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Technology and the Romanian Revolution:
performative contradiction in the nation-state

Jolan Bogdan

What is modern technology?
Martin Heidegger.¹

The line comes to exist politically at the moment in which
someone passes or is refused rights of passage.
Judith Butler.²

The Romanian media did not report on the protest that began in Timisoara on 15 December 1989. Instead, calls went out to the nation to resist imperialist and fascist forces working to undermine the great Romanian state. Accustomed to decoding messages of state propaganda, this message and the absence of coverage was precisely what the people needed to confirm rumours that something was happening. When Timisoara lost telephone connection with the rest of the nation on 18 December, all suspicions were confirmed.

A few days later, Nicolae Ceausescu appeared on the balcony of the Central Committee building in Bucharest, and the crowd gathered there to show support instead shouted out against him. This unimaginable act caused the cameras to momentarily falter. After a gap of a few minutes, the cameras resumed filming. Millions watched as Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu fled. The following morning, after news of the Defence Minister’s death, the army joined the people in support of the revolution. On 22 December, the people took over the television station. Live broadcasts aired from inside the studio, and news anchors apologized for having deceived the public under Ceausescu’s regime.³

Many questions concerning the authenticity of the revolution link back to this moment, when the revolution moved from unfolding in the streets, to unfolding on the screen. Events began to emerge retroactively, as the belated coverage of the Timisoara protests finally arrived. So blatantly were the ‘facts’ distorted that, together with the spectacle of the Ceausescus’ execution on Christmas Day, western viewers could not ignore the fact that something was not quite right. The Romanian Revolution soon developed a reputation in the West as having been completely staged.

Indeed, several significant references to this problem have been made in works of contemporary critical theory. Bernard Stiegler, in Echographies of Television, succinctly...
summarizes the root cause for doubting the authenticity of the Romanian Revolution, and how this doubt is inextricably bound to the crucial role played by technology:

The role of television in the 1989 Romanian ‘revolution’ remains the object of intense scrutiny and debate. Among the most critical and contested events was the televising of an apparent massacre of antigovernment demonstrators by former communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu’s security forces in Timisoara, on December 16, 1989, in which it was initially reported 40,000 to 60,000 people had been killed. Considerable evidence emerged, after the fact, suggesting that this and other massacres had been carefully staged, and, in some cases, simply invented, and that the so-called revolution was not a popular uprising but a coup.4

In The Illusion of the End, Jean Baudrillard has a chapter entitled ‘The Timisoara massacre’, devoted to highlighting the simulacra of the Romanian Revolution. Referring to the hasty trial and public execution of the former dictator, Baudrillard comments, ‘It is not the judicial procedure itself which is scandalous but the video tape, unacceptable as the only, bloodless trace of a bloody event. In the eyes of the whole world, this will remain an event forever suspect, for the sole reason of its – strangely obscene – scenic abduction.’5 The significance of the media cannot be overlooked for having directly contributed to the way in which the revolution unfolded and its profound influence on political developments which followed, both internally and internationally.

Finally, Giorgio Agamben, in Means without Ends: Notes on Politics, emphasizes the link between the rise of the media and the decline of democracy, which is one of the central concerns of the discussion of technology. After observing that media rules public opinion, and that the West has already forsaken democracy in this process, Agamben dubs Timisoara as ‘the Auschwitz of the age of the spectacle’:

For the first time in the history of humankind, corpses that had just been buried or lined up on the morgue’s tables were hastily exhumed and tortured in order to simulate, in front of the video cameras, the genocide that legitimized the new regime. What the entire world was watching live on television, thinking it was the real truth, was in reality the absolute nontruth; and although the falsification appeared to be sometimes quite obvious, it was nevertheless legitimized as true by the media’s world system, so that it would be clear that the true was, by now, nothing more than a moment within the necessary movement of the false. In this way, truth and falsity become indistinguishable from each other and the spectacle legitimized itself solely through the spectacle.6

These passages illustrate the significance of this event, and call for an interrogation of the theoretical frameworks which are being deployed for analysis. Before the Romanian revolution can be dismissed as a coup, a simulacra or a falsification, we must fully engage with the complexity of this very recent political example. Given that...
each of the above readings hinge on the role of television, interrogating the nature of technology emerges as a crucial first step towards an investigation of how political identity is formed.

Radical transformations in material culture over recent centuries have visible consequences in the realm of the political. This essay seeks to interrogate accounts of the political, specifically via the nation-state, and the way in which we might conceive of technology as an entity in its own right, separate from specific technological manifestations. Indeed, the technology of political identity is at stake here, and that technology is the essential technology, with a most significant impact on the development of the political. Certainly the technology of identity is responsible for both political and technological development.

Judith Butler, in her recent book *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, discusses performative contradiction in terms of political activism, which I juxtapose in this paper with Heidegger’s concept of Enframing, one of his defining attributes of technology, as discussed in *The Question Concerning Technology*. Notwithstanding the unorthodox reading of Butler alongside Heidegger, such an approach is precisely what is needed in order to develop a politics of technology that is post-identitarian.

While these thinkers lay claim to and elicit followers from divergent philosophical legacies, these two specific texts can be troubled to reveal certain unexpected congruencies. For Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* emerged after his post-war turn. In this, and his other later works, Heidegger becomes more and more concerned with the consequences of technology, and specifically the danger which accompanies Enframing. He spent increasingly more time emphasizing the saving power of *techne* [art], and elaborating the problems which are inherent to modern technology. For Heidegger, technology describes the relationship between Being’s concealment and unconcealment, and therefore is the process governing the ways in which beings manifest in the (political) world. For Butler, though this claim could be construed as premature, I suggest that the discussion of performative contradiction could also mark a turn in her work. This turn would represent a move away from the performative (in *Bodies that Matter* and *Gender Trouble*, for example), to more challenging discussions of self-negation as a necessary prerequisite of self, which emerges perhaps most prominently in *The Psychic Life of Power*.

As a form of power, subjection is paradoxical. To be dominated by a power external to oneself is a familiar and agonizing form power takes. To find, however, that what ‘one’ is, one’s very formation as a subject, is in some sense dependent upon that very power is quite another. We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are.
This passage complicates the master/slave relationship by emphasizing the mutually constitutive aspects of their dynamic. The power structure between oppressor and oppressed is also exposed as a necessary and possibly even voluntary relation. The oppressed depends on the oppressor, but not simply for securing the means of her survival (i.e., I am dependent on my master for food, shelter, etc. because he has taken away the possibility of my securing these things for myself), but the oppressed harbours and preserves her subjection in her being. This is not an argument in favour of subjugation, but rather an exposing of the relationship between subjecthood and subjection.

The account is given from the perspective of one subjected. This is necessarily the case, as the master does not exist as a stable external entity. Consequently, the instability of the position of slave is also exposed. Describing Hegel’s account from The Phenomenology of Spirit, Butler writes, ‘The master, who at first appears to be “external” to the slave, reemerges as the slave’s own conscience.’ The external oppressor becomes the internal enforcer. In terms of the Romanian revolution, the people occupied the position of slaves under Ceausescu. But the events of the revolution, the ambiguities and false reports referenced above by Stiegler, Agamben and Baudrillard, were committed not by the dictator (and not even in his name) but by the people. This implies that the external master is not easily locatable outside the people, and therefore calls into question the aims of the revolution, and of the sovereignty it seeks to undermine. Before connecting this turn to Butler’s discussion of performative contradiction in Who Sings the Nation-State?, consider an analogous process in Heidegger.

In The Question Concerning Technology, Heidegger describes technology as a process which reveals, brings into being, something which is hidden. A being is brought out of concealment, into unconcealment. The way in which this unconcealment occurs, the ethics of this unconcealment, determine whether Enframing enters into the dynamic. If the unconcealment happens through a ‘letting be’, then the relation is ethical. If, however, the unconcealing is forced, the being brought forth is enslaved, seen only as a commodity to be exploited.

For Heidegger, Enframing is a necessary consequence of modern technology, which challenges humanity to transform nature into a commodity. This transformation comes at a price, as the means employed to further this goal of unconcealment result in the loss of sovereignty. Nature, through this process of commodification, transforms into use-value, and loses its autonomy. Whether the tools used employ the aid of factory workers, machines or political bodies, any entity which is not yet present, but capable of being brought into being, becomes a standing-reserve. The consequence of this transformation into a standing-reserve is the loss of subjecthood, which applies both to the one employing technology to this end, and the one being employed. In this sense of Enframing, the one employing technology is the master, and the one being unconcealed is the slave:

Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature can this ordering revealing happen. If man is challenged, ordered to do this, then does not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing-reserve? The current talk about human resources, about the supply of patients for a clinic,
gives evidence of this. The forester who, in the wood, measures the felled timber and to all appearances walks the same forest path in the same way as did his grandfather is today commanded by profit-making in the lumber industry, whether he knows it or not.\textsuperscript{12}

It is worth noting that Heidegger is concerned with the relation towards the object as well as the relation towards the individual. The ethics governing the treatment of one also extends to the treatment of the other. If the earth is set upon to unconceal her resources, (gold, timber, etc.) and seen as a standing-reserve, this exploitation necessarily spreads to the individual. Ultimately, man enslaves himself when he Enframes nature. The conditions governing the subject/subjection paradigm in Butler extend to the Enframed/Enframer paradigm in Heidegger. In both instances, the line is blurred, the master is revealed as the slave, and vice versa.

But nature is complicated, especially in its relationship towards the political.\textsuperscript{13} In \textit{Who Sings the Nation-State?}, Butler critiques Agamben’s claim of ‘bare life’ (we might trace Agamben’s position here back to a Spinozan state of nature) with respect to the nation-state’s treatment of its marginalized members. She takes issue with the idea that when a nation-state expels a being, that being is placed back into nature, into what essentially amounts to a state without politics. Butler argues that this state of ‘nature’ is precisely enforcing a state of subjection, and is far from being a realm without politics:

\begin{quote}
It may be the case that one crucial and central operation of sovereign power is the capacity to suspend the rights of individuals or groups or to cast them out of a polity. When cast out, one is cast out into a space or a condition of bare life, and the \textit{bios} of the person is no longer linked to its political status. By ‘political’ here is meant membership in the ranks of citizenship. But does this move not precisely place an unacceptable juridical restriction on the political?\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Consider Spinoza’s treatment of this process. In \textit{A Political Treatise}, having previously given account of how man, in a state of nature, joins forces with other men in order to ensure survival, and this group invests their power in a sovereign, Spinoza describes the natural rights of this sovereign, in this state of the political, which emerges (is unconcealed) from the state of nature.\textsuperscript{15} The sovereign acts well within his authority in punishing and expelling those members of the commonwealth who are deemed undesirable. ‘And so, as those who are without fear or hope are so far independent […] they are, therefore, enemies of the dominion […] and may lawfully be coerced by force.’\textsuperscript{16}

Butler, in her example, references illegal Mexican immigrants in California, as well as Middle Eastern hostages being imprisoned by the US outside of its borders.\textsuperscript{17} In both cases, she is concerned with the state of powerlessness being imposed on the stateless subject. The question, essentially, is: How natural is the state of the stateless being? In Heideggerian terms, we might ask how a being that has been brought out of unconcealment by force, could then be forced back into a state of concealment. Applying this framework to Spinoza, one might conclude that forming a commonwealth is not a forcing, but a letting be. The state is unconcealed according to the wishes of the individuals forging a social contract. But even so, the sovereign’s
The act of expelling members of this state could be seen as an attempt to reconceal them, if the site of the political state is seen as the location of unconcealment. Politics is brought forth from the state of nature. And given that a political act is required to expel individuals from this state, the sovereign’s order to cast out individuals desiring to dwell in this state of unconcealment (since concealment is arguably the only state beyond the unconcealed) might already be read as a performative contradiction.18

This performative contradiction by the sovereign is, not coincidentally, also the moment of revolution in *A Political Treatise*:

> It comes to be considered, that those things are not so much within the commonwealth’s right, which cause indignation in the majority. For it is certain, that by the guidance of nature men conspire together, either through common fear, or with the desire to avenge some common hurt; and as the right of the commonwealth is determined by the common power of the multitude, it is certain that the power and right of the commonwealth are so far diminished, as it gives occasion for many to conspire together.19

The sovereign is vested with complete authority and power, and therefore acts with the unquestioned authority of the multitude when dispensing justice. If the reading of Spinoza stops here, it is easy to see where accusations of rational positivism might arise. Butler’s critique of bare life, in any case, is directed at Agamben, and not Spinoza. And as the above passage illustrates, the Spinozan sovereign willingly relinquishes power when he engages in actions which lead to the multitude conspiring against him. Spinoza is clear on the fact that once chosen, the sovereign retains power exclusively. The individual retains no rights to speak against the sovereign. The sovereign is the only one who can cause the revolution, and he does so by acting in a way that is not in the best interest of the multitude. This second gesture of performative contradiction comes directly from Spinoza, not his sovereign.

A comparable moment of revolution is harder to spot in Heidegger, but we might treat the passage from concealment to unconcealment, and vice versa, as turnings which revolve around manifestations of Being. This process, of course, bears the name *technology*. If it occurs through force, Enframing accompanies it. The more pertinent question with respect to Heidegger might be whether Enframing always accompanies technology. ‘Enframing comes to presence as the danger… the danger, namely, Being itself endangering itself in the truth of its coming to presence, remains veiled and disguised.’20 This passage implies that for Being, unconcealment is dangerous. If Being is forced into unconcealment, technology is a sort of diversionary tactic which shifts the attention away from Being, and onto the one attempting to impose unconcealment. Ultimately, since Being is only able to have this conflict with itself, technology becomes the name governing the internal conflict referenced earlier with the master/slave dialectic.

Enframing is the disguise adopted by Being, shifting attention away from itself. This ‘itself’ is an infinitely problematic pronoun, capturing the essence of performative contradiction:
This disguising is what is most dangerous in the danger. In keeping with this disguising of the danger through the ordering belonging to Enframing, it seems time and time again as though technology were a means in the hands of man. But, in truth, it is the coming to presence of man that is now being ordered forth to lend a hand to the coming to presence of technology.21

The turn now extends not only to the Enframer and the Enframed, but technology itself emerges as a subject, employing man in order to unconceal itself: the object becomes a subject, who in turn becomes a subjector. Heidegger’s state of nature, from which unconcealing occurs, is no less complicated than Spinoza’s. A unitary stable identity does not exist in either text. The position between master and slave, the state and the stateless, is constantly in flux. ‘Does this mean that man, for better or worse, is helplessly delivered over to technology? No, it means the direct opposite; and not only that, but essentially it means something more than the opposite, because it means something different.’22

The distinction between the opposite and the different opens up a crucial gap leading back to Butler’s discussion of the nation-state, and specifically to her interrogation of the hyphen connecting these two words through their opposition and difference. We might extend this gap to the one placing the state of nature in opposition to the state of the political, or to the gap governing technology and politics. The difference in these terms does not necessarily lead to a straightforward opposition. Certainly in terms of concealment and unconcealment as manifestations of Being, opposition is strictly internalized.

The state is not always the nation-state. We have, for instance, non-national states, and we have security states that actively contest the national basis of the state. So, already, the term can be dissociated from the term ‘nation’ and the two can be cobbled together through a hyphen, but what work does the hyphen do? Does the hyphen finesse the relation that needs to be explained?23

Is this hyphen a technology, one which unconceals the fusion between the site of unconcealment (state) with the politics governing its unconcealment (nation)? Furthermore, does the hyphen act as a diversion, drawing attention away from differences between these terms, by placing it as a unified, stable identity in opposition to the state of nature, which is supposedly governed by more brutal natural laws? What might these natural laws look like? For Spinoza, it is a simple might makes right, together with the complex right to join forces with other individuals in the establishment of a commonwealth. For Heidegger, we might consider the state of Being as a sort of nature, but it would be a mistake to think of nature as Being, or to think of rights as being limited to nature. Natural law might perhaps approximate to the ethics governing the process of unconcealment, and therefore the ethics of technology, but while ethics and law might be cobbled together in this sentence, that ought not detract from their differences, which might not amount precisely to an opposition.

For Butler, rights are also not aligned with nature, but are discussed rather in terms of a right to rights, which necessarily supersedes all specific rights. ‘That first right would
never be authorized by any state, even as it might be a petition to or for authorization. The second set of rights is the rights that would be authorized by some rule of law of some kind. The similarity in structure between Butler’s definition of rights and Heidegger’s definition of technology should not be overlooked. For Heidegger, “Technology is not equivalent to the essence of technology. When we are seeking the essence of “tree”, we have to become aware that That which pervades every tree, as tree, is not itself a tree that can be encountered among all the other trees.” Therefore, the first right, and the first technology, are both separate and distinct from all the specific rights and technologies which manifest in the world of the political. And yet, each manifestation carries within itself something of its essential nature, something which makes unitary consciousness or stable identity impossible, something which opens up the gap to performative contradiction.

The need and the possibility of performative contradiction arise simultaneously, when a specific state’s specific rights threaten to deprive an individual of their original right. The first right is the one upon which all other rights are founded, and therefore, any right that seeks to supersede its conditions of possibility engages in a performative contradiction. The paradox of this event, to quote Butler’s example of illegal Mexicans protesting for rights, lies in the fact that:

They have no right to free speech under the law although they’re speaking freely, precisely in order to demand the right to speak freely. They are exercising these rights, which does not mean that they will ‘get’ them. The demand is the incipient moment of the rights claim, its exercise, but not for that reason its efficacity.

How does this process unfold with respect to technology? When does a specific technology attempt to supersede its conditions of possibility, and engage in performative contradiction? Given the nature of Enframing, and the disguise Being employs to conceal itself from unconcealment, one suggestion might be that the essence of technology itself is a performative contradiction, as it conceals and unconceals simultaneously. By way of an example, let’s consider a moment where technology and politics converge: namely, the moment of televising revolution.

What happens when revolution is televised? In order to demonstrate the concealing and unconcealing power of technology when it is bound up with the image, I will return to a concrete political example. In the case demonstrated by Harun Farocki’s documentary of the Romanian revolution of 1989, Videograms of a Revolution (1992), the televising of the event compensated for political shortcomings. The events of a revolution, any revolution, are difficult to determine and classify. The medium of video renders this classification process slightly less problematic. Fact is established as that which has been captured on film. Beyond that, fact is established as that which one has access to, edits, and strings together to form a cohesive narrative. Such is the case in the present example.

Among the clips compiled by Farocki is the pivotal moment when Romanian television turned in upon itself, and broadcast the event of its own revolution. The film shows when the television studio in Bucharest was taken over on 22 December, capturing the
discussions and preparations being made before the cameras went live. On several occasions, the revolutionaries began to address the nation, to declare victory and rally support, but the cameras were not ready, and the message had to be repeated. The raw footage captures the silence, with the revolutionaries waiting for the camera, without which the revolution could not continue. Prior to this moment, Videograms contains perspectives from several amateur cameras, tracing their movements throughout the city. After the television takeover, there is only one camera, speaking for the people, with one sovereign voice, broadcasting the revolution. When the Ceausescus are captured, tried and executed, within the span of three days, there are no amateur cameras present. The execution is broadcast on 26 December, and the recently liberated Romanian media is gathered in a room, with their professional cameras, filming the scene on television, as it is being aired to the nation.

The media (as technology) was able to broadcast itself in the process of revolution, and to represent itself, as the Romanian public, revolting, to the Romanian public. But the media was already divided from itself by the 26th, when the footage about the former dictator was aired by a sort of meta-media, not the ones which were filming the protests in the streets days before. The revolution was unconcealed, by the revolutionaries, via the media. What relation did these revolutionaries have to Romania, and where might Romanian identity be located during this revolution? On 21 December, Ceausescu addressed the nation during a rally for support against the Timisoara protests. He extended warm, ‘revolutionary greetings’ to the crowd gathered below the Central Committee building.28 His greeting was revolutionary. The crowd was also revolutionary. How could a stable identity be distilled from these events? Performative contradiction provides a theoretical platform which might reflect more closely the mechanisms at play here, which transcend any noncontradictory paradigm of sovereignty and identity.

The complexity of this gesture embodies the inherent movement of technology, captured in the motion of unconcealment. That which is elusive, complex and anything but quantifiable, becomes transcribed into an observable and measurable narrative. Heidegger provides an account of man’s tendency to quantify nature through the example of physics, which is presented as an exact science:

In a similar way the unconcealment in accordance with which nature presents itself as a calculable complex of the effects of forces can indeed permit correct determinations; but precisely through these successes the danger can remain that in the midst of all that is correct the true will withdraw.29

Video has never pretended to be an exact science, though it has on occasion claimed to capture the truth. The danger implied in the passage above applies also to the moving image, it being no less technological in nature then the sciences. Despite the captured footage, despite the calculations, the true might remain concealed. Man’s ambition to unconceal is the source of the danger, when it is followed by a disregard for that which was unconcealed. This danger leads back to the previous discussion of standing-reserve, and man’s relationship to it, to the object, and to the loss of autonomy.
As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve.30

Who will take man as only a standing-reserve? Other men, like himself, who are only capable of seeing him as a means to an end. According to Heidegger, there is nothing inherent in technology which predetermines such a course of events, though it is the technological process of Enframing, which tends to see only one option, namely the one that it is pursuing. Enframing has a limiting characteristic that can lead to the myopic view that everything is standing-reserve. As a saving potentiality, Heidegger identifies the connection between art and technology via techne, the word which at one time described art: ‘There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name techne. Once that revealing that brings forth truth into the splendor of radiant appearing also was called techne.’31 Art is linked to technology because of the bringing forth, the unconcealment that both are engaged with. However, unlike technology, art does not share the limitation Enframing imposes on potentiality. The openness Heidegger sees in art, he believes can liberate Enframing and reinstate subjecthood into the standing-reserve. This openness can potentially counteract the danger inherent in Enframing.

Video contains both the Enframing aspect of technology, which modern technology is especially susceptible to, and the openness of art. ‘Whether art may be granted this highest possibility of its essence in the midst of the extreme danger, no one can tell.’32 The danger lies in the loss of autonomy, to which art – being intertwined with modern technology – is equally susceptible, despite its saving potential. Do documentaries such as Videograms fall under the saving possibility of art, or the limitation of technological Enframing? Does each viewer make the individual choice to see the screen with openness, or does the screen have to present itself as open?

The answer is, necessarily, both. Such is the nature of performative contradiction. The video footage reframed by Farocki’s film captures the revolution, Enframing it, and by this gesture of containment, undermining its spontaneity. Revolution is nothing if not unexpected. The decision by specific Romanian subjects to broadcast themselves performing a revolution elicited concerns that if the revolution needed to be performed for the cameras, then it might not have been a revolution. The irony is that revolution is always a performance. The problem here is that it was performed too consciously. It was performed twice, and therefore the performance was contradictory. But isn’t performative contradiction necessarily the only site of political change?

Once we reject the view that claims that no political position can rest on performative contradiction, and allow the performative function as a claim and an act whose effects unfold in time, then we can actually entertain the opposite thesis, namely, that there can be no radical politics of change without performative contradiction.33
But just like Heidegger’s hope that art can save humanity from Enframing, performative contradiction is also problematic. These two gestures engage each other ceaselessly, each troubling the stability of the other.

In Enframing, that unconcealment comes to pass in conformity with which the work of modern technology reveals the real as standing-reserve. This work is therefore neither only a human activity nor a mere means within such an activity.\(^{34}\)

In the case of the Romanian revolution, the reality of the revolution was transformed into the standing-reserve of the video footage. But, the contradiction of this process contains within itself a degree of awareness which might well act as a marker of actual change.

In this example, revolution is a self-overcoming, a performative contradiction. Revolution is an age old technology of performative contradiction, as Spinoza alluded to, along with Heidegger. The terminology in each example differs, but the Romanian revolution acts as the hyphen bringing these traditions together at the same time that it pushes them apart. What Butler points out, namely that performative contradiction is essential to revolution, allows a reinterpretation of the revolution in Romania. The events unconcealed by the media in 1989 question the very nature of sovereignty, scrambling the frequency of agency in the nation-state, with respect to the locations of master and slave. Is the hyphen connecting nation with state a technology, one which conceals the contradictions inherent to identity and location, brought together into the sovereignty of the political? The hyphen is the site of contradiction, Enframing political identity. Enframing contains contradiction, but performative contradiction disrupts the sovereignty of Enframing. Sovereignty itself is as disruptive as revolution, as demonstrated by Spinoza, along with Ceausescu’s revolutionary greeting to the revolutionaries. These events, concerning the location and identity of the nation-state, lead necessarily to an interrogation of subjecthood, and a post-identitarian politics of technology.

Notes

7 Though this book was co-authored with Gayatri Spivak, I am only focusing on sections written by Butler, for her direct discussion of performative contradiction. Spivak, in the second half of the book, focuses her critique on capital, which is no less pertinent to the questions raised here, ‘Judith speaks of a right inhabiting a performative contradiction. My point would be that those rights that are now in the declarative, in a universal declaration rather than a performative contradiction, are predicated on the failure of both state...
Subjection (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp.1–2 [original emphasis].


Judith Butler, The Psychic Life of Power, p.3.

A note on translation and choice of words: adhering to conventions in Heidegger studies would require using ‘fusis’ rather than ‘nature’ when discussing this aspect of his work. For a deeper investigation of the relation between ‘fusis’ and techné, see his Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), Section 97, for example. With respect to the limited scope of this essay, I hope experts on the topic will permit me this oversimplification. Also, note the use of Being, rather than Dasein, etc.


Further to note 11 on ‘fusis’, our initial task will consist in examining the origins of modern technology, which Heidegger describes in the primordial ‘experience’ of Being as [fusis], together with the human manners of comportment to this the primordial manifestness of Being.’ John Loscerbo, Being and Technology, p.3. Also, ‘the right to rights, emphasizing the first, is one that’s not yet guaranteed by the law, but not for that reason “natural” either.’ Judith Butler, Who Signs the Nation-State, p.65.

The use of ‘man’ does not reflect a lack of awareness in problematizing gender, but rather an activation of the historical and linguistic context.


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