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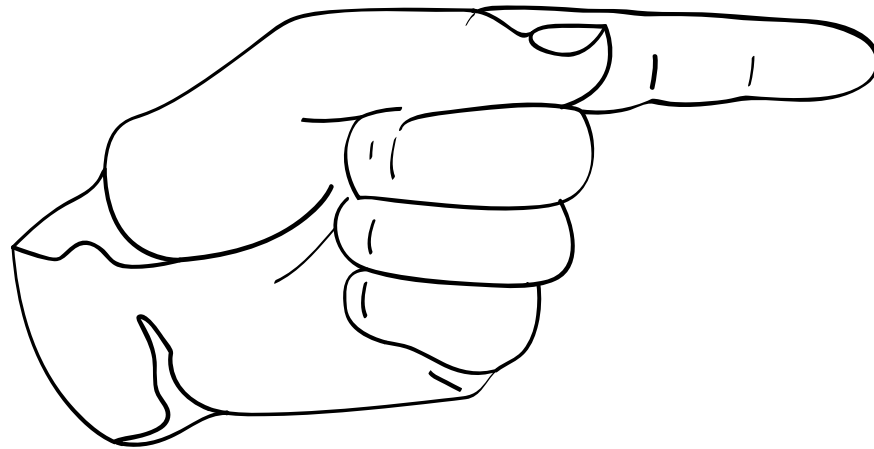
What is a colophon?

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The text that I am now writing is such an “inscription... with facts relative to the production” of a particular volume — the philosophy journal that you are now reading. Some of the typefaces used to produce this volume will be mentioned (this, for example, is New Clear Era). The names of thinkers and concepts that appeared in the last hundred or so pages of text will reappear in these few pages at the end. This, strictly speaking, will have been a colophon. [But, as you may already guess, one that is aware that “strict speech” often more closely resembles the most mischievous trope than it does ordinary parlance.]



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1. What is the image of language?

[It cannot be *only* the shape of letterforms.]

2. Which writings are colophons?

[Certainly not only those with the banner “**COLOPHON**” at the top of the page.]

← That is also a colophon.

2 This second sense of colophon, however, does not have an entry in Webster's (nor in the O E D, nor Robert's). It is likely no more than a simple accident of scholarship that the second sense of colophon often seems

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And, yes, in this case they are undeniably philosophical concepts and questions. This is the passage anticipated a paragraph above; the author is the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan:

Descartes apprehends his I think in the enunciation of the I doubt, not in its statement, which still bears all of this knowledge to be put into doubt. Shall I say that Freud makes one more step... when he invites us to integrate in the text of the dream what I shall call the colophon of doubt? — the colophon, in an old text, is that small pointing hand that, in the days when we still had a typography, used to be printed in the margin. The colophon of doubt is part of the text. This indicates that Freud is placing his certainty... only in the constellation of signifiers as they result from the recounting, the commentary, the association, even if they are later retracted (33).

Lacan is describing the design of a conceptual graph. He finds the path traced by Freud’s writings on the unconscious to intercept the path of Descartes’ meditations on doubt, certainty, and the self. Descartes, of course, worried that all his experience of the world was nothing but a dream. In hope of locating an island of solidity in the sea of the world-as-dreamwork, Descartes argues from his doubt — from the belief that there must be a doubter — to secure his confidence that he exists. Lacan’s Freud recasts this exercise; it is by way of doubting, questioning, reinterpreting the surface features of the dreamwork that we may be able to name with confidence where the responsible self lies. For Lacan, the interaction between a body of text and its questioning colophon of doubt parallels the interaction between the dreamly thinking of Descartes’ as-yet-insecure self and that which secures by recognizing the doubting. To anticipate: when a printer notices an error, the colophon of doubt is added to a page, not to spite or threaten a text, but to re-secure the text’s authority by pointing out its moment of failure. And Lacan’s point is that the securing of the self occurs as a similar moment of rupture; Cartesian security comes only at the price of an irreparable fragmentation of who one is.

Lacan stops there. The colophon of doubt is abandoned and does not reappear in his work. [And if I seem to be passing the question of selfhood by, it is only to provide some turning room so we can approach it from another angle.]

4. THE DAYS WHEN WE STILL HAD A...

But I want to broaden Lacan’s metaphor by describing another intersection and another rupture. The relationship that I want to discuss is that between the graphic and the linguistic. It might seem that these are obvious or even surpassed concepts; without doubt, art historians and aestheticians, literary critics and philosophers of language, have produced rich and varied discourses about each. However and with doubt, we only yet have the allusions to a rich understanding of how image and language relate — what quite literally could be called an understanding of typography. When we don’t find the rote dualism of a thesis of the incommensurability of image and language, we often find the most common reaction to any dichotomy — an urge to understand the defining features of one sphere as nothing more than particular manifestations of the other. [An aside: I confess that I am over-generalizing. For example, My idea begins with this:

The colophon (in the dictionary’s sense of “an inscription placed at the end...”) often has the function of a colophon (of doubt).

To begin to grasp what I mean here, it is helpful to take up one of the manifestos of so-called “modernist” typography. A number of such works have been published over the last century that we could choose. An early example is Jan Tschichold’s 1923 *Die Neue Typographie*, published recently in English as *The New Typography*.

This is how Tschichold describes his work:

AN EXPLANATION OF THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW TYPOGRAPHY IS THEREFORE AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR ALL WHO WISH TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE FIELD OF PRINTING. MERELY TO COPY ITS EXTERNAL SHAPES WOULD BE TO CREATE A NEW FORMALISM AS BAD AS THE OLD. WE MUST FREE OURSELVES COMPLETELY FROM THE RIGID PATTERNS OF THE PAST, AND TRAINING IN CALLIGRAPHY OR GRAPHICS ALONE WILL NEVER ACHIEVE THIS. IT WILL COME ONLY FROM A COMPLETE REORIENTATION OF THE ROLE OF TYPOGRAPHY...

everyone from the most austere philosopher to the most sprightly critic in one way or another believes, “There is graphic language — writing.” This much is trivial. From this point, though, one often slips too quickly into the belief that any philosophical interest in writing is exhausted by how writing signifies. Typography is one of those cases when we should remember that sometimes there is more in heaven and earth...]

I set the above passage in a reproduction of Tschichold's favored font (12pt. Aksidenz Grotesk) to highlight an irony implicit in *The New Typography*, and to begin to provide "a fuller account" of what "the New" was. The book has a colophon. In that colophon, Tschichold's editors and designers, who are by no means unsympathetic with his declaration that the history of print culminated in high modernism, describe at length the technical and aesthetic decisions they made so as best to mimic the design of Tschichold's original work. They delve into quite a bit of detail about, for example, how lost typefaces were feigned to produce a sense of historical accuracy, about how tracking and margins were set to imitate those of the original printing, and so on.

The colophon doubly revises Tschichold's text. First, it informs the reader that Tschichold's declaration of a typographical *tabula rasa* was false — the history of print has continued even so far as to make the moment of its declared end recoverable only by an effort of imitation. This first revision alone is not that interesting; the observation that all of culture does not resemble *De Stijl* comes as no surprise.

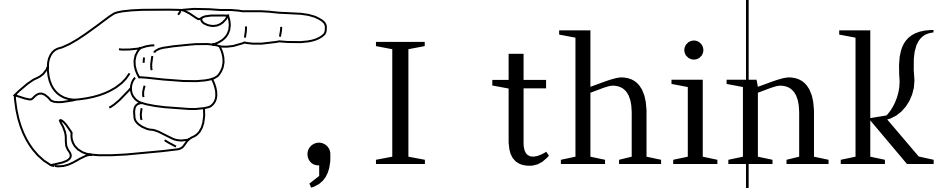
The colophon's second revision is far more surprising. It serves not only as a summary, an abridged edition of what we would have already learned from the passage through Tschichold's book. Instead, it produces the very sense of an origin that it proceeds to deny. It offers a reassuring proscription: "You can reclaim the moment when history was complete by mimicking its means, even though you know that that was never anything more than an illusion." So, the colophon is nostalgic for an event that never was. But this directive has an underbelly. It is not just in spite of, but precisely because there never really was an end or origin of history that there is an urge to imitate what one wishes there might have been.

5. IS PART OF THE TEXT...

Interrogating the colophon of doubt may help clarify the dynamic at issue here. Let's begin with the semiologist's question: What does the colophon of doubt signify? But the question may already imply too much about how signification functions and what qualifies as a signifier. The colophon, though, might not be so simple a signifier as those our courses have trained us to expect. A first option would be to treat the colophon of doubt as signifying the act of doubting:



But what would that entail? If the colophon were nothing more than a icon substituting for the phrase "I doubt," then the colophon would be a usage of synecdoche. Synecdoche, in study of rhetoric, is the act of using the name of one part of the body to invoke and encapsulate the notion of a "greater whole" — synonymy at the expense of scale. So, the colophon of doubt would be the incarnation of a self-complete doubter. We could then offer this new translation of Descartes' famous phrase, "I doubt, I think":



Our attempt to understand the colophon of doubt as the signifier of doubt has backfired. The exchange of what were thought to be synonyms turns out to be far from idle for the content of Descartes' statement. The most famous example of an a priori truth in the history of philosophy is thus brought precariously close to the edge of philosophy's most famous paradox: "This statement is false." A norm of intellectual respect would seem to dictate that, for the moment at least, I should assume the difficulty is mine in interpretation and not Descartes' or Lacan's in formulation.

Perhaps this re-designation is simply the result of misconceiving what the colophon signifies. Another diagram would seem to be called for, one that leaves no worries as to where the colophon directs its attention. This diagram would take the colophon to signify the very text it calls into question:



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In our attempt to eliminate doubt from the picture, it seems we have inadvertently eliminated the picture of repetition — the graphic incarnation of the text. Its doubting function has been abolished. In its place is now the exposition of a logical identity. To demonstrate:

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In order to rectify these errors, it will be necessary to describe how the colophon both doubts and channels its doubting toward a certain object — of how it functions as what linguists call an indexical.

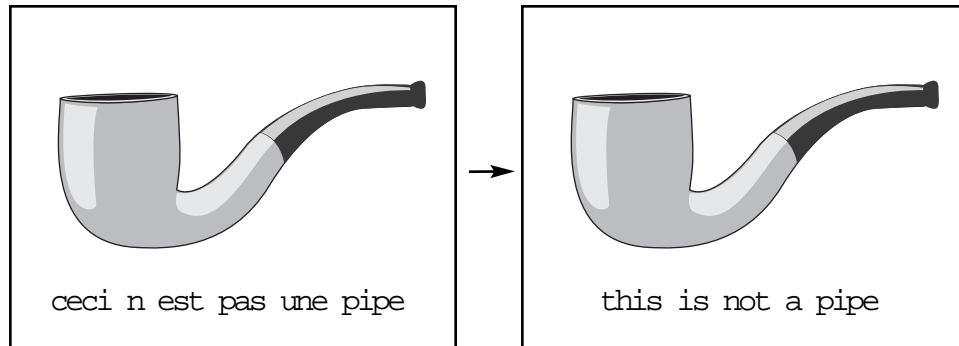
THIS...6

"This" is an indexical. The way that indication works has come to jeopardize the beliefs shared by many philosophers that a simple and clear harmony between language and the world will inevitably be found. René Magritte will teach us this. (So could a more proper philosopher of language, like Donald Davidson.)

One finds the concept of the indexical most frequently employed by analytic philosophers writing about language. Their idea is that, when fully rooted out, the way that a statement implicitly indexes a certain "this" (that is, an "at this particular time," "at this particular place," and so on) often reveal the statement to be incoherent. An example may be found in the fifth sentence of this text: "The text that I am now writing is the [colophon] of the philosophy journal that you are now reading." Here the difficulty is temporal; the first "now" indexes a time (about 11 AM on a day in late December 1999) that is not the same as the time indexed by the second "now" (what will have been sometime next

year at least). This (or “this”) has thus impeded attempts to formalize theorems of truth or meaning.

The unformalizability of “this” may itself indicate a condition not confined to this linguistic phenomenon. This condition of language is what I’ve been calling image; image has shot through language and language bears the mark of its path. This is a representation of that drawing and its English translation:



A thematic similarity between Magritte’s “Betrayal of Images” and Lacan’s colophon of doubt is immediately apparent. At first glance, both are displays of a tension between language and the image that accompanies it. But Magritte (anachronistically) inverts Lacan’s schema. Where the colophon Lacan describes is an image that doubts the authority of the text in which it has become a participant, Magritte’s painted phrase is a text which doubts the authority of the image (initially, the pipe-shaped lines) in which it has become a participant (now, Magritte’s painting). In short, Magritte’s phrase is a colophon of the kind described by Webster’s.

Michel Foucault writes what is likely the most famous, if often chastised, interpretation of Magritte’s “Betrayal.” Foucault first highlights the ambivalence of the “~~ceci~~” (“this”), demonstrating that it can be taken to refer to the image of the pipe (because it is a representing image, it is not, strictly speaking, a pipe), the words drawn on the canvas (the statement “This is not a pipe” is not a pipe), or the painting as a whole (the painting of a pipe and some text, when taken together, is not a pipe, but a painting).

Foucault’s Magritte wants to split the world of images from the world of things: “Must we say: ‘My God, how simpleminded!’ the statement is perfectly true, since it is quite apparent that the drawing representing the pipe is not the pipe itself” (19). Language — specifically, the language of indication — is the wedge brought in to accomplish the task. But there may be more to “this” than that. Magritte’s “this” is not only ambivalent as to what it signifies or refers, it is ambivalent as whether it is so simply and completely contained within language. Magritte’s

“this” will be the mark left behind when language lost its ability to imitate the world, and instead was condemned to describe it

Now, Foucault is one of those thinkers who takes image and language to be utterly separate domains; he would allow that a word or image might both represent and signify, but would say that ~~that~~ representing and ~~that~~ signifying are two completely isolated activities in which that word or image participates. Hence, for Foucault, the thought that “this” might reach across the boundaries between image and language is a distortion when taken at face value, and permissible only as a charade executed according to the implicit rules of the painter’s game - a “ruse,” Foucault says. Magritte’s painting thus poses a special challenge for Foucault: to provide a theory of how “this” could bind image and language that does not place his belief in the mutual resistance of image and language in jeopardy.

Foucault tries to meet this challenge. He finds in Magritte’s painting the evidence of its history. The image of the pipe and the text that underlies it, he says, were once together, “allied,” in the form of a calligram - written words that adopt the shape of that to which they refer. Foucault writes that *The Betrayal of Images* has survived

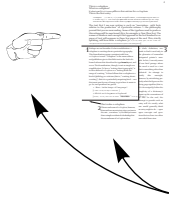
An operation rendered invisible by the simplicity of its result, but which alone can explain the vague uneasiness provoked. The operation is a calligram that Magritte has secretly constructed, then unravelled. Each element of the figure, their reciprocal position, and their relationship derive from this process, annulled as soon as it had been accomplished. Behind the drawing and these words, before anyone has written anything at all, before the formation of the picture (and within it the drawing of the pipe), before the large floating pipe has appeared - we must assume, I believe, that a calligram has formed, and then unravelled. There we have the evidence of failure and its ironic remains (20).

So Foucault is positing a history of Magritte’s painting. The narrative runs something like this:

“Once upon a time, there was a firm alliance of language and image. But at some moment there was a break in this history — [It is far from clear as to when or where Foucault imagines the splitting to have occurred. When Foucault writes about the split, it seems that he wants to be taken a saying that it was something more than a decision made and executed by Magritte in the production of *Betrayal*; Foucault wants to inflate the story of this one work and project it onto the history of meaning. To a habitual reader of Foucault, this move is of little surprise. But that reader ought to also recall that Foucault’s ethic of attentiveness to detail is often a method of clarifying exactly where our commitments lie. With Magritte, however, Foucault is ambiguous. Is Foucault thinking the split in the history of meaning to have occurred with Freud, as the Surrealists themselves thought? Or perhaps earlier, with Nietzsche? With Hegel? All the way back to Aristotle? Or, perhaps, not until the time when Foucault and his contemporaries would articulate the notion?] — a break in history when the alliance between image and language ruptured beyond the possibility of repair.”

The story concludes by describing the debris left behind — the “ironic remains” that lay bare *The Betrayal of Images*.

Our difficulties with the colophon of doubt are not all that different from Foucault's with *The Betrayal of Images*; both us and Foucault have been trying to understand how an image and some language could disagree without ever having entered the same conversation. Maybe, then, we could adapt Foucault's solution to our own ends. The colophon, together with the doubted text, would be the remnants of a calligram gone awry. This is one way that calligram could look:



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But in the case of the colophon of doubt, there was a real history of the typography, not just an imagined one, as in Foucault on Magritte (or as in Tschichold's editors on Tschichold). When one sees the colophon of doubt in a printed work, it shows that, at some point in time, an editor came along, noticed an error in the original text and chose to mark the site of that error so as to rectify it for himself and the reader. The colophon of doubt, unlike the unravelled calligram, did not emerge from a void. The wounded text came first, the colophon only in retrospect. This calligram thus cannot account for the colophon's history

THIS 7

"This" is one of a very few moments in language when the gap between the signifier and what it signifies is collapsed. Hegel, for one, used the phrase "the this" to describe primal immersion in the spectacle of the world - image. The moment when one begins to become a self, for Hegel, is precisely the moment when "the this" is lost to history.

We need to think something like Hegel's "this" alongside Foucault's if we want to really understand how the calligram — and the colophon — work. We should ask, what does Foucault think to have been surpassed in the unravelling of the calligram?"

Memories do not easily disappear; even when they seem forgotten, they return in other forms. Often to say that something "is nothing more than a memory" is just a strategy to disavow what one is confronting in the present. Foucault is engaging in the theorist's version of precisely this kind of disavowal.

What Foucault is trying to forget is how "this" is the mark of image's passage into language. By imagining the calligram to have gone awry, thinking "this" to have only ever been a failed attempt Foucault can deny it in the present.

There is a "this" to be found in the present, to be sure. And one that Foucault knows he has to confront. It is written across the surface of Magritte's painting. In as much as "this" marks the collusion of language and image, there is in a sense, a calligram staring sitting right there on the surface of *Betrayal*.

But how does Foucault deal with "this" when confronted by it? By pushing it away. By saying that the "this" that could ambivalentate between image and language has disappeared — "only a memory." And a memory that was never all that powerful; For Foucault, the collusion between image and language was only

ever a shaky "alliance," one already doomed to fail. Except, he says, when it "misleads"

Perhaps we can then offer a final calligram to more fully express what was lost when the colophon of doubt was born:

I AM LANGUAGE SPEAKING.
 I KNOW THE TRUE NAMES OF THINGS. I SAY WHAT I SHOW WHAT I MEAN WHAT I AM.

"Not a calligram!" you say, "Merely a commonplace passage of text." It certainly has a certain form, though, and not just as a rectangle. The little text unquestionably "references what it represents." If you are not yet convinced, look again at the diagram on page 84. There is more than

8 one calligram to be found. Examine the little text block hanging in the margins of the page, what at one time was one crumb of the “ironic remains” of the colophon’s calligram. You try to read it — perhaps as a game to test your vision, perhaps to check up on the trustworthiness of this essay. You can almost make out the words, but not quite. “Doesn’t matter much,” you think, “I know perfectly well what it says. I’ve seen it before.” [Another aside: You say, “What you’re advoc

Of course, you are right. The little text says what you think it does. And if you’ve read this colophon by the numbers, you have seen it before. But you only know what it says because you know how it looks. The little text indicates the first page of this essay simply by reproducing its image; it says “This!” Maybe the text says it unintelligibly, but the message comes through loud and clear. Even if this colophon did not start out as a calligram, it has become one. [A final aside: Foucault’s *This is Not a Pipe* itself has

Through a twist of scale and the passage of time, some language becomes the image of itself. As the figure of the calligram reappears in the shadows of is ruins, the sort of colophon that you are reading ambivalates as well.

question. It implies that the painting is an artist’s anticipation of one of the central themes of Foucault’s career — the celebration of the power and diversity of signification. If we choose to grant authority to this title, it would seem that even Magritte presents an image only insofar as it can be conceived as a code, a collection of signifiers to be deciphered. Except for one accident. The painting that Foucault’s colophon calls *The Use of Speaking* Magritte himself titled *Forbidden Speech*. And the index finger has obliterated the painting here looks like a naïve Platonism. It’s as if the word *sirène* only to reconstitute it in another form. The image of the pointing finger forms a new *I* to supplant the one that had to be destroyed in the quest for secure meaning. And the finger promises salvation only to thwart that promise. We all know what would happen if the *sirène*’s song were heard clearly. And that is precisely why we want to hear it. To repeat: the image of the pointing finger forms a new *I* to supplant the one that had to be destroyed in the quest for secure meaning — an accurate summary of the colophon as revision of the self. a colophon. Across the last few pages of the book, there are a number of reproductions of Magritte’s works as well as an index naming the title of each, the credits for its reproduction and printing, and so forth. This colophon identifies the title of another painting of Magritte’s as *The Use of Speaking*. This second Magritte shows a simple room, where the word *sirène* (“bell”) has been painted on the floor. In the painting, a giant extended index finger has ruptured through the floor, obliterating part of the text. (Is it a colophon?) That finger points out what the words on the floor once tried to name — a single bell floating in the room’s air. *The Use of Speaking* as the painting’s title is compelling evidence in favor of those features of Foucault’s account that I’ve wanted to call into

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colophon or ‘this’ or whatever had some unique access to ideals which the rest of language lacked.” I say, “Yes, Cratylus, you’re absolutely right. It is Platonism.” Then you’re somewhat proud and somewhat confused as to why I give up so early, so I rephrase: “I’m not talking about Forms, I’m talking about people imagining. What I’m saying is that participating in Cratylism is one step in becoming a self. Let yourself remember that we were all Platonists once. Should it surprise you that it returns?” “When were we Platonists?” you ask. I say, “When our mothers first placed an object in our view an said, ‘This is a...’” Then you leave the café.]

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Finally, we have the means to understand the colophon of doubt. The colophon of doubt is not a mere image. It does speak, though not in any ordinary way. All the colophon of doubt says is “This!” And it says it so forcefully that it cannot even articulate the word. The colophon of doubt disavows that it speaks. (no wonder we had such difficulty trying to comprehend what it could signify.) It is in order to ensure that its viewer imagine the harmonious page that the colophon must keep mute about its process. To lay bare how it creates the images of security would undermine its task.

Thus, in the tension between the colophon of doubt, we find a compelling and radical revision of how Descartes found himself to exist. This revision does not claim that what Descartes said was false — indeed it was perfectly true — but one where the I who thinks and the one who is are no longer neatly contained, as Descartes hoped they would be, but irrevocably split, like the text and the colophon that doubts it.

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"The assumption of the rectorate is the commitment to the

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spiritual leadership of this institution of higher learning. The Benjamin, Walter. "The Life of Students" in *Selected Writings*: 1913-1926.

following of teachers and students awakens and grows critique from outside."

strong only from a true and joint rootedness in the as the students' bulwark against "alien" demands. So our concern here must be with inner unity, not

essence of the German university. This essence, or intellectualism — as commonly feared — but is a legitimate criticism, since science is normally adduced

however, gains clarity, rank, and power only when first indifference. To measure student life by the yardstick of this science does not necessarily imply any paralogism

of all and at all times the leaders are themselves led — an idea. The concept of "science" or scholarly discipline serves primarily to conceal a deep-rooted, bourgeois

led by that unyielding spiritual mission that forces What distinguishes student life is the opposite of that: it is the will to submit to principle, to identify completely with

the fate of the German people to bear the stamp of in distinguishing between specific problems — of science, of politics, or ethics — if the courage to submit is missing overall.

its history. The question to address is that of the conscious unity of student life. This is the starting point for there is no point

Do we know about this spiritual mission? the future from its deformation in the present by an act of cognition. This must be the exclusive task of criticism.

Whether we do or not, the question must be to focus on the system as a whole. So long as the preconditions needed for this are absent, the only possibility is to liberate

faced: are we, the body of teachers and students stout-hearted will submit. The only way to deal with the historical significance of the student life and the university is

of this "high" school, truly and jointly rooted in the nature of things. This crisis will lead on to the resolution that will overwhelm the craven-hearted and to which the

essence of the German university? Does this manifesto: each of these is as futile as the other. But it casts light on the crisis that hitherto has lain buried in the

essence have genuine strength to stamp our being metaphysical state of history. Only then will it be possible. Such a description is neither a call to arms nor a

(Dasein)? No Doubt, only if we most deeply will this their present existence can be used as a metaphor, as an image of the highest

essence. But who would doubt this? "Self-governance" is the trouble to describe the contemporary significance of students and the university, of the form of

commonly seen as the dominant characteristic of the structure, as with the messianic domain of the French Revolution. It is worth taking

university's essence; it if to be preserved. However—have we customs, and so on), in fact, it eludes them. Rather, the task is to grasp its metaphysical

considered fully what this claim to self-governance demands on us. be captured in terms of the details (the history) of institutions,

the highest school of the German people? Can we even know this absolute, to make it visible and dominant in the present. This condition cannot

without the most constant and unsparing self-examination. historical task is to disclose this immanent state of perfection and make it

Neither an awareness of the present conditions of the university, nor exorciated, and ridiculed ideas and products of the creative mind. The

an acquaintance with its earlier history are enough to guarantee a sufficient deeply rooted in every man in the most endangered,

knowledge of its essence — unless we first delimit what this essence is to be, manifest themselves as formless progressive tendencies, but are

clearly and unsparingly: and having thus delimited it, will it, and in such philosophers. The elements of the ultimate condition do not

willing, assert ourselves."

Heidegger, Martin. "The Self-Assertion of the German University" in that have traditionally been found in the utopian images of

Review of *Metaphysics* Summer 1986. history appears to be concentrated in a single focal point like those

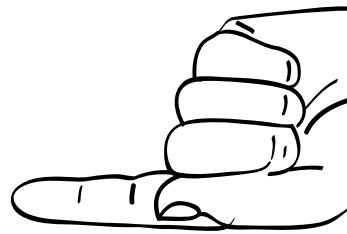
"The following remarks, in contrast, delineate a particular condition in which

The doubter is forced to admit that he has only the doubting. The I that secures is as an inarticulate figure at the margin that can do nothing more than point at all the thinking that has come before and say "This is what I am." Even this move, though, is darker than an act of minimal confidence. To say

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"this is what I am" is also to say "that is no longer me." Thus the colophon has radical implications. Like the colophon, a new image is created—the image of a complete self—to conceal the flaw in the thought that has been left behind. This image is how we



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[COLOPHON continued from page 89]

believe we can think, even when we cannot access what we say. To have a self is to flee from what one is. And to have a history of thought is to disavow memory.

Now, against today's opinion that philosophy is "exhausted," that culture should no longer care, and that we have already seen the "last metaphysician of the West" come and go, can we ask if, tomorrow, our typographers will be thought to have been the first to figure things out?

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