



## Who's Afraid of Derrida?: Gumbrecht and the metaphysics of presence

Gustavo Ramos de Souza<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universidade Estadual de Londrina – UEL, Londrina/PR, Brazil

**ABSTRACT – Who's Afraid of Derrida?: Gumbrecht and the metaphysics of presence** – This paper proposes a reflection on the concept of presence theorized by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht premised on Heidegger's thought, contrasting it with the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, especially in his deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence. Accordingly, it is neither a matter of tracing the Heideggerian presence throughout his oeuvre nor of defending Derrida from the accusations of *linguistic existentialism*, but rather of demonstrating that, by having Heidegger as an ally, Gumbrecht's crusade against metaphysics and the hermeneutic field ultimately restores them more strongly, thereby he commits to what he aims to oppose.

Keywords: **Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. Jacques Derrida. Martin Heidegger. Presence Studies.**

**RÉSUMÉ – Qui a Peur de Derrida?: Gumbrecht et la métaphysique de la présence** – Cet article propose une réflexion sur le concept de présence théorisé par Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht à partir de la pensée de Heidegger, en le confrontant à la philosophie de Jacques Derrida, notamment dans sa déconstruction de la métaphysique de la présence. En ce sens, il ne s'agit pas de suivre les traces de la présence heideggérienne tout au long de son œuvre, ni de défendre Derrida des accusations d' *existentialisme linguistique*, mais plutôt de démontrer qu'en ayant Heidegger comme allié, la croisade de Gumbrecht contre la métaphysique et le champ de l'herméneutique finit par les restituer plus fortement, se compromettant avec ce qu'il cherche à combattre.

Mots-clés: **Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. Jacques Derrida. Martin Heidegger. Études de la Présence.**

**RESUMO – Quem tem Medo de Derrida?: Gumbrecht e a metafísica da presença** – O artigo propõe uma reflexão sobre o conceito de presença teorizado por Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht a partir do pensamento de Heidegger, confrontando-o à filosofia de Jacques Derrida, sobretudo em sua desconstrução da metafísica da presença. Assim, não se trata de rastrear a presença heideggeriana ao longo de sua obra nem de defender Derrida das acusações de *existencialismo linguístico*, mas antes de demonstrar que, ao ter Heidegger como aliado, a cruzada de Gumbrecht contra a metafísica e o campo hermenêutico acaba por restaurá-los mais fortemente, comprometendo-se com aquilo que visa combater.

Palavras-chave: **Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. Jacques Derrida. Martin Heidegger. Estudos da Presença.**

## Introduction

I propose in this article a clash around the concept of presence based on Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's reflections and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence. Thus, I do not intend to present the current state of the art regarding presence studies or their contributions to the humanities and the arts, nor to recognize the influence of Gumbrecht's theory, but rather to problematize the concept itself. Accordingly, the objective is to contrast the two authors based on their theories, their works, seeking to find similarities and dissimilarities.

With this approach, I intend to demonstrate that, by questioning what he calls "linguistic existentialism" of deconstruction — the supposed inability of language to refer to the world —, Gumbrecht ends up falling back on what his concept of presence aims to combat: the "hermeneutic field". That is because his gesture is a mere reversal of the poles, insofar as it suggests an opposition between meaning and presence, giving primacy to the second and incurring a kind of *metaphysical materialism*, which restores the "hermeneutic field" more strongly.

Since Gumbrecht is founded on Martin Heidegger to develop such concept, the aim is to present, initially, how Heidegger's philosophy is read by him in *Production of Presence*. Then, I intend to show the extent to which Derridean deconstruction already challenged the *thought of presence*; according to Derrida, Heidegger's oeuvre would be his deepest defense. However, it is not a matter of defending Derrida in relation to Gumbrecht, but rather of putting the two authors in polemical dialogue, in order to determine the limits of the concept of presence.

## To be or not to be Heideggerian?

At a conference held in May 1992 at Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), later published in the book *Corpo e forma* (1998) with the title *O campo não-hermenêutico ou a materialidade da comunicação [The non-hermeneutic field or the materiality of communication]*, Gumbrecht outlines a brief scheme on the characteristics of the so-called postmodernity, in order to demonstrate the failure of the interpretive method in the humanities. After making acid comments about Wilhelm Dilthey, to whom he attributes

the “dishonor” of being the founder of hermeneutics and systematizer of the field of humanities, Gumbrecht (1998, p. 141) turns his attention to Martin Heidegger, who “[...] represents the apotheosis of the domain of hermeneutics”.

On the pretext of challenging hermeneutics, Gumbrecht refers directly to Heidegger, such that, when talking about serenity (*Gelassenheit*), a state in which phenomena would reveal themselves in their truth, he says: “[...] a condition undoubtedly related to the philosopher’s anti-intellectual perspective. After all, the state of relaxation has nothing to do with the intellectual work of seeking the truth, depurating it” (Gumbrecht, 1998, p. 142).

Evidently, by opposing *serenity* to a voluntarist movement towards truth, Gumbrecht is reaffirming the subject/object paradigm that underlies hermeneutics, that is, the conception that there is a subject endowed with will that unveils a surface in search of truth.

However, it is worth noting what Gumbrecht (1998, p. 143) says next: “[...] a final comment on the philosopher. I believe that every German has a moral obligation to be very critical of his oeuvre. I take this opportunity to clarify what has already been understood: I am not at all related to Heidegger”. This moral obligation concerns, of course, the philosopher’s involvement with the Nazi regime, due to his membership in Hitler’s NSDAP party, ten days after he took office as dean at the University of Freiburg in 1933. That is, the nature of his criticism of Heidegger is both epistemological — given the fact that he is one of the main philosophers of hermeneutics — and moral and political — due to this stain in his biography.

Although it is not my purpose to trace a possible genealogy of Heidegger’s presence in Gumbrecht’s thought, it is important to point out that, in addition to *Production of Presence*, the philosopher already appears in Gumbrecht’s previous texts: in *1926: Living at the Edge of Time*, published in 1997, there is a chapter that deals directly with Heidegger, *Being-in-the-worlds of 1926: Martin Heidegger, Hans Friedrich Blunck, Carl Van Vechten*, in which it is said about him: “[...] Perhaps Heidegger’s entire contribution to Western philosophy can be read as originating in a reaction to the emotional, intellectual, and political environments of 1926”<sup>1</sup> (Gumbrecht, 1997, p. 442).

In this same text, despite situating Heidegger in the context of the “conservative revolution” that led to Nazi ideology, Gumbrecht will, how-

ever, defend him: “[...] This contamination does not tarnish the philosophical importance of Heidegger’s thought [...]. *Sein und Zeit* cannot of course be identified with Nazi ideology”<sup>2</sup> (Gumbrecht, 1997, p. 443).

The philosopher is also the subject of an essay published in 2000, in the journal *Diacritics: Martin Heidegger and his Japanese interlocutors: about a limit of western metaphysics*. That is, between the 1992 conference and the 1997 book, and also in subsequent works, his position on Heidegger underwent a major change. In an interview with Mariana Lage, published in the journal *Artefilosofia* with the title *Da produção de presença ao presente amplo [From the production of presence to the broad present]*, Gumbrecht (2017, p. 197, our translation) states that:

Until I was almost forty (which means: almost to the end of my period in Germany), I avoided reading anything written by Heidegger. [...] Things changed more drastically after my intellectual and professional move to the United States in 1989. There, both my students and my fellows expected, in some ‘natural’ way, that I was almost an expert on Heidegger — so I proceeded with my readings. At some point (which I would not associate with any event or book), Heidegger’s texts (especially those from the 1930s onward) became more and more interesting and challenging to me — until, in *Production of Presence* (published in 2004), he became my main reference author.

Heidegger eventually becomes Gumbrecht’s main reference in his conceptualization of “presence” in *Production of Presence*<sup>3</sup>, published 12 years after the conference in which he harshly criticized the philosopher. The potential sources in his reflection, in order to establish an anti-Cartesian position, are found in the Aristotelian definition of sign, in the Christian Eucharist, in medieval theatre, and in Heidegger’s philosophy.

In this book, Gumbrecht proposes to “get his hands dirty,” to resort to obsolete concepts such as “substance,” “being,” and “reality” in his attempt to confront the exclusive domain of interpretation and metaphysics in the Humanities. He says: “[...] To use such concepts, however, has long been a symptom of despicably bad intellectual taste in the humanities”<sup>4</sup> and “[...] to believe in the possibility of referring to the world other than by meaning has become synonymous with the utmost degree of philosophical naïveté” (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 77).

Thus, if before Derrida was considered an ally due to his notion of “exteriority of the signifier”<sup>5</sup> and Heidegger was regarded with extreme re-

serve due to his legacy for hermeneutics, the positions are reversed, even if the cost is lapsing into “bad intellectual taste”. Regarding deconstructionism, Gumbrecht (2010, p. 78) says that his success in the Academia must be attributed to the fact that Derrida’s epigones called “naive” or “substantialist” anyone who defended the possibility of maintaining a stable meaning, concluding that “[...] deconstruction has thus to an extent large relied on soft terror to shore up the existing order in the humanities”<sup>6</sup>. I believe that this epistemological turnaround is due to Gumbrecht’s need to defend the concept of presence, as deconstructionists put the “metaphysics of presence” under suspicion.

### The presence of Heidegger

In *O campo não-hermenêutico ou a materialidade da comunicação* [*The non-hermeneutic field or the materiality of communication*], in defining the premises of the hermeneutic field, Gumbrecht (1998) summarizes them into four: 1) meaning has its origin in the subject, and not as a quality inherent in objects; 2) a radical distinction between body and spirit (Cartesian tradition) is considered *parti pris*; 3) the spirit leads to meaning; 4) the body is a mere instrument that conceals meaning. There is, therefore, an interrelation between metaphysics and hermeneutics, since, according to Gumbrecht, it is Cartesianism that founds modern metaphysics and serves as the basis for the sciences of the spirit.

Thus, to combat metaphysics, he resorts to Heidegger, whose main target is Descartes: “[...] this is why *Being and Time* presents the Cartesian grounding of human existence on thought (and on thought alone) and the subsequent dissociations between human existence and space and between human existence and substance as the original sins of modern philosophy”<sup>7</sup> (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 91).

Heidegger’s key concept is *Dasein*, because it presupposes, contrary to Husserlianism — which, in order to overcome Cartesianism, couples subject and object, but suspending the factual existence that takes place in the world —, that man, beings that we are, has always been with the things of the world: thus, he reclaims the aspect of presence in relation to things. However, instead of *Dasein*, the concept that Gumbrecht tries to adapt to

his reflections on presence is the very Being<sup>8</sup> and, to that end, he proposes four theses on this concept in Heidegger.

The first thesis is that Being takes the place of truth. However, this is not to say that Being simply replaces truth, for truth is something that happens — in a movement of revelation and concealment. Therefore, Being is that which is revealed and concealed at the same time in the happening of truth. Being is not a meaning, but “belongs to the dimension of things”<sup>9</sup> (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 93, our translation). He continues: “[...] If Being has the character of a thing, this means that it has substance and that, therefore (and unlike anything purely spiritual), it occupies space”<sup>10</sup> (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 93). Here, caution is needed, for, when Gumbrecht asserts that Being has the character of thing, possesses a substance, and occupies space, we may be led to believe that it is something fixed and simply given.

However, by resuming the original meaning of Being as *ousia*, Heidegger removes its substantial aspect and installs the notion of presentness/presencing (*anwesen*). This “occupying space” must be understood, therefore, as existing alongside the things of the world, which characterizes the very mode of being of *Dasein*, that is, Being belongs to the dimension of things. Gumbrecht (2010, p. 94), however, rectifies himself by saying that this “occupying space also implies the possibility of Being unfolding a movement”<sup>11</sup>.

Gumbrecht’s second thesis relates precisely to movement. And Being’s movement in space happens multidimensionally: vertical, horizontal and of withdrawal. The vertical dimension would be associated with the movement of Being in simply being there, while the horizontal dimension would point to Being as being perceived by or offering itself to the view. Finally, the withdrawal dimension refers to the fact that the things that appear no longer have the aspect of object (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 94-95). This withdrawal constitutes the very unconcealment of truth, in which the vertical and the horizontal concur in opposite directions, in centrifugal movement, in order to reveal Being.

According to Gumbrecht (2010, p. 95), “[...] Being, I think, refers to the things of the world before they become part of a culture (or, using the rhetorical figure of the paradox, the concept refers to the things of the world before they become part of a world)”<sup>12</sup>. This means that, in its vertical and horizontal dimensions, that is, being there and in sight, Being can be under-

stood within the meaning system of culture, offering itself to perception and representation, falling into metaphysics. Therefore, this *movement* of withdrawal (unconcealment) reveals Being before being part of the world, that is, Being while Being: “Being will only be Being outside the networks of semantics and other cultural distinctions”<sup>13</sup> (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 96).

The third thesis is that, since *Dasein* cannot be defined in the category of subject or subjectivity and since the world with which it is necessarily in contact is already always interpreted, it is necessary, for the happening of truth, to let things simply happen: according to Gumbrecht, this disposition is associated with serenity (*Gelassenheit*).

The awakening of serenity, says Heidegger (2001, p. 34-35), does not arise from ourselves, it is not provoked, but allowed. It does not mean, however, that it is the result of chance, since it arises from uninterrupted thought — despite not having an instrumental purpose, such as the thought of calculation; it is, therefore, between passivity and activity. Serenity towards things (*die Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*) is the “Release of oneself from transcendental re-presentation and so a relinquishing of the willing of a horizon”<sup>14</sup> (Heidegger, 2001, p. 57). Thus, serenity thinks the things of the world in themselves before any interpretation.

The fourth and final thesis refers to the work of art as a favorable place for the happening of truth. Obviously, the work of art is not the only space in which the revelation of Being happens, such that, in *Being and time*, Heidegger gives speech (*logos*) special status in this movement of concealing and unconcealing Being; however, the work of art would be another possibility.

Commenting on the concepts of “world” and “earth,” Gumbrecht resumes Heidegger’s analysis of an ancient Greek temple, which would represent nothing. It is worth saying that, if in *Being and time* the polarization was established between *Dasein* and the world, in the later Heidegger, from the turn (*die kehre*), the dispute between opening and concealment is established in the opposition between world and earth: the world would be human activity, human products, having been established by the use and domestication of the earth, while the latter would be the tree, stone, grass, water, animals presenting themselves as they are: “this arising and blooming in themselves and in the whole, the Greeks have long ago called the *physis*” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 104, our translation).

Thus, earth would be the condition of possibility for the installation of a world, and truth can happen in the interaction between one and the other. When, in paragraph 86, Heidegger (2010, p. 117-119, our translation) comments on a stone, he states that “it only shows itself when it remains unconcealed and without clarification”. This “showing itself,” still without an explanation created by the semantic chain of the world, concerns earth, in its truth that unconceals it as it is. Gumbrecht (2010, p. 100) clarifies: “[...] Only the presence of certain things [...] opens up the possibility of other things appearing in their primordial material qualities – and this effect might be considered as one way (and as a part) of unconcealing their Being”<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, Gumbrecht, in order to adjust the Heideggerian concept of Being to his reflection on presence, makes his four theses derive from a premise that is based on the idea that the unconcealed Being has the character of thing. Moreover, in his discussion of the work of art, Being is similar to earth (not understood as a static thing, but rather as the arising and blossoming). Gumbrecht’s interpretation gives primacy to serenity as the ability to see things before they integrate an interpretive system. Serenity refers, then, to the earth, to “seeing things as part of Being, that is, independently of the shapes imposed upon them by historically specific cultures”<sup>16</sup> (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 102), in contrast to the world, which would be, conversely, the configurations of things within these cultural situations.

In other words, Being is the things of the world before they become world, before they enter into a system of cultural determinations. Yet, because it has character of thing, Being would correspond to tangible things. I think the problem of the Gumbrechtian reading of Heidegger lies in considering that: 1) Being has character of thing (*ding*); 2) Being are tangible things; 3) Being has substance. After all, when Heidegger undertakes the task of reaching the original Being of the work of art through the current reality of the work, aiming to seek the thingness of the thing (*Dinghafte-desdinges*), that is, the tangible reality of the work, he concludes that the thingal basis does not belong to the Being of the work: “[...] we erroneously assumed that the current reality of the work, in principle, would be in this thingal basis” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 93, our translation).

The fact is that Being does belong to the dimension of things, insofar as things allow the unconcealing of truth. However, this does not mean that it has a “character of thing”: this would be not taking into account the on-

tological difference between Being and beings. After all, Being only reveals itself as existence, and things do not exist, they simply *are*, they are given — even though Heidegger points out that truth must always be taken, in the first place, from beings. And substance implies stasis, whereas Being while *ousia*, or *anwesen*, is presencing, presentness, duration.

In any case, despite these inaccuracies, later on, Gumbrecht (2010, p. 104) points out: despite the character of thing, Being has movement, making it “impossible to think of Being as something stable”.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the Heideggerian concept of Being and the Gumbrechtian concept of presence have affinities: both are only understood outside the semantic network of the world, both have movement, both are in a space, both are presentness and duration. Being as presencing: *anwesen*.

Just as Gumbrecht bases his concept of production of presence on his etymology, that is, the tangibility of what is ahead in permanent movement, Heidegger (2010, p. 211, our translation) uses the Greek sense of *thesis* as presencing in his appearance: “The Greek term ‘put’ refers to situating as letting emerge, for example, a statue; it refers to placing, depositing a sacred offering. Situating and placing have the meaning of bringing *here* – in the unconcealed, *forward* — in the presence, that is, letting-be-present”. In short, Gumbrecht revisits Heidegger’s concepts because they supposedly provide him with the conceptual framework against the metaphysical worldview, *roughly* understood as “something beyond the merely physical”<sup>18</sup> (Gumbrecht, 2012, p. 63).

### **Derrida and the criticism of the metaphysics of presence**

When Gumbrecht says he has changed his mind about a philosopher whose oeuvre was regarded as morally suspicious and to whom he said he was not related at all, it is not, in my view, a problem. The problem lies in revisiting an author whose method — hermeneutics (the hermeneutics of facticity, more precisely) — was previously deplored, because his theory of production of presence incurs a kind of “naive realism” and, above all, contributes to the reaffirmation of the foundation on which the very hermeneutical field is based: metaphysics.

More than that: as Derrida well demonstrated, Heidegger’s work is the apotheosis of Western metaphysics: “[...] I sometimes have the feeling that

the Heideggerian problematic is the ‘deepest’ and most ‘potent’ defense of what I try to call into question using the term *thought of presence*”<sup>19</sup> (Derrida, 2001a, p. 62, our translation). Gumbrecht’s theoretical premises are therefore based on hermeneutics and metaphysics, precisely what his theory aims to combat. In the chapter of *Production of presence* in which he addresses Heidegger, in order to relate the concepts of Being and presence, Gumbrecht (2010, p. 75) provokes Derrida by quoting an excerpt from *Of Grammatology* in which the philosopher writes that the “age of the sign,” treated as a synonym for metaphysics, may never come to an end, although its historical closure is traced.

Gumbrecht (2010, p. 77) continues: “Derrida has never been shy about inventing new concepts, even when the need to do so has not been very obvious. Why is he so hesitant, then, about coming up with some new concept that would allow us to ‘end’ the age of the sign?”<sup>20</sup>. Thus, the accusation about the impertinence of concept creation lapses into a criticism of the “Sokal hoax” type, which was noted for mocking post-structuralist jargon. However, it is not a matter of defending Derrida from Gumbrecht: that is not the purpose of this article. My purpose is to demonstrate, through Derridean philosophy, the extent to which Gumbrechtian theory, mediated by Heidegger, reaffirms the same assumptions against which it stands.

In any case, despite the claim that Derrida refrains from ending the “age of the sign,” according to Derrida, it is only possible to deconstruct metaphysics by playing on its own terms: “the metaphysics of presence is shaken with the help of the concept of sign”<sup>21</sup> (Derrida, 1971, p. 233). In this sense, it would not only be “bad intellectual taste,” as Gumbrecht presumes, but also almost a performative contradiction. In the essay *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, Derrida states this clearly:

[...] There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no léxicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest<sup>22</sup> (Derrida, 1971, p. 233).

That is because intending to shake metaphysics from an “outside” of metaphysics means to claim a place that is prior to it: a foundation, a fixed origin, an *arché*, a center that commands the “inside”. The substantialist

concepts to which Gumbrecht (2010, p. 77) resorts, such as “presence,” “reality,” and “Being” — instead of being, as he intends, possibilities of referring to the world not by meaning — are, in fact, what allows speaking of meaning (for it is the origin that gives meaning). Such concepts are characterized as the center, because it is the *first principle* that governs the play of substitution of the contents and the terms that are derived from it, since, as Derrida (1971, p. 230) states, “At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements [...] is forbidden”.<sup>23</sup>

This founding immobility which constitutes the center is not, however, in the midst of the play and is not properly a center; rather, it is simultaneously inside and outside, it is the origin and the end, even if it thinks of itself as full presence outside the play. Thus, when Gumbrecht assumes the concept of presence or reality prior to metaphysics, he seems to forget that it is characterized precisely as that which arrogates the position of precedence to all things, determining them. That is, the mere assumption that there is a physical world and a non-physical world and that the first precedes the latter is metaphysical in itself, since the very notion of metaphysics implies the existence of something physical and something non-physical, just as the idea of presence brings with it its antithetical pair, absence.

It is only possible to speak of presence because of a prior view of everything that presence is not. I explain: presence is presence only because it is not absence, but in order to determine what presence is, it is necessary to establish what presence is not. And so it is with all binary oppositions: man and woman, human and animal, speech and writing, true and false, inside and outside, among others. Metaphysics is what allows this play of binary and, above all, hierarchical differences. As Derrida (1971, p. 231) reminds, “[...] The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies”<sup>24</sup>: the successive names and forms that the center – the outside of play – receives in the play of differences. Derrida (1971, p. 231) continues:

It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – *eidos*, *archè*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *alètheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth<sup>25</sup>.

It should be noted that Derrida refers to some concepts that are constant in Heidegger’s philosophy: “Being as presencing,” *ousia* and *aletheia*.

Such mention is not gratuitous, since Heidegger is a frequent figure in his texts, in addition to the fact that Derrida dedicated some essays to him, as well as the 1987 book *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. In an interview with Henri Ronse, which is part of the volume of *Positions*, first published in 1972, Derrida assumes to be related to the German philosopher, in view of the proximity between the Heideggerian *destruktio*n and his deconstructionist project:

Nothing I try to do would be possible without the opening of Heideggerian issues. And, first of all, because here we must say things very quickly, without attention to what Heidegger calls the difference between Being and beings, the ontic-ontological difference as it remains, in a certain way, unthought of by philosophy. However, despite this debt to Heideggerian thought or, rather, because of this debt, I try to recognize in the Heideggerian text — which, like any other, is not homogeneous, continuous, equal, in each of its parts, to the global force and to all the consequences of its issues — signs of belonging to metaphysics or to what he calls ‘onto-theology’<sup>26</sup> (Derrida, 2001a, p. 16, our translation).

These signs of belonging to metaphysics can be noticed both in the binary oppositions that operate in the Heideggerian text – Being and beings, authentic and inauthentic, truth as adequacy and truth as unconcealment, essence and presentness, among others — and in the deep hierarchy that underlies the fact that the clarification of the meaning of Being would be not only the most authentic purpose of ontology, but also the question that should be answered first.

When Derrida says that nothing he does would be possible without the opening of Heideggerian issues, especially the ontological difference, it is important to remember that, in *The saying of Anaximander*, after resuming one of the main motifs for *Being and time*, namely, that *the forgetting of Being is the forgetting of the difference between Being and beings*, Heidegger (2002, p. 430) states that “[...] The distinction collapses. It remains forgotten. Although the two parties to the distinction, what is present and presentencing, reveal themselves, they do not do so as distinguished. Rather, even the early trace of the distinction is obliterated”<sup>27</sup>. Further ahead: “[...] Illumination of the distinction therefore cannot mean that the distinction appears as a distinction”<sup>28</sup> (Heidegger, 2002, p. 431).

It is precisely by denying that difference *appears* as difference that Heidegger presents signs of belonging to metaphysics; and it is by treating

difference as difference, that is, as *différance*<sup>29</sup>, that Derrida develops his grammatology. As Derrida points out in the essay *The Difference*, when commenting on the aforementioned excerpt from *The saying of Anaximander*, according to Heidegger, metaphysics forgot that it had forgotten the difference between Being and beings, erasing the very trace of the difference. Thus, “[...] If we maintain that difference (is) (itself) other than absence and presence, if it traces, then when it is a matter of the forgetting of the difference (between Being and beings), we would have to speak of a disappearance of the trace of the trace”<sup>30</sup> (Derrida, 1991, p. 57-58). But the trace, it is important to emphasize, does not have *its own*, a property, a quidditude; – of the trace, one does not ask *what* it is; – on the *contrary*, Being, according to Heidegger, despite being a presentness/presencing (Anwesenheit), and not a substance, would still have something that allows understanding it as such, insofar as it would be necessary to differentiate it from beings, that is, Being is not beings. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (2013, p. 25) states that:

The word ‘being,’ or at any rate the words designating the sense of being in different languages, is, with some others, an ‘originary word’ (*Urwort*), the transcendental word assuring the possibility of being-word to all other words. As such, it is precomprehended in all language and – this is the opening of *Being and Time* – only this precomprehension would permit the opening of the question of the sense of being in general, beyond all regional ontologies and all metaphysics: a question that broaches philosophy [...] and lets itself be taken over by philosophy, a question that Heidegger repeats by submitting the history of metaphysics to it. Heidegger reminds us constantly that the sense of being is neither the word ‘being’ nor the concept of being. But as that sense is nothing outside of language and the language of words, it is tied, if not to a particular word or to a particular system of language (*concesso non dato*), at least to the possibility of the word in general<sup>31</sup> (Derrida, 2013, p. 25).

It is, therefore, not only an ontological pre-comprehension, as Heidegger wants, but also a prior understanding of what *being* is in language, that is, in the system that allows to enunciate and formulate it as a question: “[...] the question of being unites indissolubly with the precomprehension of the word being”<sup>32</sup> (Derrida, 2013, p. 26). In fact, it is the original meaning of the word being that Heidegger tries to rescue from oblivion through disclosure, *aletheia*:

It is thus that, after evoking the ‘voice of being,’ Heidegger recalls that it is silent, mute, insonorous, wordless, originarily a-phonetic (*die Gewähr der lautlosen Stimme verborgener Quellen...*). The voice of the sources is not heard. A rupture between the originary meaning of being and the word, between meaning and the voice, between ‘the voice of being’ and the ‘phonè,’ between “the call of being,” and articulated sound; such a rupture, which at once confirms a fundamental metaphor, and renders it suspect by accentuating its metaphoric discrepancy, translates the ambiguity of the Heideggerian situation with respect to the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism. It is at once contained within it and transgresses it<sup>33</sup> (Derrida, 2013, p. 27).

It is not, however, a matter of saying that Heidegger calls for an original meaning that attaches itself to the signifier “being,” that is, a purely immaterial/transcendental meaning. This would be an infinite misunderstanding in the face of an extremely sophisticated philosophy, since the sense of being is never just a *meaning*: “that means that being escapes the movement of the sign”<sup>34</sup> (Derrida, 2013, p. 27).

Heidegger’s metaphysical gesture consists, rather than in the search for the unique name<sup>35</sup>, in the determination of the meaning of Being as presencing. The fact is that there is something even more original than Being – despite not being an origin, a foundation, and resisting the question “what is it?”: *différance*. According to Derrida (1991, p. 56), “Since Being has never had a ‘meaning,’ has never been thought or said as such, except by dissimulating itself in beings, then difference, in a certain and very strange way, (is) ‘older’ than the ontological difference or than the truth of Being. When it has this age it can be called the play of the trace”<sup>36</sup>.

The fact is that the trace never presents itself as such, it does not have an “itself,” “[...] It erases itself in presenting itself, muffles itself in resonating, like the a writing itself, inscribing its pyramid in *différance*”<sup>37</sup> (Derrida, 1991, p. 57); “[...] the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and no concept of metaphysics can describe it”<sup>38</sup> (Derrida, 2013, p. 80). In conclusion, “[...] The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general”<sup>39</sup> (Derrida, 2013, p. 79-80).

Thus, when Heidegger imposes as a task on his fundamental ontology the issue of the original being, he is, in fact, pursuing the trace of the difference between Being and beings, and not Being. And if the trace does not

have an “itself,” it is what is erased in showing itself, it is neither intelligible nor sensitive, this means that it cannot be named: the trace has no proper name (an identity, an *itself*). Derrida (1991, p. 61-62) says:

‘Older’ than Being itself, such a *différance* has no name in our language. But ‘already know’ that if it is unnameable, it is not provisionally so, not because our language has not yet found or received this *name*, or because we would have to seek it in another language, outside the finite system of our own. It is rather because there is no name for it at all, not even the name of or of Being, not even that of ‘*différance*,’ which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions<sup>40</sup> (Derrida, 1991, p. 61-62).

If *différance* is the very play that creates the structures we call names, and the nominal effect (one cannot speak of name or concept in this case) of *différance* is also brought into the play, the words “being,” “essence,” and “origin” end up becoming only effects of *différance*. Thus, *différance* is not even a name, “There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being”<sup>41</sup> (Derrida, 1991, p. 62). That is, although Heidegger looks at the trace of *différance* and names it Being, the play of *différance* cannot be named: “[...] What is written as *différance*, then, will be the playing movement that ‘produces’ – by means of something that is not simply an activity – these differences, these effects of difference”<sup>42</sup> (Derrida, 1991, p. 43).

It is observed that Derrida does not speak of effects of presence, but of effects of difference; that is because the verb *différer* has two meanings: to differ and to postpone. Considering that the *quasi*-concept of *différance* is inscribed in an economy of writing, Derrida uses it in the deconstruction of the sign and of the metaphysics of presence. Currently, the sign is that which acts vicariously, that is, in place of the “thing,” of the referent, representing it in its absence: “The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence”<sup>43</sup> (Derrida, 1991, p. 40). The sign, therefore, would assume a provisional and supplementary character in relation to this original presence, establishing a mediation.

However, referring to Saussure and the notions of arbitrariness of the sign and differential value, which are solidary, Derrida draws the following implications: since the meaning of a sign is always arbitrary – that is, there is no natural relation between signifier and meaning –, besides never present in itself, depending on the relations with the other meanings, materiality matters less than what is around it. If according to Saussure it is the play

of differences that produces meanings, according to Derrida *différance* is the movement in which meaning is always deferred, never present:

It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present<sup>44</sup> (Derrida, 1991, p. 45).

This means that *différance*, while deferring the meaning, produces difference between the other signs. It no longer makes sense to speak of a sign, since the sign, in the Augustinian definition resumed by Barthes (2007) in *Elements of Semiology*, establishes a *relatio* between two *relata*, namely, the signifier and the signified – since the sign has always been understood as a sign-of: linking a signifier to a signified. But, when the signified is removed, the field and the play of signification are extended indefinitely (Derrida, 1971).

In Derridean grammatology, “[...] the signifier first signifies a signifier, and not the thing itself or a directly presented signified”<sup>45</sup> (Derrida, 2013, p. 289). Or rather, one signifier always refers to another signifier; the trace refers to another trace. In other words: since there is no longer a stable and fixed signified – the center, the full presence –, the sign that would take the place of the center, which *would supply* its absence, is replaced by another sign, another supplement. In any case, the presence (the signified, the thing represented, etc.) has never been present in the text: it is only the trace of another trace.

It is considering the notion of trace that we must understand the famous phrase, so often misunderstood, that “[there is no outside-text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]”<sup>46</sup> (Derrida, 2013, p. 194). The text does not refer to anything other than itself, it does not advance towards the referent or a transcendental meaning.

Thus, when Gumbrecht derides deconstructionism as “linguistic existentialism” that laments the inability of language to refer to the things of the world, as if the text were trapped in a cloister that isolates it from the outside world, he seems to ignore the “exteriority of the signifier”. Unless

Gumbrecht understood the exteriority of the signifier as opposed to an alleged interiority of the signified, taking into account only the principle of the arbitrariness of the sign. It follows that, due to his criticism of hermeneutics, which would consist in seeking the immaterial meaning at the expense of the material surface, Gumbrecht simply promotes an inversion, that is, it gives primacy to the material aspect; however, metaphysics, according to Derrida, operates precisely in binary oppositions.

In any case, when Derrida talks about the exteriority of the signifier, he is saying that exteriority is the *conditio sine qua non* of writing, for “[...] there is no linguistic sign before writing. Without that exteriority, the very idea of the sign falls into decay”<sup>47</sup> (Derrida, 2013, p. 17). This does not mean, however, the predominance of the “outside” over the “inside,” that is, of the material support over the internal system of the language; in fact, the movement of inscription on the support simultaneously brings with it the play of *différance*. After all, if *différance* mobilizes in the element said present all things other than itself, bringing the trace of the past and the future, such play also refers to the immanence of the inscription. Or rather: when I write a certain text, each material trace (letter, spacing, syllables, words, etc.) includes, in its “presence,” all other elements not present at the time of writing.

According to Derrida (2013, p. 56), “[...] Even before it is linked to incision, engraving, drawing, or the letter, to a signifier referring in general to a signifier signified by it, the concept of the *graphie* [unit of a possible graphic system] implies the framework of the *instituted trace*, as the possibility common to all systems of signification”<sup>48</sup>. The institution of the trace concerns the imprint [*empreinte*] in the passage to form; therefore, Derrida (2013, p. 77) says that *différance* is the formation of form: “But it is on the other hand the being-imprinted of the imprint”<sup>49</sup>. The term imprint retains the sense of inscription as cutting, tracing, incision on a surface.

By way of illustration, it is enough to think of the poem *Un coup de dés* (1897), by Stéphane Mallarmé, because the graphic arrangement of words on paper – in addition to the importance given to the blanks of the page – dictates the reading, that is, there is an indiscernibility between the support and the text. Incidentally, Mallarmé’s blanks have an affinity with Derrida’s notion of spacing, as spacing refers to the pause, the blank, punctuation, etc. In the domain of logocentrism, the omission of the exteriority

of the signifier has always been the omission of spacing, of imprint, of the trace as a trace. Derrida (2013, p. 79) continues:

[...] it is in the specific zone of this imprint and this trace, in the temporalization of a lived experience which is neither in the world nor in ‘another world,’ which is not more sonorous than luminous, not more in time than in space, that differences appear among the elements or rather produce them, make them emerge as such and constitute the texts, the chains, and the systems of traces. These chains and systems cannot be outlined except in the fabric of this trace or imprint<sup>50</sup>.

The trace, therefore, is not *in the* world, nor in *another* world; it is not within language, nor outside it, it is not material, nor immaterial – in a double exclusion –; on the other hand, it is simultaneously *in the* world and in the *other* world, in language and outside it, being material and immaterial – in a double participation. It is apprehended from this that, just as there is no *outside-text*, there is also no *inside-text*, because the movement of the inscription is the same that produces the differences that enable signification. This does not mean that there is an irreducible presence of the inscribed, in the materiality of the support, because the grapheme never has an itself, a stable identity; it is the otherness – what it is not – that allows us to think of it as such. And this otherness excludes the full presence, let us call it the “things of the world” or the real – even because the real is only an “effect” of *differance*, it is a trace of another trace. According to Derrida (2013, p. 194-195), “[...] there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the ‘real’ supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc”.<sup>51</sup>

The radicalism of the statement that there is no *outside-text* generates misunderstandings such as: “pain is not a text, I feel it effectively” or “the real is irreducible to the text”. This type of discussion contains at least three issues that are not taken into account: 1) pain and real are words like any other: it is the language that allows them to be formulated; 2) the trace, as I have shown at length, is not pure textuality; it only occurs at the moment of inscription: “No, there isn’t language on one side and reality on the other”<sup>52</sup> (Derrida, 2004, p. 341); 3) the notion of “real” carries with it its antithetical pair, whether it is “unreal,” whether it is “ideal,” or correlates – that

is, the real would be in the domain of metaphysics, since the oppositional structure is, in itself, metaphysical.

In an interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta, from 1971, which is part of the volume of *Positions*, Derrida (2001, p. 72, our translation) states that “[...] the signifier ‘matter’ does not seem problematic to me except at the moment when its reinscription does not prevent it from being made into a new fundamental principle, at the moment when, through a theoretical regression, it is reconstituted into ‘transcendental meaning’”<sup>53</sup>. Although he speaks of matter, we could replace it with something, reality, real, sensible presence, referent, etc.: vulgar materialism only promotes an inversion of metaphysical terms and refounds them under a new guise. Derrida continues:

The transcendental meaning is not merely the resource of idealism in the strict sense. It can always end up reaffirming a metaphysical materialism. It becomes, therefore, an ultimate referent, according to the classical logic implied by this referent value, or an ‘objective reality’ that is absolutely ‘prior to’ any work of the mark, a semantic content or a form of presence that guarantees, through its exterior, the movement of the general text<sup>54</sup> (Derrida, 2001, p. 72, our translation).

Thus, is not the concept of *presence* of the Gumbrechtian theory just this moment of inversion of metaphysics, that is, a “metaphysical materialism”? When Gumbrecht (2010, p. 13-14, our translation) says that presence should not be understood in the temporal sense, but rather in the spatial sense, in the world of things and objects, tangible by human hands, and that the “things of the world” should be understood as “a reference to the desire for this immediacy,” is he not re-elaborating the metaphysics of presence? Is not the prominence given to the support in the “materialities of communication,” rather than to meaning (considered as transcendental), related to the idea that it is possible to understand/describe the “things themselves,” the “reality,” etc.?

Despite Derrida’s criticism of Husserlian phenomenology in *Speech and Phenomena*, first published in 1967, it cannot be denied that phenomenology had already challenged the supposed objectivity of the methods of the empirical sciences, insofar as they would assume a “natural attitude,” which relied on the belief that experience is capable of accounting for all things in the world: “Natural cognition begins with experience and remains

within experience”<sup>55</sup> (Husserl, 2006, p. 33). That is, in the natural attitude, there is the unquestioned belief that things and the world are as they present themselves to us, revealing themselves to our five senses.

Although he resorts to Heidegger’s Being as presencing (*Anwesenheit*), Gumbrecht’s concept of presence bears more affinities with the natural attitude than with Heidegger’s philosophy; after all, according to the philosopher, being is not that which is simply given in its immediate tangibility. While Gumbrecht (2010, p. 14) highlights the spatial aspect of presence, stating that “[...] Something that is ‘present’ is supposed to be tangible for human hands, which implies that, conversely, it can have an immediate impact on human bodies”<sup>56</sup>, Heidegger (2012, p. 64, our translation) says: “[...] beings is understood in its being as ‘presentness,’ that is, based on a certain mode of time, of the *currently present*”.

Thus, instead of presentness/presencing, this character of “tangible by human hands” resembles, if not what is “before the hands” (*vorhanden*), at least the instruments, the “manuality” (*Auhandenheit*), which is when the beings are in use. As pointed out by Michael Inwood (2002, p. 113), “[...] *Vorhandenheit* is not the primary mode of being. *Dasein* itself is not *vorhanden*, nor are articles of use or ‘equipment’”<sup>57</sup>. However, if we were to admit with Gumbrecht that being as presence can be taken as the mere tangibility of what lies ahead, we could not circumvent the fact that still this full presence is inaccessible. All that exists are signifiers of signifiers, supplements of supplements, traces of traces, mediation of mediation, veils under veils, for presence is only the representation of representation.

### Language and reality

In an 1873 text published only posthumously with the title *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, Friedrich Nietzsche outlines a philosophy of language that anticipates many of the concerns of the so-called post-structuralism (or philosophy of difference) and, above all, of Derridean deconstructionism. However, while Derrida argues that what we call “reality” would be only a play of traces, according to Nietzsche the metaphors are placed on one side, and the “reality” on the other side. Nevertheless, such reality is incomprehensible by language, that is, the only truth to which we

have access is that of language itself, being unjustified the transposition of a thing into it, as logic and empirical sciences do.

Nietzsche (2007, p. 36) states that truth is nothing more than an “army of metaphors” and that “[...] the ‘thing in itself’ (it would be precisely the pure truth without any consequences) is also, for the creator of language, something totally inapprehensible and for which it is far from worth making an effort” (2007, p. 31, our translation). There would be no original correlation between the metaphor and the thing represented: more than that, it is a mistake to believe that things present themselves to our perception as they are, that we have before us pure objects, for things conceal themselves in their appearance: man are “[...] deeply immersed in illusions and in dream images; their eyes merely glide over the surface of things and see ‘forms.’ Their senses nowhere lead to truth”. (Nietzsche, 2007, p. 52). The fact is that we perceive only the effects, even if there is no cause.

There is no immediate presence (of the thing, of the real, etc.), but only relations, mediations: “properties contain only relations” (Nietzsche, 2007, p. 89, our translation). This means that the terms that constitute relations are only relations that refer to other relations, with no itself, no unique name, a presence. It is in this sense that we must understand Nietzsche’s famous passage in *The Will to Power*: “[...] against positivism, which stops before the phenomenon ‘there are only facts,’ I would say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations [*Interpretationen*]. We cannot establish any fact “in itself”: perhaps it is nonsense [*Unsinn*] to even want to do such a thing”. (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 260).

It is based on the Nietzschean assumptions that Gumbrecht — in the essay “Presence in language or presence achieved against language?” — promotes his “return to things themselves”. He begins by establishing an opposition between language and presence, since language would be associated with something that demands an interpretation, with an attribution of meanings circumscribed to words. That is, language would require that one go beyond words inscribed on a material support, going beyond the physical surface in search of a deep meaning.

Thus, language, interpretation and metaphysics would be placed in the field of modern cultures of meaning, as thing, being and matter would integrate, oppositely, the field of cultures of presence. His intention is to

identify how presence insinuates itself in the meaning, or rather in language – so, in order to demarcate his theoretical position, he criticizes Derridean deconstructionism: “[...] I have not found much consolation in what I like to characterize as the ‘linguistic existentialism’ of Deconstruction, i.e. the sustained complaint and melancholia (in its endless variations) about the alleged incapacity of language to refer to the things of the world”<sup>58</sup> (Gumbrecht, 2012, p. 63). Standing against the hermeneutic paradigm that does not cease to produce meaning, despite the referentiality of the things of the world, Gumbrecht is based on the premise that presence would be antithetical to representation; hence, it matters to him how presence insinuates itself in language: that is, language outside representation. To this end, he proposes six types of amalgamation between language and presence: 1) spoken language is, above all, a physical reality; 2) language concerns the fundamental practices of philology, especially in the original function of curating texts (desire to literally incorporate texts); 3) any type of language is capable of causing an aesthetic experience; 4) the relation between mystical experience and the language of mysticism: “[...] mystical language produces the paradoxical effect of stimulating imaginations that seem to make this very presence palpable”<sup>59</sup> the presence of the divine, of the supernatural (Gumbrecht, 2012, p. 69); 5) the opening of language to the world of objects: instead of the paradigm of representation, the deictic attitude that uses language to point to objects, not aiming to represent them, comes into question; 6) literature can be the place of epiphany: “[...] In its theological use, the concept of epiphany refers to the appearance of a thing, of a thing that requires space, a thing that is either absent or present”<sup>60</sup> (Gumbrecht, 2012, p. 70). In short, according to Gumbrecht, these types of amalgam differ from the hermeneutic paradigm of expression – of a spiritual meaning – and install the understanding of language as a “dwelling of the being” or of the presence, since language would have the same ontological *status* as the objects referred to.

On the contrary, the hypothesis I defend is that, due to the fact of being premised on the notion that there is an originary presence, since he is based on Heidegger, Gumbrecht disregards the play of *différance* and reaffirms metaphysical assumptions. That is because he already states at the beginning that: that “[...] which is not language [...] will be what I have come to call ‘presence’”<sup>61</sup> (Gumbrecht, 2012, p. 61); with this, he corrob-

rates the binary opposition between something purely spiritual on the one side and something “real” on the other side, namely, the support on which language is inscribed and from which meaning flows. Thus, since presence arises as antithetical to language, the suggested amalgams between presence and language are beforehand an impossibility, they are incommunicable.

Hence, the first three kinds of amalgam, though they suggest a pure materiality, a full presence beyond meaning, can be explained only by means of what meaning is not, that is, presence is ultimately mediated and deferred. There is no physical reality or aesthetic experience beyond the hinge (*brisure*) between outside and inside language. Moreover: even if there were, it would be incomprehensible, for language is the only reality that is made known to us. In turn, the other four types of amalgam perfectly accomplish the metaphysics of presence, insofar as language would be that which makes an absent referent present, or rather, the sign vicariously replaces the thing itself – since they would be on opposite sides. However, it is worth noting that language refers only to itself, not to something exterior to it. It is precisely this desire that the text transcends the text itself towards a meaning or a referent prior to it that constitutes the metaphysical and, consequently, hermeneutical gesture. It is by attempting to promote a mere reversal of the hermeneutic field that Gumbrecht restores it. It is not a matter of defending Derrida from the accusation of textualism, but rather of pointing out how Gumbrecht’s theory — despite claiming to be non-metaphysical or non-hermeneutical — ends up ratifying the metaphysics of presence.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Original text in English: “Perhaps Heidegger’s entire contribution to Western philosophy can be read as originating in a reaction to the emotional, intellectual, and political environments of 1926” (Gumbrecht, 1997, p. 442).
- <sup>2</sup> Original text in English: “This contamination does not tarnish the philosophical importance of Heidegger’s thought [...]. *Sein und Zeit* cannot of course be identified with Nazi ideology” (Gumbrecht, 1997, p. 443).
- <sup>3</sup> *Nota bene*: the quotations in the body of the text were extracted from the Brazilian edition of *Production of presence*, published in 2010 by the publisher Contraponto, translated by Ana Isabel Soares. The original text is provided in footnotes.

- <sup>4</sup> Original text in English: “To use such concepts, however, has long been a symptom of despicably bad intellectual taste in the humanities”. [...] “to believe in the possibility of referring to the world other than by meaning has become synonymous with the utmost degree of philosophical naïveté” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 53).
- <sup>5</sup> In the late 1980s, while conducting his research on the materialities of communication, which culminated in the publication of *Materialities of Communication*, Gumbrecht sought theoretical allies to defend his positions: “But we also wanted to see an intellectual ally in Jacques Derrida, who at the beginning of his philosophical trajectory (a good twenty years before our colloquium) had argued that the systematic bracketing of the ‘exteriority of the signifier’ was one key reason for the devastating dominance, as we were quick to believe, of ‘logophonocentrism’ in Western culture” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 9).
- <sup>6</sup> Original text in English: “[...] deconstruction has thus to a large extent relied on soft terror to shore up the existing order in the humanities” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 54).
- <sup>7</sup> Original text in English: “[...] this is why *Being and Time* presents the Cartesian grounding of human existence on thought (and on thought alone) and the subsequent dissociations between human existence and space and between human existence and substance as the original sins of modern philosophy” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 66).
- <sup>8</sup> In the article *Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht reader of Martin Heidegger: conception of production of presence*, Wellington Amâncio da Silva (2017, p. 513) states that, in *Production of presence*, Gumbrecht converges the concepts of *Dasein* and presence. However, in the US edition, *Production of presence*, 2004, Gumbrecht (2004, p. 71) chooses to maintain the Heideggerian concept in the German original: “[...] the role of *Dasein* (Heidegger's word for human existence) in the happening of truth.” And, in the same paragraph: “*Dasein* is being-in-the-world” (2004, p. 71). In the classic American translation of *Being and Time* (1962), translators John Mcquarrie and Edward Robinson also chose not to translate the concept of *Dasein* into English, preserving the German word. In any case, contrary to what Silva asserts in the aforementioned article, in the passage in which Gumbrecht establishes an approximation between *being* and presence, it is clear, in the original, that he says *being* and not *Dasein*: “Both concepts, *Being and presence*, imply substance; both are related to space; both can be associated with movement” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 77).

- <sup>9</sup> Original text in English: “[...] belongs to the dimension of things” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 68).
- <sup>10</sup> Original text in English: “If Being has the character of a thing, this means that it has substance and that, therefore (and unlike anything purely spiritual), it occupies space” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 68).
- <sup>11</sup> Original text in English: “[...] occupying space also implies the possibility of Being unfolding a movement” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 68).
- <sup>12</sup> Original text in English: “Being, I think, refers to the things of the world before they become part of a culture (or, using the rhetorical figure of the paradox, the concept refers to the things of the world before they become part of a world)” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 70).
- <sup>13</sup> Original text in English: “Being will only be Being outside the networks of semantics and other cultural distinctions” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 70).
- <sup>14</sup> Original text in English: “Releasement is indeed the release of oneself from transcendental re-presentation and so a relinquishing of the willing of a horizon” (Heidegger, 1966, p. 79-80).
- <sup>15</sup> Original text in English: “Only the presence of certain things [...] opens up the possibility of other things appearing in their primordial material qualities—and this effect might be considered as one way (and as a part) of unconcealing their Being” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 74).
- <sup>16</sup> Original text in English: “[...] seeing things as part of Being, that is, independently of the shapes imposed upon them by historically specific cultures” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 75).
- <sup>17</sup> Original text in English: “[...] impossible to think of Being as something stable” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 77).
- <sup>18</sup> Original text in English: “[...] something beyond the merely physical” (Gumbrecht, 2006, p. 130).
- <sup>19</sup> Original text in French: “[...] j’ai parfois le sentiment que la problématique heideggerienne est la défense la plus ‘profonde’ et la plus ‘puissante’ de ce que j’essaie de mettre en question, sous le titre de *pensée de la présence*” (Derrida, 1972, p. 75).
- <sup>20</sup> Original text in English: “Derrida has never been shy about inventing new concepts, even when the need to do so has not been very obvious. Why is he so

hesitant, then, about coming up with some new concept that would allow us to ‘end’ the age of the sign?” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 53).

- <sup>21</sup> Original text in English: “[...] the metaphysics of presence is shaken with the help of the concept of *sign*” (Derrida, 2001b, p. 354).
- <sup>22</sup> Original text in English: “There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no *l xicon* – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest” (Derrida, 2001b, p. 354).
- <sup>23</sup> Original text in English: “At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden” (Derrida, 2001b, p. 352).
- <sup>24</sup> Original text in English: “The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies” (Derrida, 2001b, p. 353).
- <sup>25</sup> Original text in English: “It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – *eidōs, arch , telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *al theia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth” (Derrida, 2001b, p. 353).
- <sup>26</sup> Original text in French: “Rien de ce que je tente n'aurait  t  possible sans l'ouverture des questions heideggeriennes. Et d'abord, puisque nous devons dire ici les choses tr s vite, sans l'attention   ce que Heidegger appelle la diff rence entre l' tre et l' tant, la diff rence ontico-ontologique telle qu'elle reste d'une certaine mani re impens e par la philosophie. Mais, malgr  cette dette   l' gard de la pens e heideggerienne, ou plut t en raison de cette dette, je tente de reconna tre, dans le texte heideggerien qui, pas plus qu'un autre, n'est homog ne, continu, partout  gal   la plus grande force et   toutes les cons quences de ses questions, je tente d'y reconna tre des signes d'appartenance   la m taphysique ou   ce qu'il appelle l'onto-th ologie” (Derrida, 1972, p. 18-19).
- <sup>27</sup> Original text in English: “The distinction collapses. It remains forgotten. Although the two parties to the distinction, what is present and presencing, reveal themselves, they do not do so *as* distinguished. Rather, even the early trace of the distinction is obliterated” (Heidegger, 1984, p. 50-51).

- <sup>28</sup> Original text in English: “Illumination of the distinction therefore cannot mean that the distinction appears as a distinction” (Heidegger, 1984, p. 51).
- <sup>29</sup> According to Derrida (1991, p. 34-36, our translation), “[...] this graphical difference (*a* in place of *e*), this marked difference between two apparently vocal notations, between two vowels, remains purely graphical: it is written or read, but not heard, not understood. [...] Undoubtedly, this pyramidal silence of the graphical difference between *e* and *aa* can only function within the phonetic writing system and within a language or grammar historically associated with phonetic writing as well as with the whole culture of which it is inseparable. That is, *différance* is neither a word nor a concept, but a graphic intervention, a nominal effect, that shakes phonologocentrism.
- <sup>30</sup> Original text in English: “If we maintain that difference (is) (itself) other than absence and presence, if it traces, then when it is a matter of the forgetting of the difference (between Being and beings), we would have to speak of a disappearance of the trace of the trace” (Derrida, 1982, p. 23-24).
- <sup>31</sup> Original text in English: “The word ‘being’, or at any rate the words designating the sense of being in different languages, is, with some others, an ‘originary word’ (*Urwort*), the transcendental word assuring the possibility of being-word to all other words. As such, it is precomprehended in all language and – this is the opening of *Being and Time* – only this precomprehension would permit the opening of the question of the sense of being in general, beyond all regional ontologies and all metaphysics: a question that broaches philosophy [...] and lets itself be taken over by philosophy, a question that Heidegger repeats by submitting the history of metaphysics to it. Heidegger reminds us constantly that the sense of being is neither the word ‘being’ nor the concept of being. But as that sense is nothing outside of language and the language of words, it is tied, if not to a particular word or to a particular system of language (*concesso non dato*), at least to the possibility of the word in general” (Derrida, 1997, p. 20-21).
- <sup>32</sup> Original text in English: “[...] the question of being unites indissolubly with the precomprehension of the word being” (Derrida, 1997, p. 21).
- <sup>33</sup> Original text in English: “It is thus that, after evoking the ‘voice of being’, Heidegger recalls that it is silent, mute, insonorous, wordless, originally a-phonetic (*die Gewähr der lautlosen Stimme verborgener Quellen. . .*). The voice of the sources is not heard. A rupture between the originary meaning of being and the word, between meaning and the voice, between ‘the voice of being’

and the ‘phonè’, between “the call of being”, and articulated sound; such a rupture, which at once confirms a fundamental metaphor, and renders it suspect by accentuating its metaphoric discrepancy, translates the ambiguity of the Heideggerian situation with respect to the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism. It is at once contained within it and transgresses it” (Derrida, 2001b, p. 22).

- <sup>34</sup> Original text in English: “[...] that means that being escapes the movement of the sign” (Derrida, 1997, p. 22).
- <sup>35</sup> It is important to note that, in one of the texts of the so-called turn [*die Kehre*], *Letter on Humanism*, 1946, Being is similar to the Derridean *différance*, even in the refusal of the proper name: “But if the human being is to find his way once again into the nearness of being he must first learn to exist in the nameless [*das Namemlose*]” (Heidegger, 2005, p. 16). In direct translation, *das Namenlose* means “nameless”.
- <sup>36</sup> Original text in English: “Since Being has never had a ‘meaning’, has never been thought or said as such, except by dissimulating itself in beings, then difference, in a certain and very strange way, (is) ‘older’ than the ontological difference or than the truth of Being. When it has this age it can be called the play of the trace” (Derrida, 1982, p. 22).
- <sup>37</sup> Original text in English: “It erases itself in presenting itself, muffles itself in resonating, like the *a* writing itself, inscribing its pyramid in *différance*” (Derrida, 1982, p. 23).
- <sup>38</sup> Original text in English: “the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and no concept of metaphysics can describe it” (Derrida, 2001b, p. 65).
- <sup>39</sup> Original text in English: “The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general” (Derrida, 2001b, p. 65).
- <sup>40</sup> Original text in English: “‘Older’ than Being itself, such a *différance* has no name in our language. But ‘already know’ that if it is unnameable, it is not provisionally so, not because our language has not yet found or received this *name*, or because we would have to seek it in another language, outside the finite system of our own. It is rather because there is no name for it at all, not even the name of or of Being, not even that of ‘*différance*’, which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions” (Derrida, 1982, p. 26).

- <sup>41</sup> Original text in English: “There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being” (Derrida, 1982, p. 27).
- <sup>42</sup> Original text in English: “What is written as *différance*, then, will be the playing movement that ‘produces’ – by means of something that is not simply an activity – these differences, these effects of difference” (Derrida, 1982, p. 11).
- <sup>43</sup> Original text in English: “The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence” (Derrida, 1982, p. 9).
- <sup>44</sup> Original text in English: “It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present” (Derrida, 1982, p. 13).
- <sup>45</sup> Original text in English: “[...] the signifier first signifies a signifier, and not the thing itself or a directly presented signified” (Derrida, 1997, p. 237).
- <sup>46</sup> Original text in English: “[there is no outside-text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]” (Derrida, 1997, p. 158).
- <sup>47</sup> Original text in English: “[...] there is no linguistic sign before writing. Without that exteriority, the very idea of the sign falls into decay” (Derrida, 1997, p. 12).
- <sup>48</sup> Original text in English: “Even before it is linked to incision, engraving, drawing, or the letter, to a signifier referring in general to a signifier signified by it, the concept of the *graphie* [unit of a possible graphic system] implies the framework of the *instituted trace*, as the possibility common to all systems of signification” (Derrida, 1997, p. 46).
- <sup>49</sup> Original text in English: “But it is on the other hand the being-imprinted of the imprint” (Derrida, 1997, p. 63).
- <sup>50</sup> Original text in English: “[...] it is in the specific zone of this imprint and this trace, in the temporalization of a lived experience which is neither in the world nor in ‘another world’, which is not more sonorous than luminous, not more in time than in space, that differences appear among the elements or rather produce them, make them emerge as such and constitute the texts, the chains,

and the systems of traces. These chains and systems cannot be outlined except in the fabric of this trace or imprint” (Derrida, 1997, p. 65).

- <sup>51</sup> Original text in English: “[...] there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the ‘real’ supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc.” (Derrida, 1997, p. 159).
- <sup>52</sup> Original text in English: “No, there isn't language on one side and reality on the other” (Derrida, 2005, p. 146).
- <sup>53</sup> Original text in French: “[...] le signifiant ‘matière’ ne me paraît problématique qu'au moment où sa réinscription n'éviterait pas d'en faire un nouveau principe fondamental, où, par une régression théorique, on le reconstituerait em ‘signifié transcendantal” (Derrida, 1972, p. 88).
- <sup>54</sup> Original text in French: “Le signifié transcendantal n'est pas seulement le recours de l'idéalisme au sens étroit. Il peut toujours venir rassurer un matérialisme métaphysique. Il devient alors un référend ultime, selon la logique classique impliquée par cette valeur de référend, ou une ‘réalité objective’ absolument ‘antérieure’ à tout travail de la marque, un contenu sémantique ou une forme de présence garantissant du dehors le mouvement du texte général” (Derrida, 1972, p. 88).
- <sup>55</sup> Original text in English: “Natural cognition begins with experience and remains *within* experience” (Husserl, 1983, p. 5).
- <sup>56</sup> Original text in English: “Something that is ‘present’ is supposed to be tangible for human hands, which implies that, conversely, it can have an immediate impact on human bodies” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. xiii).
- <sup>57</sup> Original text in English: “[...] *vorhandenheit* is not the primary mode of being. *Dasein* itself is not *vorhanden*, nor are articles of use or ‘equipment” (Inwood, 1999, p. 128).
- <sup>58</sup> Original text in English: “I have not found much consolation in what I like to characterize as the ‘linguistic existentialism’ of Deconstruction, i.e. the sustained complaint and melancholia (in its endless variations) about the alleged incapacity of language to refer to the things of the world” (Gumbrecht, 2006, p. 130).
- <sup>59</sup> Original text in English: “[...] mystical language produces the paradoxal effect of stimulating imaginations that seem to make this very presence palpable” (Gumbrecht, 2006, p. 134).

- <sup>60</sup> Original text in English: “In its theological use, the concept of epiphany refers to the appearance of a thing, of a thing that requires space, a thing that is either absent or present” (Gumbrecht, 2006, p. 135).
- <sup>61</sup> Original text in English: “[...] which is not language [...] will be what I have come to call ‘presence’” (Gumbrecht, 2006, p. 129).

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**Gustavo Ramos de Souza** is Adjunct Professor A, in Doc-CRES regime, of the Department of Letters of Universidade Estadual de Londrina (UEL). He obtained his PhD degree in Letters, from the same institution, in 2019. He conducts research on materialities of literature and intermediality.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5164-420X>

Email: [avulsoaoavesso@gmail.com](mailto:avulsoaoavesso@gmail.com)

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