing’ in Derrida’s extended sense of *différance*. Since public education is enacted through active engagement with such designed outputs, design pedagogy, while acknowledging the necessity of qualification (practical knowledge and skills) and socialisation (competent action in the socio-cultural world), must foreground additionally ‘subjectification’: the ways in which qualified, socialised educands ‘invent’ their own, highly conditioned and conditional, personhood.³¹ Such educational ‘inventionalism’, by breaking through the ‘order of socialization, the order of the present and the same’, opens up design education as a practice of affirmative deconstruction.³²

Through a critically intimate engagement with the liberal, humanist, educational-political subject, human being is shown to be incomplete, bearing ‘the character of not being closed’: open to contingent historicity.³³ Sloterdijk argues, inventively misreading Heidegger, that, ‘Being-in designed spaces constitutes our fundamental condition’; in other words, ‘Dasein is Design’.³⁴ For Latour, ‘we are enveloped, entangled, surrounded; we are never outside without having recreated another more artificial, more fragile, more engineered envelope. We move from envelopes to envelopes, from folds to folds, never from one private sphere to the Great Outside’.³⁵ The countless overlapping and interacting webs we have created have enveloped the planet with design as a geological layer, such that design has become the world.³⁶ In being communicative, intersubjective and dialogic as well as objective, substantial and impedimentary, designs articulate the two great alternative narratives of modernity: ‘one of emancipation, detachment, modernization, progress and mastery, and the other, [. . .] of attachment, precaution, entanglement, dependence and care’.³⁷

By considering design in this way, Heideggerian *Dasein*, *Mitsein* and *Mitda-sein*, as thrownness and being between, is translated into Sloterdijkian situated existence, a being-in-the-media that characterises our ‘radical mediocrity’.³⁸ For Sloterdijk, we are thrown into situations, mediated by designs of various orders. Situations are ‘forms of coexistence of someone with someone and something in something’, where collectives at different scales are

caught up in shared immersive environments.³⁹ In seeking a grounding for its own value, human being as situated ek-sistence may become ‘an unceasing attempt to give a decisive turn to our state of thrownness in the world by moving together to design a society’.⁴⁰ To free ourselves from the givenness of the world, ‘We must ont-werpen our lives [the Dutch word for ‘design’ can also be read as ‘un-throw’ – Tr.] [. . .] Thrownness-unthrowing: there you have the human condition’.⁴¹

Design pedagogy and design practice as un- or over-throwing thrownness is far from the common-sense understanding of design as a positive, technical art (*ars/technê*). Design becomes a discipline that deals with possible worlds and with opinions about what the parts as well as the whole of the human environment could be, while not predetermining, on its own terms, what they should be. So, while ‘the moral imperative falls to leaders in governments, institutions, and corporations to enact radical policy changes’, design may nevertheless take part in public education about complex policies, while also urging and inspiring people to put pressure on those in positions of authority to enact justice through restitutive, restorative and reparative design.⁴²

The Clipper chip, from the days prior to the infiltration of the World Wide Web into all aspects of social existence, remains a pertinent example because, of all the political binaries that permeate Western democratic life, it is secrecy–revelation that is currently in most need of political theorising and historicisation within political thought.⁴³ This is, first, because human subjects, no longer conceivable as sovereign but rather as networked, are incentivised to give away their privacy (confidences) in exchange for perceived health or financial benefits; and, second, because a hyper-informed citizenry is paralysed by being simultaneously overwhelmed by information and unable to trust any of it and therefore to act confidently on it. This secrecy–revelation dynamic has become all the more conspicuous during the coronavirus pandemic. Existing fault lines, notably between totalitarian surveillance and citizen empowerment, on the one hand, and between nationalist isolation and global solidarity, on the other hand, have been exacerbated and, while there is a good case for more intrusive policing and surveillance measures, there is a danger that such temporary responses may become permanent, implying a major reduction in civil liberties.⁴⁴ In the society of control into which we have been thrown, we might well find ourselves uttering and citing the quite possibly apocryphal apostrophe, in both its canonical and recoil versions, ‘O my friends, there is no friend!’, while perhaps not yet having confidently overthrown, or being able to overthrow, anything in our own name.⁴⁵

Notes

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11. Jacques Derrida, 'The Politics of Friendship', *Journal of Philosophy*, 85.11 (1988), 632–44; Jacques Derrida, 'Politics of Friendship', *American Imago*, 50.3 (1993), 353–91.

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13. Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Paul Ricoeur, 'The Political Paradox', in Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles Andrew Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), pp. 247–70.

14. Lawrence Quill, *Secrets and Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

15. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*. Vol. II: *In Search of the Divine*, trans. Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 174.
16. Sheldon S Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 67; Jacques Derrida and Jean Birnbaum, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
17. Cornelius Castoriadis, 'The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy', in *The Castoriadis Reader*, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 267–89 (p. 281).
18. Jacques Derrida, 'Unconditionality or Sovereignty: The University at the Frontiers of Europe', *Oxford Literary Review*, 31.2 (2009), 115–31 (p. 117).
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29. Derrida, 'The Deconstruction of Actuality', p. 8.

30. *Ibid.* p. 29.

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42. Suzanne Labarre and Paola Antonelli, 'MoMA Curator: "[Humanity] Will Become Extinct. We Need to Design an Elegant Ending"', FastCompany (2019).

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