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# THE CONSEQUENCES OF DECONSTRUCTION

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## SUMMARY

My investigation asks, 'What are the consequences of deconstruction?' Such a question asks at the same time, 'What difference (or what differences) does deconstruction make?,' and, 'How is deconstruction different from other things?' By way of a close analysis of the identifying and differentiating processes which set deconstruction apart, and which also permit us to determine the consequences brought about by deconstruction *in particular*, I come to focus on the difficult question of the *different difference of deconstruction*.

Though the impetus of this question drives the inquiry down a number of paths towards its goal, often the determination of the different difference of deconstruction is a function of a key distinction. There is a moment in Paul de Man's reading of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (in 'The Rhetoric of Blindness') when de Man considers the distinction between a *deliberate* and a *passive* knowledge. Clearly, the different difference of deconstruction is tied both to the deconstruction *and* the reinstitution of this fundamental distinction, which remains active, overtly and covertly, throughout my investigation.

Part One of my dissertation addresses the question, 'What is deconstruction?,' in three chapters: firstly, a short history of the different difference of deconstruction which selects a handful of moments in deconstruction's institutional propagation; secondly, a reading of Julian Wolfreys' remarks in the early chapters of *Deconstruction•Derrida* to the effect that deconstruction is neither a thing nor a method; thirdly, an examination of a response to the question, 'What is deconstruction?,' which replies without hesitation, 'Deconstruction is a word.'

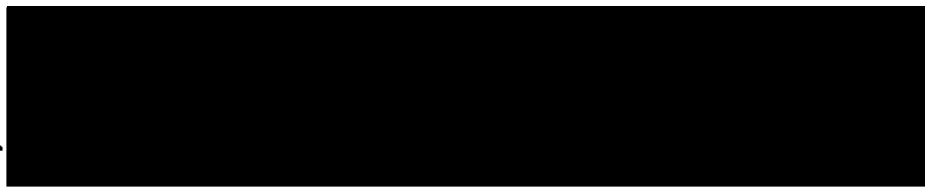
It becomes clear that the difference or different difference of deconstruction is implicated in the tense relationship between words and things. Part Two formulates a precise account of the representational (or referential) mechanism and its aporia in three chapters: firstly, a consideration of the logic of the word, with specific reference to the rule in analytic philosophy marking the distinction between use and mention; secondly, an invocation of the aporia of representation in Kant's first *Critique*; finally, a reading of Hegel and Heidegger on the relation of identity and difference, which addresses the question of the different difference of deconstruction at its most perplexing and intractable point.



## CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

I hereby certify that the dissertation entitled THE CONSEQUENCES OF DECONSTRUCTION and submitted for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this dissertation (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for the award of any other degree to any other university or institution.

Signed .

A large black rectangular box redacting the signature of the candidate.

Date . 30 AUGUST 2000 . . . . .

## PREFACE

Though the title of my dissertation announces a concern with the consequences of deconstruction, I should emphasize from the outset that the project which finds its realization here is not oriented towards a comprehensive (that is, extensive) account of deconstruction or of Derrida's writings, nor does it attempt to make a thorough survey of the reception of deconstruction. Similarly, an endeavor to describe, interpret, mobilize, criticize, modify or exemplify the Derridean or deconstructive terminology on a large scale falls outside the range of my project. Some of these terms are mentioned here of course, but they are not analyzed extensively or systematically. These are fine and necessary tasks, to be sure, but my preoccupations are much narrower.

The themes of my inquiry emerge and develop according to the imperative, announced in the introduction, which calls upon deconstruction (and it must be said not only deconstruction) to *make a difference*. This is the central issue. There are *consequences* of deconstruction *only* when it has done just this—when it has made a difference. In short, the *consequences* of deconstruction are *(its) differences*. If a map of the consequences of deconstruction is a complex system or quasi-system of differences, then how are these differences to be determined as such and organized into chains or networks of antecedent causes and consequential effects? From the countless opportunities to pursue this question, I have chosen a mere handful, which must then serve an exemplary role.

Admittedly, there are elements in Chapter One, for example, which might be construed as directed towards something more comprehensive. The first section of Chapter One observes an early deconstruction in its contact with francophone structuralism, on one side of the Atlantic, and in its contact with anglophone New Criticism on the other, but if this creates the expectation of an exhaustive investigation of the origins or reception of deconstruction then I must apologize in advance, for this is

not in fact the route the analysis takes. I have no doubt that a detailed map of the consequences of deconstruction would be an invaluable scholarly resource, and I look forward to the fruits of such a venture should it be undertaken. Yet the outcome of such a project would be at least partly determined by a significant *relation* to a range of conceptual assumptions, and it is this relation, as it happens, that does preoccupy me here. Hence my project, addressing the *question* of the consequences of deconstruction, is in reality a protracted propaedeutic, if you like, to this 'detailed map' of the consequences of deconstruction. One could say then that it is a question of the consequences of deconstruction *in theory*, as it were.

It is not the case, however, that a concern with underlying 'conceptual assumptions' is necessarily a prelude to a *formalism*, though it might seem that way at first. This is why I stress the word 'relation,' and already there is a difficult question here about consequences, which are intrinsically relational entities. A discourse in the tradition of the classical Kantian critique addresses conceptual assumptions (or conditions) as a means retrospectively to anticipate consequences. Can we say that the result of a certain project is *determined* by its conceptual assumptions—and perhaps all the more so if these assumptions remain implicit? Conceptual assumptions are conditions of possibility, and their relation to what *eventuates* is as intricate and aporetic as the relation of the transcendental is to manifestation. What 'eventuates' is the event, and the event, as event, both severs every connection (it does not then 'eventuate') and at the same time refers us to another place, the place where the event was made possible. The event is a signal. It becomes apparent then that this relation—of conceptual assumptions or transcendental conditions to what eventuates—is a *referential* or a *representational* one, and is therefore correlated with what I call the 'representational mechanism.'

How is the relation of conceptual assumptions to what eventuates *representational*, as I have claimed? It is simply inasmuch as the *conditions* of an event come to stand for the event. As much as the event is a singular catastrophe, without precedent, an originary orphan, the event is also referred to its conditions. The event is not self-contained or autonomous, for instance, but merely stands for its causes. There are many ways to express this type of relation, or dependency, but there is no need to venture too far in this direction just yet. There will be plenty of time for this kind of excursion in the main body of the work. Let me say at this stage merely that the limitation I have

acknowledged with regard to comprehensiveness is challenged by the intensification of a *conceptual* investigation, whose concerns infiltrate every labor of comprehension, however extensive. This is my transparent concession to the seduction of formalism, which is so hard to resist at the best of times.

The central concerns of my dissertation—focused on the question of the different difference of deconstruction, preoccupied with the aporia of representation, and looking at a number of issues around deconstruction that were prominent in the 1980s—may have for some readers a whiff of anachronism about them. For some, the issues in PART ONE may well seem like an extended trip down a memory lane which was a fruitless cul-de-sac even then. PART TWO maintains its focus on the aporia of representation, a story that has been told by deconstructors and others in many variations. Hasn't deconstruction moved on from these earlier reflections? Doesn't it now respond to an entirely new set of concerns? Of course, though things have undoubtedly moved on, something in the movement of moving on has not moved on, and this conflict or collusion of sameness and difference is, in part, what interests me, as much as it has always interested deconstruction as well. I must admit that here too there is still the ever-present risk of accentuating a kind of formalism over the unquestionable virtue of *singularity*, of the singularity—in itself a formalism to defeat all formalisms. Perhaps the one who can finally reconcile these contending inclinations has yet to walk amongst us.

Let us not be deterred then by the all too familiar conjunction of the words *representation* and *deconstruction*, for the two do seem to go together in an essential way. Like old friends, they may even share the very same aporia. What would this mean? Would it mean that they are in fact the same thing? It means at the very least that we can never afford to consider one without the other. Strangely though, deconstruction undergoes its transformation from the evil demon of unraveling into the valiant knight of justice and responsibility only inasmuch as it forgets representation, at the very place where it differentiates or would differentiate itself. Reminding deconstruction of (its) representation—needless to say a challenging task—therefore involves both a resistance to deconstruction and *another* deconstruction, both a resistance to the *transformation* of deconstruction and *another* transformation of deconstruction, if such a thing is possible.

This is a difficult terrain which nothing can prepare us for. Have Derrida's frequent reminders about the irreducible alterity of the future not prepared us for it in advance?

At the beginning of Chapter Four, I recall the promise made by anglophone philosophy of language to *represent representation*. This was its goal in other words. But, following the interruption of this ambitious project, it would seem that even the subsequent and less sanguine promise to give the *aporia* of representation a representation remains unfulfilled. Hence this secondary project, which seeks to *represent the failure of the attempt to represent representation*, continues to exert a certain inexorable pressure, despite an exhaustion of means and despite the disconcerting ubiquity of the *aporia*, which can hardly be confined to mere instances of it. The promise to represent the *aporia* of representation issues in a singular fashion from deconstruction, but not only from it. But does deconstruction have a special relationship to the *aporia* of representation? This is one of the questions raised in my dissertation, with regard to the *difference* or *different* difference of deconstruction. The task of responding to the question demands a kind of stubborn concentration, not always distinguishable it must be said from mindless repetition, or from an inability to think at all. In this space, it is some consolation that anachronism and contemporaneity may well coincide, which is what a little history tells us. The insistence of the dominant themes of my dissertation shapes an inquiry whose literal fruits, strung from the vine of an attenuated syntax, are themselves a kind of protracted prelude to the ultimate representation of the *aporia* of representation itself. The *literality* to which I refer here is represented succinctly in the assertoric formula which gives Chapter Three its title: *deconstruction is a word*. Even here, in the preface, this banal formula marks the absolute limit of the investigation.

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\* \*

It might be helpful for me to say something briefly and in a prefatory way about the relation of the words 'Derrida' and 'deconstruction' in my argument. There are probably those who would like to draw a clear distinction here, and though no doubt to separate them would have been an interesting exercise in itself, unfortunately I cannot see how it would be done other than by some rigid contrivance—by legislation in other words. To

distinguish rigorously or systematically between these two words would require that the extension of each be determined, and this is already the difficult task that awaits us. Hence, while demonstrably different, both words wind together for me in a way whose system or rule is not immediately apparent, and on the whole, for better or worse, I have left them free to do this.

One could imagine them caught in an intricate trinity: Derrida, Deconstruction and the Specter. Derrida is the father of Deconstruction, but only until the relation is reversed or extended, which can happen at any time, and in all likelihood already has. Because the Specter is a specter, it may well not be very clear who or what it is, or if it really is who or what it appears to be. Hence it may be the specter of Freud or Heidegger, for example, or of the Unconscious or *Destruktion*, or Totalitarianism, or of Hegel or Heraclitus, or of the Mother, or of another, or of any of countless others. The Specter is almost certainly the specter of Deconstruction. It is probably the specter of the Father too, which is a serious entanglement. No doubt, in this work, Derrida is the specter of the Father. The signs of this familial and spectral infestation are everywhere, and they need to be taken into account.

Someone is not present in this triangle who might well have found a place there in a leading role: Paul de Man. As it happens, this is the fate of de Man in my inquiry, where he plays only a relatively small part—a significant part, but nonetheless still a small one. Can one discuss the consequences of deconstruction and not spend considerable time with Paul de Man? Unfortunately, it has not been possible to accommodate the specific question of *de Man's deconstruction* within the finite space of my inquiry, so, insofar as far as my own contribution is concerned, this subject will have to wait for other occasions. Does not this apprehension of omission, this apology, and this promise of restitution, quite confirm that it is *de Man* himself, or at least his close relative, who is really the Specter?

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\* \*

I have tried to maintain the rhythm of the argument by pressing a certain amount of adjacent material into the notes. Many of the notes thus have their own brief and supplementary story to tell. In the end I have made a compromise between the conflicting virtues and vices of footnotes (immediacy but distraction) and endnotes

(tidiness but remoteness) by placing the notes at the *end of each chapter*. When reading, in general, I tend to turn to those endnotes whose superscripted indices are positioned at a point in the main argument which stimulates my immediate curiosity, but most of them I read consecutively at the end of a chapter or section, where they seem to form their own domain with a slightly different set of rules and certainly a different tonality from the rest of the text. Alternatively, footnotes do sometimes offer a splendid kind of scholarly clutter, a bric-a-brac of associations, references, corroborations and asides, but just as often I find that they are a nuisance at the bottom of the page, like so many noisily competing memes struggling for a place in the sun.\* Positioning the notes at the end of each chapter should, I hope, link them to each chapter as a kind of epilogue and make them more generally accessible than they would be *en masse* and remote at the end of the entire document.

An earlier draft of my dissertation included a PART THREE, comprising three chapters, which I removed with some regret in order to focus the project more sharply and to constrain its final size. PART THREE was concerned with the question of the difference, or different difference, of deconstruction in the context of the division between analytic and continental philosophy, and the division between realism and idealism. This part of the dissertation reflected research I have been undertaking for some time which moves between the two Western philosophical traditions (see, for example, 'The Value of the Variable,' published in *Philosophy Today*, 41:3/4, 1997). Fortunately, what was Chapter Seven of PART THREE, entitled 'Analytic and Continental: The Division in Philosophy,' is available (in a form adapted for its alternative context) in *The Monist* (88:2, 1999). Chapters Six and Nine, 'The Ideal Realism,' and 'The Heart of What Happened' respectively, will have to join the other amputee, Chapter Seven, to form a phantom appendix to the present document—though this brief reference in the preface ought to be the only substantive indication of their absence.

There are many who have helped me in many ways to bring my dissertation to completion. I would like to thank my supervisors: Dr Alexander García Düttmann, who

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\* The term 'meme' is a relatively recent coinage. Memes are the cerebral or cognitive equivalent of genes, and are driven like genes by the twin objectives of survival and reproduction. They are *ideas*, in other words, and the idea of a meme assumes that ideas themselves can be readily individuated.

helped the project find its first legs in 1997; Dr Millicent Vladiv-Glover, who stepped in when Dr Düttmann left Monash University in late 1997; Dr Claire Colebrook, who took over in 1999, when a good deal of the writing and structuring work was being done, and Professor Kevin Hart, who generously agreed to assist with the final stages of the process when Dr Colebrook left Monash University at the end of 1999. From the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, I would like to thank Associate Professor Andrew Milner, Dr Chris Worth, and especially Gail Ward, without whose constant assistance and support the whole endeavor would hardly be possible. The Monash University Travel Grant Scheme provided some financial assistance for research and conference attendance in Europe in 1998. For their encouragement and support in the other places which allow a long research program to bear fruit, I would like to thank Ralph Humphries (not my double but my father), Kate Humphries, Joan Lynn, Irene Pargeter, Paul Humphries, Glenys Atkins, Max, Odette, and Mathilda, and my midnight and daylight co-conspirator, Rebecca Garcia Lucas.

## INTRODUCTION

*Consequence, concatenation, rattle of chains,  
endless procession of phenomenal forms that file by,  
all white and diaphanous, in the middle of the night.*  
—Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup>

*Does Derrida's work cut across the development of  
Western thought with a line of demarcation, similar  
to Kantianism, which separated criticism from  
dogmatic philosophy? Are we again at the end... of  
an unsuspected dogmatism which slumbered  
underneath what we took for the critical spirit?*  
—Emmanuel Levinas<sup>2</sup>

*Theoretical and political arguments that take  
deconstruction as their starting point can go in  
many directions.*  
—Ernesto Laclau<sup>3</sup>

*The oscillation... oscillates between two types of  
oscillation.*  
—Jacques Derrida<sup>4</sup>

### Does Deconstruction Make Any Difference?

In 1985, Michael Fischer published a collection of essays which undertakes a critique of deconstruction. With this book, Fischer made a worthy contribution to a debate about the merits of deconstruction, about its consequences for literary studies, which reached a peak in the mid 1980s. However, what is of enduring interest about Fischer's book is not so much what falls between its covers, but what is printed on its spine. Long after the book has been read with due care and its arguments patiently digested, what lingers about Fischer's intervention in the controversy around deconstruction, what continues to demand an adequate response, is the question Fischer poses and which he chooses as his title. This question confronts Michael Fischer's prospective reader even before she has reached in front of her and taken the book from its resting place on the library shelf, and it remains unanswered long after the book has found its way home again:

—*Does deconstruction make any difference?*

Fischer's question borrows its form and orientation from two sentences, or statements, one affirmative and the other negative: (1) Deconstruction makes a difference; (2) Deconstruction doesn't make any difference. But Fischer's question is not simply poised between these two statements as a moment of equivocation. It implies instead a preamble something like the following: There has been quite a hullabaloo for some time about this thing called 'deconstruction,' many angry words traded back and forth in bitter disputation; there have been many proclamations of the power and perspicacity of deconstruction, and many denunciations of its infernal pact with a Gallic Mephistopheles—but, when all is said and done, *does deconstruction make any difference?* Does it really *do* anything? Is anything altered by deconstruction? Is it of any consequence? None of the careful arguments deployed in the essays constituting Fischer's book matches the power of his simple, opening question, with its many implications and many possible emphases.

The question arises from within a cluster of tacit assumptions or preconceptions which assume that *to matter is to make a difference*. Hence, from Fischer's critical and adversarial perspective, if, as he hopes to prove, deconstruction does not in the end make any difference, then it doesn't matter. This driving assumption is very important. Fischer's shrewd bet is that the most effective way to neutralize the deleterious effect of deconstruction upon literary studies is to argue that it has no *real* effect, that deconstruction is already, in its own way, neutral and ineffectual—an academic parlor game. Deconstruction is already fatally and internally compromised with regard to the power of *making a difference*. Thus, Fischer negotiates an obvious paradox: his book, which contests the difference of deconstruction, is itself a response and attests to the fact of deconstruction's intervention in American literary studies. The real question, no doubt, for Fischer, is not whether deconstruction has *any* effects, which clearly it does, but whether the effects of deconstruction have any critical *substance*: whether or not they *make a difference*.<sup>5</sup>

There is, in the end, curiously, no more corrosive a criticism which can be marshaled against deconstruction than this one: *deconstruction doesn't make any difference*. Even formulated as it is here at a high level of generality (where deconstruction's failure to make a difference is not specified or localized), and despite its clear note of absolute banality, this negative claim goes straight to the heart of the matter, and we will have to

spend some time establishing why this is so. Around the time that Fischer announced his interrogation of deconstruction in the title of his book, versions of Fischer's question were being asked not only by the opponents of deconstruction, but also by those within the ranks of its exponents. With the urgency and impetus of this questioning driving a reconsideration of the relationship of deconstruction to individual and collective responsibility, to institution and polity, there has been, since the mid to late 1980s, a careful and protracted consideration of the ethico-political implications and consequences of deconstruction. Underlying these considerations has been a clear affirmation from the deconstructors that deconstruction *does* make a difference, that it is neither neutral nor neutralizing, quietist nor formalist, conformist nor self-canceling, nor empty of content.<sup>6</sup>

Derrida has affirmed this too, unambiguously and from quite early in the story: 'Deconstruction, I have insisted, is not *neutral*,' says Derrida in *Positions*, 'It intervenes' (Derrida 1972c, 129; Derrida 1981b, 93). The 'irruptive emergence of a new "concept,"' says Derrida, 'a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime' (42/57) is the result of a *displacement* of the system rather than a mere reversal or mutual cancellation or neutralization of the polarities of the binary opposition.<sup>7</sup> There is a relation of conflict, of subordination and domination between the poles of the opposition. Deconstruction intervenes there. It overturns the dominant order, and, at the same time, it allows for something else. Something *different* appears—something *new*. There appears a new thought or thinking. Something is not or is no longer the same. There has been an alteration.

In 'Force of Law' ('Force de loi'), a text from the late 1980s, Derrida repeats deconstruction's commitment to intervention in the scheme of things and points towards a distinctively deconstructive difference in this regard. There is, he says:

a deconstruction that would like, in order to be consistent [*conséquent*] with itself, not to remain enclosed in purely speculative, theoretical, academic discourses but rather... to aspire to something more consequential [*prétendre... avoir des conséquences*], to *change* things and to intervene in an efficient and responsible, though always, of course, very mediated way, not only in the profession but in what one calls the *cit**é*, the *polis* and more generally the world. Not, doubtless, to change things in the rather naive sense of calculated, deliberate and strategically controlled intervention, but in the sense of maximum intensification of a transformation in



progress, in the name of neither a simple symptom nor a simple cause (other categories are required here). (Derrida 1992c, 8-9; Derrida 1994b, 23-24)

Can we recognize something akin to the formulation of a *tasl* of deconstruction in this passage? If in many ways this passage sets the agenda for what is to come, then this is as much because there are many issues in the passage that require elucidation as because it is possible to recognize a program there. It is worthwhile taking a moment to anticipate some of these issues in a preliminary way. (1) What would it be for deconstruction to 'be consistent with itself'? This is an essential question, a question of self- or auto-adequation, of consequentiality, of bringing theory into harmony with practice, of practicing what one puts into speech, of a performative symmetry, of fidelity and responsibility. This question and its variants will accompany us at all levels while we attend to the consequences of deconstruction. (2) Derrida reproduces in a casual way the opposition of 'purely speculative, theoretical, academic discourses' to 'something more consequential,' which intervenes and changes things. There is something straightforward and satisfying in this opposition, but nonetheless it does seem strangely bare, bereft of the usual array of carefully deployed precautions. Why is this the case here, when for so long such exhortative formulae have been a source of suspicion? Why is there, here, an unusually easy potentization?

There are in fact a couple of remarks in the passage from 'Force of Law' qualifying the assertion of a deconstructive activism, but they do not work to diminish its force. (3) The movement towards intervention and change occurs in a 'very mediated way,' Derrida says. It is not clear what this means specifically, but the phrase does act loosely as a gentle moderation and reservation of the earlier claim: yes, of course deconstruction's interventions are not simple and direct ones, pressing a button to produce a certain outcome, but mediated, indirect, complicated by other things. (4) The next qualification however is the more interesting one: 'not... to change things in the rather naive sense of calculated, deliberate and strategically controlled intervention, but in the sense of *maximum intensification of a transformation in progress*, in the name of neither a simple symptom nor a simple cause (other categories are required here).' Here we have a strong suggestion of another kind of intervention. With the aid of a certain vigilance and sophistication no doubt, deconstruction avoids the naivety of calculating future outcomes, but instead produces 'maximum intensification of a

transformation in progress.' This is not then an orthodox political oppositionalism, resisting by reflex and readily assimilable in any case to a martial dialecticism. If there is not even resistance here, there is perhaps instead an *affirmative exacerbation*. It is a significant formulation, if an undeveloped one, at least in this instance, for it does appear that the words have come rather too easily: it is still not clear how deconstruction might exceed the naivety of a calculative relationship to futurity, nor how it might apply its intensifying capability to 'a transformation in progress [*une transformation en cours*].' The word that remains strong and upright in this passage is the word 'transformation,' which has the unreserved character of a universal value, and it retains this approbation independently of the specificity of the transformation. This affirmation *without reservation* of the transformative bears witness perhaps to the transformation of deconstruction. Derrida asserts that deconstruction is not merely 'speculative' or merely 'theoretical,' not imprisoned in 'discourses,' but *actively transformative* 'in... the world.'<sup>8</sup>

But how is this to be assessed? How can this *difference* (of a transformation) be measured? What are the *consequences* of deconstruction? And what are the consequences of *deconstruction*? That is, in the second emphasis: What are the consequences *entirely specific* to deconstruction being *what it is*, singularly, and not being something else? It is here, surely, that the difference of deconstruction is inscribed indelibly in the course of things, just as the word 'deconstruction' is typed on the page as an ineradicable element in this sentence. But, again, how can this difference peculiar to deconstruction be measured, as measured it must be? The various micrological aggravations induced by deconstruction in the chain or network of causes and effects seem to make a confident response to this question more difficult. Therefore, while focused on the concrete consequences of deconstruction, it will be necessary for us to consider whether it is the event and advent of deconstruction which absolutely *insist* upon a difference, an intervention, and hence a set of consequences of deconstruction, but which, at the same time, make both the question of the consequences of deconstruction, and moreover the question of consequences *in general*, less straightforward. In such circumstances, deconstruction could well be that thing which is the cause and condition of its own evanescence, of its own failure to be—to be different, that is.



There are two clearly interrelated issues then: the question of the consequences of deconstruction, and the question of the consequences of deconstruction for the notion of consequentiality in general. These two questions run in parallel, and they intersect. When something—like deconstruction, for example—has a consequence, it *makes a difference*. It makes a difference *appear*, and the difference, as a consequence, is, in an important sense, *attributable* to that of which it is a consequence. The consequence is linked to it, as to a cause. The consequence is, we might say, *referred* to its antecedent condition. It would seem that deconstruction troubles—or ought to trouble—these linkages in a number of ways.

Most problematic is the temporality and temporal priority of the matter. For example, let us assume that there is an analysis in which deconstruction troubles the notion of *consequentiality* in what appears to be a novel way, linking it to other difficult (though equally indispensable) notions like *origin*, *reference*, *representation*, *decision*. It is worth taking a moment to sketch this analysis and these links, though for the time being we will have to make do with something quite provisional and schematic. Clearly the antecedent (to use the logical term) is, in an important sense, the *origin* of the consequent, as though by definition.<sup>9</sup> It brings it about. What antecedes is that from which the consequence springs. Similarly, the consequent is referred or refers to its antecedent. Consequences form a chain of representations, and the structure of consequentiality is closely related to the mechanism of representation. The relation of the representation to what is represented is analogous to the relation of the consequence to its strict antecedent, that is, to what it is a consequence of. A certain symptom, for example, may be the *sign* of a disease. The symptom signifies or *represents* the disease. The disease *causes* the symptom to appear. The disease only appears as its symptoms or representations. The symptoms are a consequence of the disease. The origin of the symptoms is with the disease, and so on.

All these representational, referential, causal, symptomatic linkages are subject to a *decision*. For example, the physician must decide on a diagnosis, attempting to recreate the corporeal decision which marked the advent of the disease. The diagnosis is ever the interpretive crisis for the physician, where the physician must intervene in a chain of consequences. *Undecidability* is thus a volatilization or destabilization of the (ideal) chain of consequences. It unsettles the decision-making protocols codified in the

physician's diagnostic manual, where the links between symptoms and diseases are formalized. It is always possible that a consequence may be reattributed, and the diagnosis reformulated or abandoned. If a consequence is *only a consequence as such in relation to that of which it is a consequence* (and, after all, almost everything is a consequence), then the *retribution* of a consequence is a violent event; the consequence must be wrested from its matrix and, for a moment, deconsequentialized; its retribution only takes place by way of the passage and the impasse of the aporia of consequentiality, where consequences are at once radically relational, stabilized within a network, absolutely isolated and motile.

Is it then as a consequence of deconstruction that an *aporia* in the structure of consequentiality is revealed? The concept of consequentiality was straightforward before deconstruction, but is no longer. It is possible, however, that the concept of consequentiality was in fact never as straightforward as it appeared to be on the many occasions when it seemed to function entirely adequately—or, at least, not to warrant close attention. It is quite possible that the aporia was *always there*, always visible too, though perhaps going by another name. It was there, disguised conspicuously, manifest in an illusion of straightforwardness which said, 'There may be disputes about *specific* consequences, but that there *are* (concrete and discrete) consequences in general—consequences of deconstruction, for example, and of other things—is not an issue.' Moreover, to complicate things a little more, there is the possibility that the appearance of the aporia of consequentiality is a mere phantom: that is, the aporia appears to appear, but is it really there? These are all critical differences, and they are constantly entangled with the question of the consequences of deconstruction.

The problematic of consequences will be approached here in terms of difference. Consequences form a chain of differences; consequences are a transaction or communication or transmission of differences. If there is now a lack of straightforwardness with regard to the determination of consequences (a problem that is more than just competition between alternative readings), then it is always possible that this lack was always present, only concealed. It has always been at work. So, where what was not previously apparent is now disclosed, what has changed? How can this *difference* between a *different difference* and a *non-different difference* be determined? There is: (1) the difference between what is present but concealed and its

unconcealment, (2) the difference which *makes* for the appearance of what was concealed—which in fact may be, on the contrary, something entirely new—and, consequently, (3) the difference between something new and an unconcealment. If deconstruction complicates a certain, previously straightforward, process, it is not immediately clear whether the complication was exposed by deconstruction, or created by it. The complication may already be thoroughly overdetermined. Something appears, but how is it to be causally articulated? How is it to be sequenced? Deconstruction does seem complicit in the hardening, the petrification, of a certain difficulty, whose obstinacy, always at work, is nonetheless *intensified* by attentiveness to it. One of the consequences of deconstruction might be to make the question of its consequences both more intransigent and futile, and, at the same time, more intricate and seductive. In any case, it is not possible to renounce the task that seeks to mark and to map a trail of consequences, for there is no other entrance into the problem than to pass beneath this arch of the aporia.

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Already, then, an important word in the story of deconstruction has appeared: the word 'aporia.' Perhaps, also, the peculiar *thing* given the name of 'aporia' has itself made an appearance—and, already, it is possible that there have been more than one of these shy aporetic entities. Under ideal circumstances, it would be a worthwhile exercise to go back and count them up. How many have there been already? For example, there is the aporia which marks the intersection and coincidence of *invention* and *disclosure*, right at the point where these two must be carefully distinguished. The aporia of consequentiality has signaled its presence also, though perhaps without a full demonstration. But, beginning an inventory, we must decide on the integrity of our units. Are these in fact *two* aporias or are they in some way the same aporia? This is itself in all probability an aporetic question, pointing towards the aporia of the medium between universality and singularity, between unity and number. Where its units are not clearly resolved, the inventory struggles to find a way. Then, a light appears, in the form of a powerful intuition which says, 'There is only the One aporia,' or 'All aporias are One.' And perhaps, indeed, these different aporias are all the same, governed by a

master aporia to which they all refer. We might call this transcendent one the *aporia of deconstruction*.<sup>10</sup>

But if an all too familiar aporia awaits us from the beginning, let us not be too hasty to greet it as a loyal friend. If it bounds up eagerly to meet us at the gate, can we be sure what kind of welcome it intends? If the aporia is the silent companion of deconstructors everywhere, obedient like a well-trained dog, then it is equally their mortal enemy, as it is equally and eternally anathema to all those who think. It can be said that the aporia is, in essence, the very locus of the irruption of existence from the heart of impossibility, and thus an interruption of the chain of consequence; or that it is an affirming emanation *ex nihilo*, in defiance of the principle of sufficient reason; or that the aporia is simply the secret source of thought itself. There are many today who are willing to embrace these truisms, which belong in what might be called the 'jargon of impossibility.'<sup>11</sup> But, despite the relative comfort of repetition, and in the very space of its facilitation, the aporia remains the implacable obstacle to thought, and all thought has no other end than to expose and to destroy it. All thought will be rid of the aporia once and for all.

This is the place and the difficulty of the deconstructive difference: deconstruction would intervene; it would begin to open something, to allow it to open, to hold or sustain its opening, to affirm it in the opening; it would open something to the other, the one who arrives without knocking; it is opened to the disturbance of the aporia; deconstruction, says Derrida in an interview with Richard Kearney, is precisely 'an openness towards the other' (in Kearney 1984, 124); deconstruction would open a rigidity of thought, otherwise bound to the negative oscillation of the dialectic, to the disruption of the aporia of the other; deconstruction has 'set to work... certain marks... that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition,' says Derrida in 'Positions,' 'but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics...' (Derrida 1972c, 58; Derrida 1981b, 42-3). These 'marks' are the signs and the signatures of the aporia.

But we need to proceed very slowly here in this place of the aporia, of the other, and of the aporia of the other.<sup>12</sup> We have described an intervention which is an opening and an openness. In a sense, the intervention intends, or it is oriented towards the opening. Is this a difference and a distinction specific to the deconstructive intervention? Or is it a

*universal* calling? Is it that such a calling can be heard and *resisted*, on the one hand, or heard and *attended to* on the other? Volition is the difficult quantity here. Aptitude is problematic also. The 'openness towards the other' (following Derrida's lead, let us call this 'deconstruction'), or the intervention that begins to open something to the disturbance of the aporia—in a sense, this is, at the same time, *what happens*. Derrida says this too: deconstruction is 'what happens [*ce qui arrive*],' he says (Derrida 1995d, 17). The *distinction* is unclear then, both between a voluntarism or intention and a passivity or inevitability (or even destiny) of the opening, and between an openness or opening and a closure or foreclosing. This is the aporia of deconstruction, where we find the question of its difference.

Though, like the others, deconstruction would know the aporia in order to install itself in its place, in order to displace it (deconstruction can have no other object), *what deconstruction knows* is that the aporia will *always* precede and postdate any deconstruction (and this is the case even if deconstruction is the aporia). It will always *be deconstructing* and *be deconstructed* and *be deconstruction* before and beyond deconstruction. This much is clear, and deconstructors frequently add something to this effect at the end of their work as a supplementary gesture: there is an instinct or convention or obligation which demands that one end with a gesture of humility and responsibility before the aporia of the other, whose inevitable supervention exceeds every circumscription.<sup>13</sup> Yet what is the *singular* part of deconstruction in this? Can we say that the aporia will always be deconstructing and be deconstruction before and beyond deconstruction, and *with or without (the phenomenon, or instance, or appearance, or existence of) deconstruction*? It would appear that it is only deconstruction that has made possible the assertion of this 'always' in relation to the aporia. Something is opened, something appears, or appears to open, something is held open, in deconstruction. There is the maintenance of an exposure or exposedness. Yet what is the singularity of this event? When does it happen?

Here again is the essential question of the *difference* of deconstruction. It is set apart. Its difference sets it apart. If deconstruction is different, then there is *something* that *makes* it different. Something sets it apart. And why not? Why begrudge it that ordinary privilege? Yet *what* sets it apart? There is something that is or has been thought which it was not possible to think before, something that was quite inconceivable before. No

doubt this is true. But how does deconstruction produce or coincide with this new thought? What is its connection precisely? Even at the basic level of a choice of prepositions, this is not an easy question. *With* deconstruction (for example), something new is thought. Is the relation one of 'with'? Something new is thought *by* deconstruction, perhaps. Or, alternatively, something new is thought *in* deconstruction. It is not immediately clear how to simplify these alternatives in determining the *relation* of deconstruction to the new in thought which it makes possible. For the sake of simplicity, we could express the relation in the following way: *deconstruction thinks a new thought*. Deconstruction is not then the medium, but the thinker or the thinking. The relation could well be an even more intimate one, and barely a relation at all, were we to collapse it just a little further and say: *deconstruction is a new thought*. The difference of deconstruction resides here somewhere, but remains to be isolated.

In deconstruction's being set apart, as it is and absolutely, the setting apart—the distinction, the difference, the novelty—is the same. There is no point quibbling here over different varieties of sameness, though they will have to be painstakingly distinguished. It may come about that the fall of the difference (or different difference) of deconstruction into the same is as unavoidable (that is, as structural or logical) as is the alteration of deconstruction. If deconstruction is singular, it may struggle not to be the *same* singularity. It *does* struggle not to be. Singularity cannot easily be wrested or preserved from this dire return, though there are many well-meaning gestures that would maintain its singular integrity and its resistance. Singularity cannot easily be saved from its kinship with unity, identity, homogeneity, coalescence, and so on, even where it divorces itself from them decisively. And, though there is a new thought of deconstruction—*deconstruction is a new thought*—it is not necessarily the case that this thought *can* be thought in any event: it is, after all, an unthinkable and aporetic thought. Is it a new thought of the unthinkable and aporetic, or a new unthinkableness? Perhaps, we might say: the new thought of deconstruction is a *barely* thinkable thought. It is *almost* thinkable. It is *at the limit* of the thinkable—a very crowded place where a thought readily slips into anonymity. However, these adequations are only an incitement to desire in the guise of its satiation.

Perhaps, in the distant and terminal hour when all is said and done, there is only this limit: the indecipherable and singular inscription, multiplied without end in a

metaphilia, metaphobia, metanoia. The indecipherable and singular inscription is multiplied without end, and the rest is history. Each indecipherable and singular inscription attests to the secret cargo it transports. There is the irreducible itself (whose name is manifold), which is subject to iteration—which is subject, in fact, to a pan-iteration. In this, the *signature*, for example, is not a more particularly aporetic instance than the word: it is an exemplary demonstration. It is no more nor less identificatory, no more nor less irreducible, singular, and iterable than the word. It is the solitary instance. It cannot be repeated. It is the essence of the word. But *what* is repeated in the (impossible) repetition of the singularity, in which the singularity is annulled? What is repeated is the idea of what is repeated: the *what* itself. *For the difference of deconstruction to be a different difference (that is, a singularity), it must be radically disjoined from this (transcendental) 'what' by which difference is returned to the same.*

This is precisely Derrida's strategic gesture, on the side of abject resistance and a didactic singularity, in 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' ('Lettre à un ami japonais'): 'All sentences of the type "deconstruction is X" or "deconstruction is not X" *a priori* miss the point [*manque a priori de pertinence*], which is to say that they are at least false. As you know, one of the principal things at stake in what is called in my texts "deconstruction" is precisely the delimiting of ontology [*l'onto-logique*]...' (Derrida 1987d, 392; Derrida 1991c, 275). The same gesture is echoed faithfully, if unequivocally, in Hillis Miller: 'By a principle that has no exceptions, sentences that take the form "deconstruction is so and so" are nonsense' (Miller 1992, 9).<sup>14</sup> In *Deconstruction•Derrida*, Julian Wolfreys quotes this passage from Miller to support the same point (Wolfreys 1998, 13), which he includes in his list of seven commandments: 'One can never say what deconstruction is,' says Wolfreys, 'because deconstruction does not allow for such statements' (14). Irene Harvey concurs, though with a different inflection: 'To ask "what is..." anything, therefore, is to install the response, indeed the possibility of a response, within metaphysics. It is precisely this formulation, as organized by and organizing (therein sustaining) metaphysics, that Derrida wishes to draw to our attention. It is not surprising therefore that when asked what deconstruction *is*, he responds with a neither this nor that (*ni/ni*) formulation. From within metaphysics one is denied meaning by this' (Harvey 1986, 23-4).<sup>15</sup>

In Harvey, the prohibition on the quidditative question ('What is...?') does not apply only to deconstruction. But it is clear that it is only inasmuch as deconstruction both exceeds metaphysics and, at the same time, points to an exceeding of metaphysics *as a consequence of deconstruction*, that the prohibition of the ontological question determines the *difference of deconstruction* as different from the difference that is demanded by the quidditative question, which belongs essentially to metaphysics. The double gesture is simplified here by Harvey to serve the institution of the difference of deconstruction as a *different* difference. 'To ask "what is..." anything is to install... [even] the *possibility* of a response... within metaphysics,' says Harvey, so the quidditative question must be radically segregated from the field of deconstruction. At the same time, however, it is quite clear that this prohibition, which springs from an important truth no doubt, is a blind adherence to the rule of deconstruction.<sup>16</sup> It stabilizes deconstruction. It permits the institution and differentiation of deconstruction in a field of contested differences, which is invariably a multivalent outcome. In fact, of course, the quidditative question is without doubt a metaphysical *and* an aporetic question, and it is for this reason—that it interrogates the deconstructive difference—and not with the prospect of a more rigorous deconstruction, that it is prohibited.

## Structure of the Dissertation

PART ONE. An inquiry which asks, 'Does deconstruction make any difference?,' and, 'What are the consequences of deconstruction?,' will have to start with some very simple things. PART ONE poses as a general rubric what is often understood to be a question proscribed by deconstruction, as we have seen. But, even within the field of this proscription, it remains fundamental:

—*What is deconstruction?*

This is one (exemplary) specification of what I call the *quidditative* question, which asks, 'What is...?' Perhaps it is in the 'what' of deconstruction that lies its difference. Identifying deconstruction with the aid of the 'what,' at the same time we differentiate it. Does deconstruction make a difference according to that essential feature (or essence)

which answers to the 'what'? This would be, in a sense, a minimal difference: that there is a 'what' of deconstruction and its 'what' is its difference.

Undoubtedly the 'what' of deconstruction is already connected to what deconstruction *does*. The term 'deconstruction' is linked to an activity by its active verbal form ('to deconstruct') and by its link to the word 'construction': construction constructs, and *deconstruction* takes apart, or *deconstructs*. The 'what' which is the action of deconstruction, and which is an element of its difference, might therefore intervene in a situation and make or facilitate an alteration, either locally, or of the field in general. 'Deconstruction is not *neutral*,' says Derrida, 'It *intervenes*.' This intervention is an active difference.

At the same time it is necessary to keep in mind what Derrida and some deconstructors claim: that deconstruction does *not* answer to the quidditative question. There is no 'what' of deconstruction. In which case the question, 'Does deconstruction make any difference?', must be answered without reference to the 'what' of deconstruction. That there is not a 'what' of deconstruction, which would signal its difference by way of its identity in the customary way, points us towards another possibility: that the difference of deconstruction is a *different* difference. It is not the *same* difference. The claim that deconstruction cannot properly be submitted to quidditative interrogation indicates that deconstruction mobilizes, or has an essential relation to, a different difference, a difference not organized by identity.<sup>17</sup>

CHAPTER ONE. One response to the quidditative question is temporal and diachronic: the 'what' of deconstruction lodges in a history. In this chapter, under the arch of the question 'What is deconstruction?', I propose a short history of the different difference of deconstruction, in which the story of the different difference is narrated, and, at the same time, in which the possibility of the different difference is interrogated. The players in this history are not only Derrida, the deconstructors, and the antagonists of deconstruction, but also a set of themes and events: strategy, interruption, alterity, textualism, reference, resistance, caricature, fidelity, play, division, adequation, discipleship, and double reading.

A *history* imposes a discipline of history-writing and narrative, but it makes another, characteristically deconstructive, discipline—which is slow, micrological, and attentive

to the textual details of formulation—difficult to practice. History cannot afford to be so patient and prudent. It must overcome a fear of flying—a fear which is relative to the shelter and habitation offered deconstruction by the architecture of the text-under-deconstruction. The shape of the other's sentence provides a home, however tenuous, for the worm of deconstruction, a place, oddly enough, where something undecidable can be decided—at least in theory. History must take a chance that the *line* it emphasizes, which would unearth and institute a reality, is compelling enough for the moment of the telling to put out of mind alternative paths and to neutralize conflicting or recalcitrant instances. It must take the risk of irresponsibility and expose itself to an imminent annulment at the hands of the facts. At every turn it will have the blood of truth on its hands, for the story, which seems to emerge shiny and new like a separate thing, a being in its own right, only responds to a callous violence of incision and omission, ignorance and willful obliviousness. Its seduction can only be the precarious lucidity of the high wire.

My history is equally compromised by deconstruction, and by the question of the difference or different difference of deconstruction which is its theme: the difference of deconstruction from New Criticism, from structuralism, the division in deconstruction itself, and so on. Too much critical attention to difference, differentiation, and the work of division, makes the laborious self-inflation of history barely tolerable, for differences and differentiations are the silent *stuff* of history, its covert mechanism of construction, not its object—at any rate, other than *implicitly*. The question of the difference or different difference of deconstruction (which stands alongside Fischer's question, 'Does deconstruction make any difference?') asks about deconstruction's effects, its interventions—where it would, in a sense, enter history and leave its mark. Is there an event of deconstruction? '[I]f deconstruction had a goal or a regulating idea,' says Geoffrey Bennington in 'Derridabase,' 'it would be: that something happen, that there be some event' (Bennington and Derrida 1993, 264). It is not immediately clear what is the relation between history and the event of deconstruction, if such it is, except that this relation must be thought according to the problematic of the difference or different difference of deconstruction.

Is it a *consequence* of deconstruction *being what it is* that it will *then* have a history? Or is it a consequence of its history that *there is deconstruction*? A consequence of



deconstruction may be that history falters. It skips a step. The causal rationale is interrupted. The 'H' of History is first recognized as capital, and then as fallen: the 'H' of 'history' is demoted to the 'h' of 'history' and then pluralized in histories. It is demoted to narrative. Narrative is promoted to the rank of history. There is a truth of narrative. Is this a consequence of deconstruction, or of a so-called poststructuralism or postmodernism?<sup>18</sup> Perhaps it happens anyway, this fall of History, without *deconstruction's* intervention. Again we are compelled to measure the different difference of deconstruction.

History is a peculiar kind of anteceding consequence, as deconstruction has taught us to recognize. It hosts a completed past with a passionate concern for the singularity of *what happened*, it brings to 'what was' a *new* life it perhaps never had (but which nonetheless comes as a properly historical revelation), and it gestures towards an ideal history, a history-to-come, which measures each attempt at history, and which would hold in its safe-keeping, like the precious text of reality itself, the ultimate truth of *what happened*. The peculiarity of history inheres in a history of the difference or different difference of deconstruction. It remains unclear at this point, however, what is *unique* to a history of deconstruction. It remains unclear whether this 'peculiarity' of history, which must be largely overlooked for history to proceed, is—inasmuch as it is indeed *peculiar*—unique to a history of deconstruction. There is a difficult question of priority. Perhaps the most that can be said at this stage is that there is a rapprochement and a coincidence between history and deconstruction: there is a question, often implicit, of the *event*. The difference between history and deconstruction is this: where history is what happened, deconstruction is, Derrida says, 'what happens.'<sup>19</sup> The difference is the difference between what happened and what happens. And there is a further difference: it is the difference between *the representation of what happened* and *what happened*, between *the representation of what happens* and *what happens*. But this difference, which opens upon the history to come, is what is always at issue and hence it would be futile in the introduction to pre-empt what follows.

CHAPTER TWO. In his book, *Deconstruction•Derrida*, Julian Wolfreys responds to the question of deconstruction by re-emphasizing the prohibition on the quidditative question, 'What is deconstruction?' 'One can never say what deconstruction is,' he says,

'because deconstruction does not allow for such statements' (Wolfreys 1998, 14). Wolfreys' introduction, entitled 'Deconstruction, if such a thing exists,' and his first chapter, entitled 'Is There Some Thing Called Deconstruction?,' challenge the process which turns an elusive deconstruction into the kind of *thing* which can be conveniently located within a taxonomical apparatus. Deconstruction is thus reserved from predication and conserved as the preserve of deconstructors who know that there is—and that they are—no such thing. This is their distinctive sophistication.

While concerned to give an introductory account of deconstruction, Wolfreys is careful not to stabilize the concept of deconstruction, which would result in a rigid determination of deconstruction's ontological status. Similarly, he displays a skepticism about the derivation of a deconstructive *method*. Wolfreys expresses this reservation fairly unequivocally. There is no method of deconstruction, argues Wolfreys in the wake of a Derridean strategy which makes the same pronouncement, contesting the methodological moment of institution.<sup>20</sup> Wolfreys focuses on the misappropriation of deconstruction in the American academy, where the fall into method has been endemic. But there is an implication in his anti-methodism. There is no method of deconstruction, it seems, for Wolfreys, but *truth*. This is the place towards which Wolfreys' anti-methodism tends. On this score, Wolfreys quotes Hillis Miller: 'Deconstruction is nothing more or less than good reading as such' (Wolfreys 1998, 9).<sup>21</sup> It is easy to recognize the truth of the impulse that prompts this assertion. Deconstruction meticulously and faithfully traces 'every contour' (14) of the text. Deconstruction does not impose a deconstructive reading, as a function of its method, says Wolfreys, but reveals what is 'at the heart of the text through good reading' (14). This kind of assertion, possessed as it is of a vital and equivocal truth, follows a shift in deconstructive emphasis away from what was misconstrued as a relativism akin to the kind of relativism promulgated by poststructuralism. Moving against the grain of a vulgar deconstruction-as-relativism, the word 'good' in the quotation from Miller has the same substantial and anchoring value as the word 'true,' however carefully it might be qualified. It is a small step to make the following modification here: 'Deconstruction is nothing more or less than true reading as such.' The method of deconstruction is, for Wolfreys, the non-methodic method of truth, which exposes the text *as it is*, 'imitating its every move, its every contour' (14). In this rigorous mimicry, the text is disclosed. It

is identified. Deconstruction, in this classical role, 'reveals how things are put together' (14). Though Wolfreys may not be exemplary in this regard, nonetheless there are sure signs here of the revolution in deconstruction, where it turns away from its relativist characterization.<sup>22</sup>

The prohibition on method is intended as the sign of a responsibility to the singularity of the text. The prohibition on method attests to this responsibility. There is no prescription for reading. However, the prohibition on method is equally a return to a higher truth than method. Method is that set of preconceptions or that ideology which obscures the thing as it is. Method is a violence of anticipation. But here Wolfreys does not pursue his prey far enough into the undergrowth, for method is ever in any case an ideal and an abstraction. Where is the method itself? Method is transcendental. The method is that which, exceeding the present and material fact of the object, points beyond it towards the object's condition of possibility. A *critical* method always seeks to coincide with the method of the object itself: it seeks to discern its condition of possibility. If, on the path towards the truth of the object, there is no method of *deconstruction*, it is at least equally the case that there is no method for other things. It is not clear then that a non-methodic essence marks a decisive and different difference of deconstruction.

CHAPTER THREE. Wolfreys is preoccupied in the early part of his book by the quidditative question of deconstruction, if only to demonstrate the deluded metaphysics which drives the question in the first place. In Chapter Three, the question which asks, naively, 'What is deconstruction?', receives the most simple and banal response. *Deconstruction is a word*, comes the reply without hesitation. Though nothing could be more obvious, this response sets in motion a complicated chain of consequences, which are, *precisely*, the consequence of proposing that *deconstruction is a word*. This banal and innocent response leads us towards something essential about deconstruction. If Julian Wolfreys argues, in *Deconstruction•Derrida*, a little unconvincingly, that *deconstruction is not a thing*, to assert that *deconstruction is a word* is not, however, to agree with Wolfreys according to a strictly bivalent opposition of thing and word. Such a strict opposition would claim the following: since deconstruction is *not* a thing, then it must be (merely) a word. To assert that *deconstruction is a word* is not automatically to

revert from thing to word, but to open the problematic of *words* and *things*, a problematic prefigured in Chapter One with regard to the antagonism between textualism and realism. Perhaps there is a deconstructive difference in the difficult space of the distinction of word and thing: deconstruction is the word for the disruption of the representational mechanism that occurs when word and thing fully assume their native proximity. Deconstruction is the word that represents this disruption.<sup>23</sup> These consequences of (the word) deconstruction determine the preoccupations of PART TWO, though it is still unclear that they are consequences of deconstruction *as such* and not of something else, some cause which has not yet been discovered and identified.

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PART TWO. The assertion in Chapter Two, in response to the quidditative question, that *deconstruction is a thing*, and the claim in Chapter Three that *deconstruction is a word*, open towards a complex problematic of words and things, a problematic in which deconstruction has always been implicated. In Chapter One, it was a matter of the deconstructive event with regard to the mechanism of reference. Deconstruction *intervened* there, in the field of reference, in the space between words and things. It was not *neutral*. This space has long been the disputed site of an intervention, an interruption, even a disruption or dislocation, by deconstruction. The referential mechanism was seduced from the shelter of its latency and exposed (though it was not clear that deconstruction was the sole agent of this exposure). There was a statement which came to be identified with this moment: 'There is nothing,' said Derrida, 'outside of the text' ('il n'y a pas de hors-texte') (Derrida 1967a, 227; Derrida 1976, 158). Whatever the translative and semantic complications and equivocations here, the simplicity of the English translation carries the polemical power and interruptive force of the statement, which is endowed with a fatal truth. But, subsequently, Derrida was pressed by circumstance to deny that deconstruction denies reference. Reference, argued Derrida, is that which points towards the other side.<sup>24</sup> The denial of reference would then be the abdication of responsibility towards the other and the closure of the circuit of an idealism from which alterity is systematically excluded. Such a strategy does not belong to deconstruction, says Derrida.

What *really* happened, back then, in the field of reference, where deconstruction intervened, if it intervened? The difficulty of this question is addressed in a provisional and preliminary way in Chapter One. In PART TWO, the question takes its present form: What really happens, *here and now*, in the action of the referential mechanism?

There is a commonplace philosophical distinction between 'use' and 'mention' which seeks to establish with clarity, or at least to regulate, what happens in the field of reference, where words refer to things. In *Logic*, Wesley Salmon makes the rule about the appropriate use of quotation marks, derived from this distinction, the consequence of a 'principle': 'the principle that to *mention* an object we must *use* a name that is distinct from the object being mentioned' (Salmon 1984, 141). This is what reference does: it uses a word to mention (refer to) an object. John Searle mobilizes this rule, borrowed from the legislative program of analytic philosophy, against deconstruction. However, in Chapter Four, 'Logic of the Word,' it becomes apparent that the rule has the effect of drawing attention to a zone of tribulation in the philosophy of language in which appears what I call the 'aporia of representation.' Perhaps, here, in this zone, there are, it seems, real consequences of deconstruction for the difference, and the relation, between words and things. Chapters Four and Five press further into this space between words and things, where they differ and coalesce, in pursuit of a formalization of this space and a clarification of its relation to the difference or different difference of deconstruction.

CHAPTER FOUR. In 'Literary Theory and Its Discontents,' John Searle lays out the principles of philosophy of language that ought to guide literary theorists in their engagement with language. The poverty of recent literary theory, in Searle's estimation, attests to a failure of literary theorists to recognize, and be guided by, the significant advances in understanding language made by philosophers in the analytic tradition. One of these guiding principles is the distinction between use and mention, which Searle outlines. A 'distinction, common in logic and philosophy,' says Searle, 'is that between the use of expressions and the mention of expressions. If, for example I say "Berkeley is in California," I use the word "Berkeley" to refer to a city. If I say "'Berkeley' has eight letters," I am mentioning the word "Berkeley" and talking about it' (Searle 1994, 644). Thus, though Searle advocates adherence to this distinction, he does not *argue* the distinction but merely announces it. He does not clarify its provenance nor does he

demonstrate its logic. In a sense, then, we are to accept this *convention* of Searle's philosophical community on faith. Why is this the case? It is because the rule marking the distinction of use and mention in turn marks an opening in representation towards the aporia of representation.

Within the project of a philosophy of language, it soon became clear to analytic philosophers that it would be necessary to mark systematically a distinction between the *use* of a word to mention something and the *mention* of a word. The mechanism for marking this distinction of use and mention was quotation marks. According to this rule, which the logician Wesley Salmon calls a 'rule of grammar,' we are obliged to write that 'deconstruction' is a word, and not that deconstruction is a word. This second assertion is nonsense. The word 'deconstruction' has fourteen letters but deconstruction does not. Where the word is not used but mentioned, it is advisable to employ quotation marks to mark the distinction. The employment of this mechanism makes good sense and lends clarity to philosophical formulations, and Searle prescribes it as a principle of literary theory.

However this mechanism and the distinction it marks do not need to be pressed very far before they run into trouble. In this chapter, I take two examples where philosophers seek an adequate formulation of the distinction of, and mechanism distinguishing, use and mention. In a sense, the idea is clear enough, but the formulation itself struggles for precision. In the course of this struggle a peculiar hole is opened in representation itself, which might be called, in the idiom of deconstruction, an 'aporia.' The work which my analysis shares, in part, with the work of the analytic philosophers adumbrating the rule of use and mention, is to *focus* the terms of the analysis as sharply as possible upon the aporia in representation: that is, in effect, *to represent the aporia clearly*. Searle and his colleagues mark the place where this task of clarification must be executed and call it 'the principle distinguishing use and mention.' Thus, they point the way.

The scene is set for a deconstruction of the distinction of use and mention, which may then function strategically in relation to the program of a philosophy of language. There is the possibility of asserting a deconstructive difference, which paralyzes the principle in question, opening the philosophy of language to the aporia of representation. Is this in fact what takes place? It is not only a question here, then, of a



deconstruction of the distinction of use and mention, but of an assessment, intrinsic to this process, of what has transpired there, in the course of such a deconstruction.

CHAPTER FIVE attends again to the appearance of the aporia of representation, this time in a brief passage of Kant's first *Critique*. Again, what is in question is not only the appearance, if such it is, of the aporia of representation, but equally the appearance, with the aporia, of the different difference of deconstruction.

There is a sentence in Kant's description of the analytic judgment in which he chooses to make an alteration while revising the first edition of the *Critique*. The revision determines an undecidability at the representational nexus, where word, object, and concept collide, collude, coincide, and must be distinguished. Though Kant revises his text in order to correct a problematic formulation, the revision does not provide a satisfactory solution. The revision reproduces the problem. At this representational nexus, Kant's revision calls for the *disappearance of the word*, which cannot be accommodated there without difficulty. Kant's revision, which would correct an infelicity, directs us towards the aporia of representation in very much the same way as did the principle of the distinction of use and mention in Chapter Four.

How direct is this direction? A deconstruction would be *faithful* to Kant's direction. In the ideal of such a fidelity, in which deconstruction finds its truth—and by which it distinguishes itself decisively from the relativist doctrines of poststructuralism, and by which it assures itself some measure of institutional leverage—the different difference of deconstruction is lost. It is a loss that deconstruction desires. In its fidelity to the text, Kant appears and deconstruction disappears. In the different difference of deconstruction, deconstruction appears and Kant disappears, as we would expect. But perhaps, alternatively, the different difference of deconstruction is precisely that a deconstruction of Kant is the disappearance of deconstruction and the appearance of Kant—there, where he was, already, in any case. Hence, it remains unclear what is the difference of deconstruction here, for its distinction may be that its difference, as such, though undoubtedly there, is only manifest covertly, if at all.

CHAPTER SIX. The question of the difference of deconstruction arises equally from a consideration of the *consequences* of deconstruction as from a meditation upon Fischer's primitive question, 'Does deconstruction make any difference?' It becomes

clear that the difference of deconstruction, for it to be a distinctive difference, must be a different difference: different from the difference which is equally the province of the others. That is, it is a different difference, and not an identical difference.

Deconstruction's difference ought not to be the same difference.

What is the relation of identity (or sameness) and difference? This is Hegel's native terrain. It is in an investigation of the relation of identity and difference that the possibility of a mechanism for judging the difference deconstruction makes will be recognizable. If deconstruction makes any difference, it must, according to the difference of identity and difference, be a difference from its identity with other things. If deconstruction makes any difference, it will have to be more than or other than what has been before, other than all the rest, all the others (other doctrines, theories, philosophies, movements, and so on). Deconstruction is a singular phenomenon, a singular event, perhaps—or better, let us say then, deconstruction is singular, or even a *singularity*. If deconstruction is *the same* as the others, then it will not have made any difference *as such*. The question of the relation of identity and difference is the essential Hegelian question, and within it is concealed the germ of a philosophy yet to be born. Hegel announces a response to this question in what I call the essential quasi-Hegelian formula, *identity = difference*. Yet the formula, which responds to the question of the relation of identity and difference, at the same time poses a question: *identity = difference?* On the path that follows the course of this question lies the possibility of an end to the inquiry which asks—perhaps in a plaintive tone—'Does deconstruction make any difference?'

Heidegger shares Hegel's understanding of the centrality of such a path of investigation. In *Identity and Difference (Identität und Differenz)*, Heidegger is concerned to think identity and difference both at the limit of and beyond representation. The crucial formulation—from the preface to the volume—is as follows:

The close relation [*die Zusammengehörigkeit*] of identity and difference will be shown in this publication to be that which gives us thought. (Heidegger 1969, 21)

What is in question is precisely this 'close relation,' this 'belonging together' (*Zusammengehörigkeit*) of identity and difference. Heidegger's meditation pursues this relation to the limit of representation, where there is a leap (*Satz*) beyond representation,

in which the 'belonging together' of identity and difference is manifest. Thus Heidegger and Hegel, despite their established differences, are both invested in that which exceeds representation. There is an *essential* difference here, and it is a difference *from* the difference which belongs to representation. It is a difference from representation, and a difference from the difference of representation.<sup>25</sup>

There is a deconstruction which would mark these differences, and in marking them mark out its own difference, both from Hegel and from Heidegger. At the limit of such a demarcation the differences are no longer clear. There is a deconstruction that, beyond these differences, comprehends its own difference not in a difference from but in its *belonging* to the quasi-Hegelian formula, *identity = difference*, which is barely comprehensible. Here, ideally, is deconstruction's pure excess of itself. But can deconstruction comprehend its belonging to the quasi-Hegelian formula? The formula betrays a kernel of unthinkability which puts in question the assertion of a different difference of deconstruction other than as a difference which it shares equally with the others: a different difference which is the same as and hence different from the same difference.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Specters of Marx* (Derrida 1994d, 135), *Spectres de Marx*, (Derrida 1993f, 216).

<sup>2</sup> 'Tout autrement,' in *Nom propres*, quoted and translated in Robert Cumming's *Phenomenology and Deconstruction* (Cumming 1991, 4; Levinas 1987, 65). The essay is translated in full as 'Wholly Otherwise' in *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bernasconi and Critchley 1991).

<sup>3</sup> 'Deconstruction, Pragmatism, Hegemony' (Laclau 1996, 59).

<sup>4</sup> 'Khôra,' in *On the Name* (Derrida 1995b, 91) and, in French, in *Khôra* (Derrida 1993b, 19).

<sup>5</sup> The 'making a difference' (the making of a difference) is intrinsically linked then to a 'mattering,' 'making matter,' materialization, to a realizing and realization, and to a 'substancing,' substantiation, and substantivation.

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, it is not completely certain that there are such persons as 'deconstructors,' hence the term, which I use throughout, is compromised by expediency—though, perhaps, no *more* compromised than many other useful and reductive designations. It is certain, on the other hand, that there are those who would vigorously object to the title of 'deconstructor,' not because of the implied close relation with deconstruction, but because of the implications of such an unqualified identification.

<sup>7</sup> Page references in italics refer to the original language edition.

<sup>8</sup> This interventive and transformative emphasis with regard to hierarchical structures, dominant orders, hegemonic configurations, and the like, is made overt in many instances in Derrida, some of which we examine later. In *Politics of Friendship* (*Politiques de l'amitié*), for example, near the end of the book, Derrida reminds his readers in a long parenthesis about the

strategy whereby he has paid so much attention to canonical accounts of friendship. 'We have not privileged the great discourses on friendship,' says Derrida, 'so as to submit to their authority or to confirm a hierarchy but, on the contrary, as it were, to question the process and the logic of a canonization which has established these discourses in a position of exemplary authority. The history of friendship cannot be reduced to these discourses, still less to these *great* discourses of a *philosophical* genre. But precisely to begin the analysis of the forces and procedures that have placed the *majority* of these *major* discourses in the *major* position they have acquired, all the while covering over, reducing, or marginalizing the others, one must begin by paying attention to what they say and what they do' (Derrida 1994c, 255-56; Derrida 1997c, 229). The key terms here—authority, hierarchy, canonization, majority, covering over (*occultant*), reducing, marginalizing—have, in a sense, survived intact in their normative function from well before *Positions* in 1972 until *Politiques de l'amitié* in 1994, and beyond.

<sup>9</sup> In logic, conditionals take the form, 'If *p*, then *q*,' where *p* is called the 'antecedent' and *q* is called the 'consequent.' For example, 'If Lucy was born in New South Wales, then she is an Australian.' The conditional is a very interesting construction, particularly with regard to its temporal articulation. An extensive investigation of the conditional form would also consider its relation to the Kantian transcendental (conditions of possibility), to the construction of history as a chain of events and consequences, and to the referential mechanism itself, about which more is said later.

<sup>10</sup> The difficulty for the *one* aporia is one of mediation. In 'Force of Law' ('Force de loi'), Derrida neatly resolves this problem in a remarkably Platonic fashion. 'In fact there is only one aporia,' says Derrida, 'only one potential aporetic that infinitely distributes itself [en fait il s'agit d'un seul potentiel aporétique qui se distribue à l'infini]' (Derrida 1992c, 22; Derrida 1994b, 48).

<sup>11</sup> The notion of a 'jargon of impossibility' is discussed in Chapter One, note 6.

<sup>12</sup> A linkage appears here, perhaps prematurely, between the aporia and the other (between aporia and other), a passage, in a sense, that goes in both directions. The moment of the other is an aporetic one. There is an aporia *of the other*. There is *the* aporia of the other. The aporia is perhaps always the aporia of the other. The aporia is an alteration. There is an aporia of same and other (of identity and difference), which is perhaps the same as the aporia of the other. (On the aporia of identity and difference, see in particular Chapter Six.) How could one possibly make the *essential* distinction between aporia and other? This is the most difficult terrain, and it is unfortunate that the collusion that appears here only half-formed as it were cannot be fully developed at this stage.

<sup>13</sup> Here the aporia performs a double role: it is knowledge and non-knowledge; it is a new knowledge, and the annihilation of a knowledge. A fidelity to the aporia seeks to acquire the secret of its ubiquity. There is a complicated transferential dimension here: for the deconstructor-who-is-not-Derrida, that which 'will always *be deconstructing* and *be deconstructed* and *be deconstruction* before and beyond deconstruction' is Derrida too. There is a transference between Derrida and the aporia, both for Derrida and for the deconstructor-who-is-not-Derrida. The signs of this in Derrida and elsewhere are the gestures, running in the opposite direction to many frequently reiterated avowals, towards a *general or universal anticipation of the other*. Can we not already sense a reversal in which deconstruction is becoming the other of deconstruction? Ought this transformation to be resisted?

<sup>14</sup> Miller prefaces this statement with the following: 'so-called "deconstruction" has itself, if there is such a thing, shown, among other things, the fallacy of letting the singularity of proper or generic names do your thinking for you.' But there does appear to be a name which does some of Miller's thinking for him. By 'singularity' here, Miller means the

misconception that 'because "deconstruction" is a single and singular name, "deconstruction" must be one single, univocal, homogeneous thing.' This 'is one example of mystified thinking,' he concludes (Miller 1992, 9).

<sup>15</sup> There is a moment in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's introduction to the proceedings of the conference, 'Les fins de l'homme,' when they repeat this maneuver, not in the context however of a predication or identification of deconstruction, but of Man. 'Dans cette époque..., la question de l'homme ne peut plus être une question d'essence (qu'est-ce que l'homme?) et la question de la philosophie, qui sans doute n'est déjà plus proprement une question philosophique, devient la question: *qui est l'homme?*' (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1981, 13). It is not immediately clear how this modulation or rewording of the question (though we cannot be sure that it is simply a rewording) evades or displaces or neutralizes or circumambulates or transforms the question of essence (if that is the movement or the intention). It would seem that the question persists in any case. The question of essence persists, of course, despite an account of the 'ideology' of essence, where essence is revealed as, say, at least ideal. The specter of essence can hardly be exorcised by a dematerialization. It survives most transparently in 'l'interrogation d'une impropriété ou d'une non-essentialité de l'essence en général' (14). There is no weakening of the exigency of essence here, so what is altered? It may be the essence of essence to be contingent, for example, or to alter. If essence describes a convergence opposed in a sense to dissemination, then it converges upon the singular, which is another word for the aporia of essence, if you like; another word for the essence of essence too. Let me state it baldly: the essence of essence is the singular. Though essence resists alteration in the name of what is essential, no doubt: it also drives alteration. One could trace a similar path between the *quoi* and *qui* asked of Man, where the transition from *quoi* to *qui* adds precisely what it is (i.e., that difference, that essence) which makes Man Man, or which makes a man the man he is. If the *quoi* asks us to pick out properties, the *qui* asks us to pick out *someone*, a proper name (*qui est l'homme?*). The *qui* is the question of a subject. There is a point though where this distinction wavers, where it is not clear whether to say *quoi* or *qui*. This then becomes itself the question: *quoi* or *qui*? And, certainly, in Part One for example, we can hardly ignore the significance of a question which asks, 'Who is deconstruction?', but nonetheless I have persisted with what I call the 'quidditative' question (What is...?), which remains despite these complications and mutations an indispensable one. On the question of the *qui* and the *quoi* in relation to 'l'invention de l'homme,' see also Bernard Stiegler, 'Quand faire c'est dire: De la technique comme différence de toute frontière' (Stiegler 1994, 271).

<sup>16</sup> Some caution is required here, for blind adherence to the rule is the kind of behavior that it is always possible to attribute to the other.

<sup>17</sup> In what follows however we are forced to pursue the question of the difference or different difference of deconstruction. That is, it will not always be possible to distinguish the difference of deconstruction from its different difference, inasmuch as the difference of deconstruction may well be its different difference, and vice versa. Nonetheless, the question of the different difference of deconstruction must always be maintained as the possibility of a difference of deconstruction different from the differences of the others. Therefore, whenever it is a question of the difference of deconstruction, which it is throughout, we need to ask ourselves, 'Is this a difference, or the difference, or is it a different difference?'

<sup>18</sup> A brief word about the concatenation of deconstruction and poststructuralism. Murray Krieger, for example, talks of 'poststructuralist deconstruction' in *Words about Words about Words* (Krieger 1988, 74), and this is a frequent alignment. Derrida has on many occasions expressed reservations about the descriptive utility of the terms 'poststructuralism' and 'postmodernism,' particularly when they are intended to include deconstruction as one of their prominent instances. See, for example, 'Marx and Sons': 'These are catch-all notions

into which the most poorly informed public... stuffs nearly everything it does not like or understand, starting with "deconstruction." I do not consider myself a poststructuralist or a postmodernist. I... almost never use these words, except to say that they are inadequate to what I am trying to do' (Derrida 1999b, 228-29). Nonetheless, despite their obvious limitations and despite their frequent abuse, the terms 'poststructuralism' and 'postmodernism' do have an intrinsic interest, if largely a symptomatic one. Niall Lucy succinctly describes the phenomenon of the 'post' (postmodern, -human, etc.) in *Debating Derrida* (Lucy 1995, 88-89). In *Postmodern Literary Theory*, Lucy considerably extends his analysis, making a distinction between poststructuralism and postmodernism which understands Derrida and deconstruction as closer to poststructuralism, and Lyotard, alternatively, as 'undoubtedly a postmodernist' (Lucy 1997, 96). Derrida's work 'can legitimately be described as poststructuralist....' writes Lucy, '[i]n the sense that Derrida rethinks the concept of structure in a way that marks it as different from the concept of structure in structuralism' (100). Lucy then formalizes his distinction between poststructuralism and postmodernism: '[F]or poststructuralism, the concept of structure always already contains sufficient "give" (or "tolerance") to provide a little room for manoeuvre, while for postmodernism a concept of structure as fully closed and present to itself is an essential requirement for the concept of a playfully open and unruly (or "structureless") structure' (102). Thus, for Lucy, divergent interpretations of the notion of play, for example—play as 'give,' play as 'freeplay'—signal the divergence of poststructuralism and postmodernism. We would do well to keep this broader perspective in mind when we consider the notion of play in the section of Chapter One entitled 'The Retreat of Play,' where the word 'play' marks the place of an incipient division within deconstruction.

<sup>19</sup> See Derrida, 'The Time is Out of Joint': 'I have often had occasion to define deconstruction as that which is—far from a theory, a school, a method, even a discourse, still less a technique that can be appropriated—at bottom *what happens or comes to pass* [ce qui arrive]' (Derrida 1995d, 17).

<sup>20</sup> 'Deconstruction is not a method,' says Derrida in 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' ('Lettre à un ami japonais'), 'and cannot be transformed into one. Especially if the technical and procedural significations of the words are stressed. It is true that in certain circles (university or cultural, especially in the United States) the technical and methodological "metaphor" that seems necessarily attached to the very word "deconstruction" has been able to seduce or lead astray' (Derrida 1987d, 391; Derrida 1991c, 273).

<sup>21</sup> The quotation is from Miller's *The Ethics of Reading* (Miller 1987, 10).

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps Wolfreys would prefer to substitute the word 'fidelity' for 'truth.' The quote from Miller would then read, 'Deconstruction is nothing more or less than faithful reading as such.' In the interview, 'As if I were Dead,' Derrida offers some assistance in this regard: '[T]he feeling of duty which I feel in myself is that I have to be true to the other.... I wouldn't say *True* vs *False*, but true in the sense of fidelity' (Derrida 1996a, 220). Here, again, despite every caution and reservation, the different difference of deconstruction seeks to assert itself—that is, in a distinction between truth (True vs False) and fidelity (truth as in *to be true to something*).

<sup>23</sup> I do not address explicitly in this inquiry the relation between *deconstruction* and *literature*, but were I to do so, this is clearly one of the places where the question of this relation would arise. For example, a simple substitution: 'literature is the word for the disruption of the representational mechanism that occurs when word and thing fully assume their native proximity.' (Equally also: 'literature is the word for the *purification* of the representational mechanism that occurs when word and thing fully assume their native proximity.') In 'La chose même,' Daniel Giovannangeli concludes that 'la littérature s'inscrit au coeur des

partages entre l'homme et les choses, les mots et les choses. La littérature est ce qui suspend l'ontologie' (Giovannangeli 1996, 96). Though one could well argue that ontology is in a sense *always already suspended*, nonetheless it is clear here why the relation between deconstruction and literature is significant: one *might* say that literature and deconstruction open the aporia of the ontological. We need to keep this in mind when we come to consider the notion of textualism in Chapter One.

<sup>24</sup> See the interview with Derrida in Richard Kearney's *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Kearney 1984, 123-4), which is quoted at length in Chapter One, note 30.

<sup>25</sup> This differentiation from representation (and from a representational difference) is complicated by the close relation of difference and representation, according to the formula announced in Chapter Five: *Representation is the difference between the representation and what is represented*.

## I WHAT IS DECONSTRUCTION?

*The primordial Difference of the  
absolute Origin,... that is perhaps what  
has always been said under the concept  
of "transcendental" through the  
enigmatic history of its displacements.  
Difference would be transcendental.*

*Whence the right to interrupt?*

*L'Amérique, mais c'est la  
déconstruction.*

—Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup>

## Short History of the Different Difference of Deconstruction

### 1.1 Strategy, Interruption, and the Other

What were the consequences of deconstruction for the francophone structuralism of the 1960s? Though Derrida's earliest scholarly texts were readings of Husserl, it is with the essays gathered in *Writing and Difference* (*L'écriture et la différence*), for example, that one registers the breadth of the polemic with regard to the structuralist enterprise.

Deconstruction was at once, it seemed, an extension and exacerbation of structuralism. It *interrupted* structuralism—this was its initial force there, where something critical, *the facility of the passage to structure*, would be interrogated. One could say the deconstructive interrogation pressed the logic of structuralism towards a *true* structuralism, which it could hardly survive. On the other hand, across the Atlantic, in the New World, what were the consequences of the importation of deconstruction for the indigenous critical orthodoxy? In departments where literature was the object, deconstruction was, or at least was soon to become, both an interruption to and extension of a doctrine of literary criticism called 'New Criticism,' which was a kind of formalism but quite different from structuralism. Let us then commence an investigation into the character of the deconstructive intervention and the deconstructive difference with this initial, simple, familiar configuration of forces—deconstruction and structuralism, deconstruction and New Criticism—while bearing in mind that the aim is not to elaborate these encounters in their diachronic detail, but to look precisely for the places where there are what might be called 'encounters,' places where something might come to be.



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\* \*

Despite more than a little theory of its own, the New Criticism was ambivalent about theory. If theory were merely the exposition of method, then some theory was required to assert the virtues of New Critical formalism. To make a claim about *what literature is*, for example, was to make the venture into theory, however reluctant and tentative. But theory was another way of reducing the singularity of the text, of subordinating literature to the non- or extra-literary, of transgressing its purity as *the work of art*, forever as such released by imagination from the endless clutter of worldly and quotidian constraints and betrothed to the god *Aesthesis*, from whom all redemption flows. The New Critics were concerned to encounter the literary work on its own terms, about which they had formed some ideas. Hence the work was quarantined by careful proscription, by a blacklist of critical fallacies, from its exhaustion in the plethora of critical contexts—historical, psychological, biographical, and so on—which only served to obscure the work itself. The ideal of the New Critic tended towards the meditative: she put aside all presuppositions and, instead of quickly relating work to world or deriving from the work a framework for acting virtuously in life's perplexing dramas, she read closely, cultivating an openness to the work by way of a sensitivity to its literary features—ambiguity (or polysemy), complexity, paradox, imagery, irony, and (according to an ultimate synthesis in imagination) unity. These formal attributes opened the way to the work itself, to the cool sublimity of the art-effect: though not quite an ecstasy, still at least a fine transcendence.<sup>1</sup>

Attention to this kind of attribute allowed the critic to constitute the integrity of the work, despite its singularity and resistance to subordination, its positive unruliness. With time and patience, care and discipline it would surrender its most precious possession: its being. It could be found there, where it was—ideally. The critic was entrusted with a difficult and subtle task—to *let it be*—a task delicately balanced between action and passivity. Thus the New Criticism—inasmuch as it is possible to discern its general doctrine amongst the particular emphases of its expert practitioners—sought to apply a formalist discipline to criticism through a practice of close reading as a means of allowing the work its own particularity and completeness. *Form and content* were certainly *not* a crude dualism in New Criticism.

Though a *formalism* will inevitably share some features with a *structuralism*, formalist New Criticism and structuralism were distinguished by teleology. Structuralism was a seductive science of subsumption which promised an enviable, even lethal, power over the particular—including, amongst other prominent particulars, the solitary instant of time and the subject itself. Structuralism coincided or colluded with the development of a critical analytic of culture, derived in part perhaps from Marxism, in opening to scientific investigation new fields of objects: for example, the objects of popular culture, the works of naive makers, who were often nameless like the composers of folk tales which seem to spring from the very bosom of the culture itself, and thus to characterize it all the more sharply for their lack of deliberation, for their pure symptomaticity. These objects were symptoms of the language thing. Structuralism was not a close reading practice but, maintaining a suitable distance from extraneous and intransigent detail, passed from the particular to the instance of structure with shameless enthusiasm. Each new terrain with its population of cultural products surrendered to a delirious repetition of the same as if driven by a cosmic binary compulsion. *Language* was the key, the unifying factor. Here was the possibility of a genuine critical totalization.<sup>2</sup>

How was it that deconstruction managed at the same time to perform this double interruption? How could it make that much more difficult, nigh impossible, the march of an all-conquering structuralism over the bodies of works littered like so many discarded symptoms across the human plane *and* frustrate the tender devotion of the New Critic awaiting the arrival of the aesthetic moment, wherein the work would *be* and *be itself*, eternally?<sup>3</sup>

It was for the following reasons:

1. Deconstruction arrived in America both as a disruption and extension of the structuralist project already under way there and as a pressure upon a kind of formalism, the New Criticism, to *read without restraint*, where it already was, up close to the text. In a sense, Derrida and de Man shared this elemental intensification of the reading experience, an excoriation of the page. At this proximity, it was no longer clear that reading facilitated the realization of the poem's intrinsic and organic unity. At this proximity, there was, on the contrary, a risk of interrupting the integrity of the literary experience as a unique but transmissible communion of suppliant and work. This

deconstructive *hyperformalism* understood the singularity or unity of the work within the tradition of a logocentrism or aestheticism stabilized by the values of immediacy, presentation, unity, univocal meaning and so on.

It was precisely the task of the New Critics to expose themselves to the individual presence of the work, and hence the deconstructive task had already begun: 'When we have the poem,' writes I. A. Richards, 'in all its minute particulars as intimately and as fully present to our minds as we can contrive—no general description of it but the very experience itself present as a living pulse in our biographies—then our acceptance or rejection of it must be *direct*' (Richards 1929, 302). As such, it was the promise and possibility of the literary experience itself that was at stake in the deconstruction (if such it was) of the values of presentation, manifestation, epiphany, revelation, unity, and so on. Deconstruction appeared to *foreclose* on the promise of the work. This was its *interruptive* force there: to make the promise relinquish its promised fulfilment, and to have it exposed as a false expectation, merely another dead thing feigning possibility like the old and forlorn ghost of a tomorrow which never comes. Deconstruction exposed the constitutive illusion of the literary experience itself as illusory, and with this exposure the future itself seemed to wither.

It is crucial to understand this critical moment of deconstruction, wherein it interrupts a procedure and forecloses on the promise which orients it towards a consummation to come. Deconstruction says, *in effect*: that towards which you are oriented, and that in which, for you, *all* possibility and *all* futurity are invested, is a sham and a lie. It does not *quite* say this, but the effect is the same.<sup>4</sup> The existence of deconstruction itself depends on this force of interruption, which delivers a blow. Something is determined and something is undermined, subverted, destabilized, made to tremble, displaced in this determination. At this point, a distinction between critique and deconstruction does not function decisively, for their violence is equal. Where an expectation of a promised moment of presence or presentation is demonstrated to depend on an indefinite deferral of the moment of the thing itself within a system (or quasi-system) of differences, for example, then it would seem that the appointment has not merely been postponed, but canceled, and the very notion of a presence as such comes to signal an impossibility.<sup>5</sup>

Here the value of *impossibility* has not yet been reduced, or transformed, as it is in what has emerged today as a *jargon of impossibility*. Impossibility is the encounter with

that which *must* be, for it is the promised end, but which, suddenly, *cannot* be.

Impossibility is this violence of destitution at the limit of the possible. Impossibility is also a logical moment in which possibility and impossibility do not so much abrade as coincide, such that impossibility becomes tame and friendly, cleansed of its constitutive anguish: this is the jargon of impossibility which, in a sense, represses impossibility.<sup>6</sup>

Where there is an *interruption*, there is an encounter with an impossibility *other than* its mobilization in a new jargon, in which its force is neutralized. Deconstruction interrupts the tender devotion of the New Critic awaiting the arrival of the aesthetic experience—wherein the work would *be* and be itself, eternally—merely by describing the differential and deferential structure which governs a general representativity from which the moment of pure presentation is constitutively absent. What appears now, in the context of a highly invested anticipation, is the relationship of the thing itself to the *never* (that is, the impossibility) of its presentation. The *never* and the anticipation are irreconcilable. Here, as I said, the difference between deconstruction and critique is irrelevant. It does not matter that deconstruction affirms the promissory or messianic function within this structure as *ineradicable*. In the grip of this structural necessity, the object is irredeemable. The literary critic is exposed by the deconstructor in the weakness of his unconscious symptomatology with respect to the structural necessity determined in the movement of the deconstruction of presence. Something happens here. There is an effect of power. Where there was a *vital adhesion*, now something is tearing itself free.

2. In New Criticism, deconstruction exposed, amongst other things, the linkage between a critical practice which discerned the living work in the unity of its 'minute particulars' and the 'metaphysics of presence.'<sup>7</sup> Yet deconstruction intervened in francophone structuralism as the champion of the singular, wresting the hapless symptom from the tyranny of the diagnosis, according to the logic of an irreducible difference (or *différance*—the difference of *différance*—which is, perhaps, a significant moment in the institution of the different difference of deconstruction).

Let us consider the encounter with (what has been called) structuralism at its most general, where structuralism is a disposition to subordinate the object to its functional or nodal character as an element of structure, and to spatialize the object as a moment of structure divorced or redeemed from the singularity of its temporal instant. Because this

is hardly a disposition unique to structuralism, it is not an entirely satisfactory exercise to address structuralism in this way, without reference to its origins, its concrete historical contexts, its disciplinary variations, its internal divisions, its phases and modulations, or without reference to structuralist theoreticians who may or may not be reducible to a formalization of their practice under the heading of structuralism. It is always possible to say, with Eric Matthews, that 'there never was, strictly speaking, a "structuralist school"' (Matthews 1996, 157). Nonetheless there is a clear and bold formalization of structuralism, and it takes place in the course of its deconstruction in 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' ('La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines') an essay concerned precisely with the disruptive event that coincides with thinking (or beginning to think, or repeating) the 'structurality of structure' (Derrida 1967b, 411; Derrida 1978b, 280).

Before we come to Derrida's essay, though, let us quickly rehearse the logical aporia of structure *per se* (which is also the logical aporia of *exemplarity*, and of *logicality*), for there is a simple way of construing the obstruction to a general or total structuration. The difficulty for every structure is that to derive or abstract the structure from its instances always requires an instance of the structure *itself*, whether as a description, diagram, formula, or something else. For the structure to be formalized, there must be a *particular* rendering of the structure: it must be a mere *instance* of it and an exemplary or definitive one, the structure *itself*. Thus the structure *itself*, to appear as the structure, can only appear as an instance of it and not as the structure itself—which remains, in a sense, noumenal. This is the pyrrhic triumph of the particular over structure (form, generality, logic, etc.).

Derrida's argument regarding structure in 'Structure, Sign and Play' focused on the question of *center*. Essential to the structure but not assimilable to it, the center marked the aporia of the coincidence of particular and universal for structurality *in general*. The center was the privileged place through whose aperture particular and universal communicated. The center was part and not part of the structure. The center was the necessary hole in the whole, its condition of possibility and its point of rupture, the site of an *irreducible* difference at the heart of structurality, which, as structurality, requires *infinite* reducibility (what I call, as the silent partner of the irreducible, the 'ever-reducible'). There was, at the heart of the structure, at its *most* structuring point, that

which was unassimilable to it. This was the both the basis for and the crisis in structure itself.<sup>8</sup>

This proved a powerful argument, which very quickly became a critical moment in the denouement of the structuralist adventure. But we must do a little more here than just condense the argument in a brief, reductive paraphrase. There is an interesting characteristic of the Derridean logic which so ably deconstructs the ethos of structure: it is couched, as logics are, entirely as a *synchronism*. Derrida's engagement with structuralism, which would readily concede that it cannot itself escape the aporia it exposes for structuralism (thus confirming the truth of the analysis of the aporia of structure), nonetheless *insists* upon universality as a function of its own rhetorical assertion and self-substantiation: the most rhetorically insistent term in Derrida's epochal text is 'always.'<sup>9</sup> What is being exposed there is a synchronic *structure* of structure, a destructuring structure (of structure), hence the kinship of deconstruction and structuralism.<sup>10</sup> And the assertion of the law ('always') is a not just a function of an unavoidable regress to structure but of the movement of *interruption* itself. The 'always' *assumes the power to interrupt*. What interrupts the universal here is not the humble, defenseless particular but the *universal particular*. This is the force of a logic. The particularity of the particular is universalized, not *for the sake of the particular*—how could that be? for it is diminished in this abstract elevation to singular existence—but with *the aim of interruption*, with the aim of interceding in the course of events.<sup>11</sup> The destabilization of a hegemonic binary configuration is always as much in the interest of a hegemony to come as of an emancipation. The 'always' of a deconstructive universal particular invades and colonizes the 'always' of structuralism's structuralizing and synchronic integrity.

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What directs this intervention in the scheme of things? Who directs it? This is not immediately clear. There is the force of entry, of a breakage. There is an irruption of the word—of the word 'deconstruction' for example. There is an irruption of the name—of the name 'Derrida' for example.



Is it a *strategy* that directs the intervention? What does Derrida mean by *strategy*? It is more, we imagine, than just a means of interruption. The allusion to strategy frequently refers us to another context and a set of contingencies that cannot easily be reconstructed in the immediate or current context, where the play of forces is differently configured. Strategy is an argumentative inclination relative to contextual exigency. Something of strategy is omitted here though: in a context and with reference to a set of local variables, strategy is a *directedness*. It is an orientation in an engagement with other forces according to a calculation of outcomes. What remains unspoken in the allusion to a strategy that cannot be resituated without misrepresentation is the *character* of this directedness, which is *in the service of a value*: in the service of *the good*, for example (which may then be construed in any number of ways), or, according perhaps to an emancipatory or Left ethos, in the service of freedom from domination. Strategy is a contextual directedness in the service or for the advancement of a value.

Of course, strategy might respond to other inclinations. It might not even be available *as such*—that is, as the transcendental map of a prior engagement of forces. Strategy might be dislodged from its military and instrumental conditions. Strategy might be an other-directedness, unavailable as a volition or project, and invariably and inextricably invested in the singularity of a context. Strategy would then be the set of moves in a context that respond only to the demand of responsibility in the other, and hence strategy would be a linkage of responses unreproducible as the *same* strategy in another situation. The *allusion* to strategy would indicate, as a precaution, the difficulty of a translation between contexts. Strategy would then be a kind of untranslatability or failure of transcendence, and hence the disarming of directedness in general. It would, in Rodolphe Gasché's phrase, 'make room for the Other' (Gasché 1994, 21).<sup>12</sup>

In this case the *strategy* with regard to structuralism employs the 'always.' The 'always' is employed strategically though it is not at all a limitation to context. That is, the 'always' would exceed every context and every local strategy as its strategy. Thus the 'always' has an incomparable strategic utility. Structuralism, in particular, has a stake in universality, which is articulated in the 'always'—the 'always' of a flattened or compressed or elided diachrony. Derrida's 'always' attacks structuralism where it stakes its ground, where it lives.

What if strategy seeks to divine or to expose the moment of deconstructibility not only as an opening upon the exterior, but *equally* in order to make an interruption: that is, in order to interrupt the other, cut it off from its source of life, and to bring it home as a trophy? What if it is precisely and indistinguishably the other who, and the other which, is *occluded* in this exercise? This is not clear. Perhaps it cannot be adequately clarified. The essential ambivalence with regard to the other—an ambivalence within which the distinction between 'mak[ing] room for the Other,' and foreclosing on it or locking it out or seeking to destroy it, is difficult to determine—questions a tacit identification with the Left. Such an identification is to be understood now as *that which, individually and collectively, always tries to recognize its responsibility and to reform its relation to the other*. This identification is maintained here, quietly, naturally. It is sustained despite a history of difficulties in harmonizing deconstruction with the program of the Left, for it was deconstruction, amongst other things, that disrupted the putative doctrinal coherence of the Marxist project.<sup>13</sup> It is sustained as an ethical ground (a groundless ground, if you like) and as an ideal (the ideal is, we recall, in Derrida's terms, the 'to-come'). The *strategy* is, in general, an attempt at interpolation. The assertion of 'always' is the consummate strategy. But who or what seeks to be interpolated? The name? The name 'Derrida,' for example? Is it the name which seeks interpolation in the course of events—in order to be, to be with, and at the expense of, the other?

Derrida responds, during an interview at a conference which bears his name ('Applied Derrida'), to an unspoken inquisition of this kind on the matter of the name, of his name. 'If my family name seems to refer to this iterable singularity I just mentioned,' he says, 'it means that this name is not simply mine, not only because it's a family name.... [F]rom the very beginning, I received this name, this name was imprinted on me.... I have an obligation to the name.... I love this name, which is not mine of course....' Thus Derrida reflects upon his name in an improvisation, turning it round in his mind, as it were, looking for the signs of his relationship to it. 'But honoring the name here doesn't mean—believe me—making a cult of the name or being devoted to the name but signing with one's name which does not yet exist; it has yet to exist' (Derrida 1996a, 219-20). His name is, he says, the name 'of the other' and it

cannot be signed, only countersigned. 'Derrida' is the name of the other. The ambiguity here is essential.

'I love this name, which is not mine of course....' Derrida does not own it. Is it that he cannot own it because this is the structure of the relation to *the name* in general? Certainly his meditation shifts imperceptibly from a consideration of *his* name ('my name') to *the* name ('one's name'). 'I love this name, which is not mine of course....' The movement from 'my name' to 'the name' in which is articulated the structure of the relation to the name in general and the structure of an essential alienation (such that it would be a mistake to think that the power of Derrida's name at the center of the event *accrues* to Derrida as an accretion and agglomeration of self) is indistinguishable here from a *disowning* of the name and of responsibility for having moved to place the name at the center. He cannot own *and* he disowns the name.

In a sense then Derrida apologizes for the ubiquity of his name, which is the *center* of the event, its title and *raison d'être*. If you think it's mine, he says in effect, don't be misled, it's not mine anyway, it's the other's. I have not set out to place it here, at the center, where it is *undoubtedly* a cult, and which was, in any case, what I always wanted. What the other wanted. I only wanted to live up to it.

In the movement in Derrida's text, the name tends to the name of the other. The movement *resolves* in the other, at least with regard to the path of a thought in the interview in question. This is a sign of politeness, and no-one is offended. But the ambiguity is not easily disambiguated: the name, which is not mine but which would be so, displaces the other for me. Or so it would. There is not, however, a *natural* resting point with the resolution of the name, the 'name-to-come,' in the other. It is not *necessarily* a function of the 'always' with regard to the name: that is, it is not necessarily the case that the name is *always* the name of the other (though undoubtedly this is so). This distributes the value of the name in the universal too hastily. Nonetheless, the alternative is not clear. To repeat: the vital ambivalence with regard to the other is an ambivalence within which the distinction between 'mak[ing] room for the Other' and foreclosing on it or locking it out is difficult to determine.

The question of strategy and of directedness thus remains unresolved. It is not clear what propels a certain *deconstructive* intervention or interruption, and it is not clear what makes the intervention *deconstructive* rather than, say, *critical*, or *deconstructive*

rather than simply *interruptive*, or *invasive*, or, say, simply *resistant*. And if it should prove the case that deconstruction does not function in a relation such that it could be said to be *in the service* of something or other, some end, perhaps—strategic, emancipatory or otherwise—or some drive or impulse, or in the service of logic, rigor, truth or enlightenment, then, paradoxically, it is not possible to say that deconstruction has a *different* relation or orientation with regard to the other, or with regard to the directedness of its interventions and interruptions. Deconstruction is 'what happens,' says Derrida (Derrida 1995d, 17). Yet it is always possible to understand deconstruction as *in the service* of something or other, for this relation—in the service of—is simply the relation to a *determination*, a *condition of possibility*: that is, inasmuch as deconstruction is interpreted and interpretable, independent of the truth or otherwise of these interpretations, then it is subject to the difficult logic of representation, whereby, invariably, it *represents* or *is represented*, whereby it *refers* or *is the referent* of some other thing. Here, we need to bear in mind, while maintaining its provisionality, the following proposal: deconstruction's difference from the others is that it is equally different—equally *in the service* of something or other, equally disjoined from a relation such that it could be said to be *in the service* of something or other.

There is a moment of considerable tension, then, in the continuum of a short history of the different difference of deconstruction. At this stage, the question of this difference becomes a matter of *strategy*, *interruption*, and the *other*—though how exactly these three are coordinated is not completely clear. It is not always easy to know what drives a strategy and where it is heading. If deconstruction has a strategy, then the strategy of deconstruction is one which intervenes in an already dynamic interplay in order to 'make room for the Other.' It would appear that there is a kind of work on behalf of the other. There is a kind of work on behalf of the irreducible. Is this in fact the case? How could this be determined? Is it a 'work'? Is such a thing possible? Perhaps a *descriptive moment* needs to be disentangled from a *moment of advocacy*, but such a disentanglement is not so easily achieved. In any case, it is likely that there is a kind of work, or activity, or thinking, *always* on behalf of the other, always indebted to the other, and indebted without the possibility of acknowledgment or recognition. The other-directedness is inescapable. Deconstruction makes this point repeatedly: *always*

*indebted to the other*. Making this point, deconstruction makes an acknowledgment and, of course, it seeks to expunge the debt.

Deconstruction *intervenes*, and on behalf of the debt to the other. Is there a possible *directedness*, in an intervention, and is there a strategy which opens a way that would not otherwise have—or have been—opened? It appears that Derrida works for and on behalf of the other. Is it 'work,' or 'a work'? Is it a 'good work'? He is enthralled by the other. He works for and on behalf of the debt which cannot be acknowledged or expunged. Could he do or could he have done otherwise? It is always possible to do otherwise, though the destiny of an action is, at the same time, absolutely singular. It would be a catastrophe were we not to know what it is, in Gasché's phrase, to 'make room for the Other,' for there is an absolute compunction in this regard. It is not yet clear however whether it is here that we can locate the difference, or the different difference, of deconstruction.

## 1.2 The Classical Object of Deconstruction

Let us consider a situation in which the character of the deconstructive intervention approaches transparency. Some time after 'Structure, Sign, and Play' Derrida defends the literary particular against another structuring generality, which would reduce it to a psychoanalytic symptom. Symptomatically, Derrida diagnoses in Lacan's 'Seminar on the Purloined Letter' both a movement away and yet, more decisively, a *return* to a 'classical' relationship of literary symptom to psychoanalytic truth:

From the outset, we recognize the classical landscape [*le paysage classique*] of applied psychoanalysis. Here applied to literature. Poe's text, whose status is never examined—Lacan simply calls it "fiction"—, finds itself invoked as an "example." An example destined to "illustrate," in a didactic procedure, a law and a truth forming the proper object of a seminar. Literary writing, here, is brought into an *illustrative* position: "to illustrate" here meaning to read the general law in the example, to make clear the meaning of a law or of a truth, to bring them to light in striking or exemplary fashion. The text is in the service of the truth.... [W]hat the literary example yields is a *message*. (Derrida 1980, 453-55; Derrida 1987c, 425-6)

What is the strategy here? At the very least, we can say that Derrida *intervenes*. The intervention is registrable in a strategic recutting or reshaping of the material, or of the relationship to the material, according to a rule which decrees that the victor is the one who has, at their command, the greater vigilance: Derrida *recognizes* differences where they were not recognized as such, by Lacan; he discriminates more acutely; Derrida cuts differences which appear now to be essential but which were not made by Lacan. Something is exposed, and at Lacan's expense. That is, there is something Derrida can see which Lacan cannot. There is a violent dialectic of transcendence. This interventive quality is at least partially a function of *tone* also: 'Poe's text, whose status is never examined—Lacan simply calls it "fiction"—, finds itself invoked as an "example."' We might say, interpreting the meaning of this tonality, that Derrida intervenes in a psychoanalytic *transference*—to Lacan; that he seeks to *displace* this transference.<sup>14</sup> But in what direction? There are a number of binaries here that might be overturned or reconfigured in the service of a strategic dehegemonization: literature and

psychoanalysis, symptom and diagnosis, literary particular and interpretive method, singular and universal, deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Derrida and Lacan.

As the thrust of his critique, heated by a careful indignation, Derrida rehearses the logic of exemplification. It is, critically, a partial rehearsal. In Lacan, there is a classical reduction of the literary by way of exemplification. Derrida does not pull his punches. He berates Lacan for his unwitting entrapment in the logic of exemplification: Lacan, he implies, *is no different from the others*. Lacan too, the great man, whose regular seminar bursts at the seams with those in search of the truth, is a symptom of applied psychoanalysis, which serves the 'general law of psychoanalytic knowledge' (427/454). Classically, Lacan belongs to the *class* of psychoanalytic applicators. 'We recognize,' says Derrida, 'the *classical* landscape of applied psychoanalysis.' *Classical*. The tone is unmistakable. *Classical*. It is a classical landscape because it is no different: Lacanian psychoanalysis is classical applied psychoanalysis. It has not made a difference. Implicitly: there *is* something which makes a difference, a different difference, where Lacanian psychoanalysis only repeats the difference of classical applied psychoanalysis. Yet the *classical* is a classical residue of examples. Lacan is an *example* for Derrida in the *classical* landscape of applied psychoanalysis by abusing the exemplarity of Poe's tale. Derrida repeats the logic of exemplification in his attribution of classicism. The *partiality* of the rehearsal of the logic of exemplification is a strategic omission *in order to maintain the force of intervention* and in order to assert the different difference of deconstruction.<sup>15</sup>

If Lacanian psychoanalysis readily reverts to formalism after a brief vacation in the materiality of the signifier, then deconstruction outformalizes psychoanalysis by way of the anti-formal privilege of the irreducible (that is, in this instance, the *literary*, of which Poe's tale is an example). Derrida is the voice of this resistance on behalf of the irreducible. But how can this be? Does the irreducible require a champion? If it is for the irreducible to resist and to resist *absolutely*, precisely because it *is* irreducible, then it does not require support or advocacy in the work of this resistance. It cannot do otherwise. It will resist *this* absolutely.

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It is certainly possible that the question of the difference or different difference of deconstruction might have been framed as a question of the difference *between* deconstruction and psychoanalysis, *between* Derrida and Lacan. If this difference asks us, implicitly, and in the context of a violent mutual contention (or castration, if you like), to *choose* between them, then the precise impossibility of the choice, which must be made, points equally towards the aporia of (the different difference of) psychoanalysis and the aporia of (the different difference of) deconstruction. The choice having been made (which is not possible), one becomes, perhaps, a psychoanalyst or a deconstructor. Here the difference between the two is marked again. The analyst becomes an analyst, becomes one who says, without equivocation or ironic evasion, and through the ordeal of a self-authorization, 'I am an analyst'—and, although this fact is printed on her business card in gold lettering, she must nonetheless endure every day the presumption of this title. On the other hand, the deconstructor does not say, 'I am a deconstructor.' On the contrary, the deconstructor is precisely one who questions (even denies) that there are deconstructors or that there is *something* called deconstruction, or that there can be a decision to become a deconstructor.<sup>16</sup> The analyst says of the deconstructor, 'He chooses not to choose, not to risk the "T".' The deconstructor says of the analyst, 'She makes of her decision to call herself a psychoanalyst a founding act by means of which she overcomes the impossibility of the decision, overturns her resistance to the choice, and acquiesces to the genealogy and institution which will support her.'

The problematic of the difference or different difference of deconstruction is set out (or prefigured) according to a difficult decision in Barbara Johnson's 'The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida.' Johnson's essay dramatizes an impossible relation and an impossible choice: Derrida and/or Lacan; deconstruction and/or psychoanalysis. It is mad that it should be a *choice*, but that is how it presents itself. Why a choice? It is not clear whether it is the violence of reading the two, the two rival readings of Poe, that confronts Johnson with the choice, or whether the choice precedes the reading. The choice is quite sharply formulated in this case, because Johnson does not make it. She presents it, in a sense. The choice subsists in her reading, but it is not announced, like an

outcome. It is incubated there. If, in 'Le facteur de la vérité,' which is not a highly equivocal text, Derrida demands a choice, then Johnson, in her reading, exceeds the choice between Derrida and Lacan, one or the other. But, even so, the choice remains. It is even *intensified*. It is not possible to love the two, Derrida and Lacan, equally. There can only be one. Who is the one?<sup>17</sup>

The distinctive dramatization in 'The Frame of Reference' must be placed alongside de Man's 'The Rhetoric of Blindness,' in which the choice (equally a mad choice) is a different, but related one: Derrida and/or Rousseau. What appears to differentiate these two essays, de Man's and Johnson's, what sets them apart from the others as two (though they are very different), is a kind of resistance perhaps. But to what? Is it a resistance to transference? That is, a resistance to love? Perhaps there is no such thing. Is it a resistance to the choice? This is unclear too, because, though the choice is not made, its necessity is *accentuated*. Is it a resistance to Derrida? Or even to deconstruction? Or is it a resistance to the differentiation of deconstruction? It is not immediately apparent what *can* be said of the difference which sets these two apart. It does appear, nonetheless, that neither of these authors is apprenticed to the name in the familiar way: a clear and unequivocal affirmation, or a defense, of the mastery of the master; a critique of the (other) master in the name of the mastery of the (one) master. If they are besotted with one or the other, their infatuation does not take this form. Instead, they fall somewhere between. They have not chosen. Something hangs in the balance. The choice is there, it is always there, it is decisively there, but it is suspended also. What is this key difference? Is there such a difference? Perhaps there is a transference to structure (to truth?) rather than to the name (which is the name of truth), but this fine differentiation would require a longer examination.

Johnson enters the space of the tension and contention between Lacan and Derrida, between the Lacanian thing and the Derridean thing, to point out an interpretive injustice done to Lacan by Derrida. She describes and illustrates Derrida's 'consistent forcing of Lacan's statements into systems and patterns from which *they are actually trying to escape*' (Johnson 1981, 125, my emphasis). This, of course, is precisely where the difficulty lies, equally for Derrida and for Johnson. Where is Lacan heading? Is his tendency clear? Is it readable? Derrida, says Johnson, forces Lacan to say things other than those he is really trying to say. Johnson, says Derrida in a section of 'Envois,' is

forcing him to say the opposite of what in fact he said.<sup>18</sup> There is a clear tendency in Lacan, says Derrida, towards those characteristics collected loosely under the heading of logocentrism (and hence phallogocentrism, and so on). Johnson finds evidence to indicate that Lacan's ambiguity tends to question or disrupt any logocentric orthodoxy.

Johnson's extended analysis of Derrida's 'objections' to Lacan's reading of Poe points to the character of the Derridean intervention, which responds, says Johnson, to 'some strategic necessity' (125). 'Derrida argues, in effect not against Lacan's *text*,' Johnson speculates, 'but against Lacan's *power*—or rather, against "Lacan" as the apparent cause of certain effects of power in French discourse today. Whatever Lacan's text may say, it functions, according to Derrida, as if it said what *he* says it says' (125). Johnson makes a very difficult series of discriminations here, but we will not concern ourselves now with all of them. Certainly the scenario Johnson describes, if it is true, is clearly a classical occasion of *strategy*. Johnson suggests that it is Lacan's *power* (or the power of his name) which stimulates Derrida's objection, which prompts his resistance. The power arises, we suppose, from the assertion of a psychoanalytic knowledge. There is a Lacanian *axiom*—for example, 'A letter always arrives at its destination' (Lacan 1966, 53; Lacan 1980, 408). Wielding the axiom, Lacan is the guarantor of an analytical meaning, he is the '*sujet supposé de savoir*,' to use the analytical expression with which Lacan describes the analysand's relationship to the analyst as repository of knowledge. Derrida contests the axiom, and contests the power, with a carefully formulated axiom of his own: 'A letter can always not arrive at its destination [*une lettre peut toujours ne pas arriver à destination*],' he says (Derrida 1980, 472; Derrida 1987c, 444). Is this an axiom, or something other? In any case, there is a choice. One cannot have both. This is Derrida's implication. The two axioms (or, perhaps, the axiom and the anti-axiom) are at war.

In Johnson's reading, then, there is an implicit problematic of power and knowledge, which can be linked in turn with the question of 'deliberate knowledge versus passive knowledge' that Paul de Man raises in 'The Rhetoric of Blindness' (de Man 1983, 118).<sup>19</sup> That is: there is a classical maneuver which establishes a deliberate knowledge in the place of a passive knowledge; the establishment of a deliberate knowledge in the place of a passive knowledge is always a gesture of (or towards) power; there cannot but be a kind of anterior usurpation in this maneuver—though, it must be said, the gesture



may be made unwittingly. Is it on account of this 'alterior usurpation' that we always hesitate around the question of power?

If there is a distinction between *deconstruction* and *critique*, it is that deconstruction *reads*, and, reading, it reads where the difference between a deliberate (conscious) and a passive (unconscious) knowledge is barely discernible, undecidable. The critical force of a reading is disrupted here. It reads towards the oblivion of the readable, at the limit of the power to bring the unconscious into consciousness. Alternatively, critique uses the difference between a deliberate and a passive knowledge to make its critical intervention—to *force the choice*, in other words. It embarrasses its object. It opens its object. It brings it from somnolence into wakefulness. It opens the eyes so that they might see what is there. It collects the light. Which of these two is Derrida's strategy? It must be said that it is not completely clear, in the space between what Derrida does, what he professes to do, and what he appears to do, that deconstruction and critique can be satisfactorily distinguished, despite their manifest differences.<sup>20</sup>

When Derrida responds, in effect, to Johnson's essay, the response focuses not on the issue of strategy, intervention, or power, but on the reversal. '[W]hat I admired most, then,' says Derrida, 'is... the overturning [*renversement*], or say rather the *reversement* [*dis plutôt le reversement final*], for it might indeed be a question of that, and the English word (*reversed*) puts us on the track of the French *reverser* better, even if it primarily means overturned or inverted, permuted' (Derrida 1980, 163; Derrida 1987c, 150). The response is buried in the remarkable 'Envois,' which precedes 'Le facteur de la vérité' in *The Post Card* (*La carte postale*). Is it a response to Johnson's essay? If it is, the tone of Derrida's response is barely readable. It does not mention Johnson by name, though she is quoted verbatim. Let us hear a long passage from this extraordinary response, which seems to contain in a complex and convoluted form the most resistant Derridean tonalities:

So then, patience, look closely at S and p [i.e., in the post card, reproduced on the cover of *The Post Card*] on the one hand (everything is there, all possible "positions") and on the other illustrate them with this caption: "If it at first seemed possible to say that Derrida was opposing the unsystematizable to the systematized, 'chance' to psychoanalytical 'determinism' [did I really do that? is Derrida or "Derrida" in question?] or the 'undecidable' to the 'destination,' the position seems now to be reversed: Lacan's apparently unequivocal ending says only its own dissemination, while 'dissemination' has erected itself into a kind of 'last word'."

This passage is immortal and every word deserves a book, the "positions," the "seem now to be," and let's not talk about "reversed." And for everything to be in order, "my" "dissemination" has to erect itself by itself, has already to have done so, so that the last word can be the last word. I have nothing against erection, but as concerns this word—and so many others—if I had insisted even more in saying that there was no master word or last word or first word, if I had insisted more (was it possible?) in saying that "dissemination" was one of those words, among so many others, that is to pull beyond [*pour entraîner*] every "last word," I would have been reproached, precisely by virtue of my insistence, for reconstituting a master word, no matter which. What to do? I am loved but they cannot stand me, they cannot stand that I might say anything that they might not be able to "reverse" in advance each time that the situation demands it (naturally, my "position," my "place," my places, answers or non-answers, etc., are a part, only a part of the aforementioned situation and of "what is at stake here"—I forgot to add that the correction is always ready to be corrected itself, and the process of restitution always remains open, to be continued: "But these oppositions are themselves misreadings of the dynamic functioning of what is at stake here." In effect. *What is at stake I cannot tell*. You have clearly seen the *carte*: even while saying in "apparently unequivocal" fashion that "what the 'purloined letter,' that is the letter '*en souffrance*,' means is that a letter always arrives at its destination," Lacan in truth meant to say what I said, what I will have said, under the heading of dissemination. What next! As for me, all the while apparently speaking of dissemination, I would have reconstituted this word into a last word and therefore into a destination. In other words, if it can be put thus, Lacan already meant what I said, and myself I am only doing what he says he is doing. And there you are, the trick has been played, destination is back in my hand [*m'est refilée*] and dissemination is "reversed" into Lacan's account. This is what I had described to you one day, three-card monte [*le jeu du bonneteau*], the agility of those expert hands to which one would yield oneself bound hand and foot. (Derrida 1980, 163-64; Derrida 1987c, 150-51)

Does Derrida object to Johnson's reversal, in which, Derrida says, Lacan ends up saying what Derrida is saying, and Derrida ends up with the 'last word'? He *appears* quite ill-disposed to this alteration, but perhaps he is playing. Is Derrida as impatient with Johnson's reading as he appears? Are his compliments to Johnson (for example, 'the thank-you letter that I sent her for the great truths she had just proclaimed'; 'her *tour de force*,' and so on) as reversible as they appear? Perhaps someone or something is being *affected* here, but it is hard to be sure. Perhaps there is a kind of infinitely subtle and implicit didacticism at work, in this (indirect) response, where Derrida commands (or at least sets in motion) a network of covertly reversible implications and evaluations, like a shrewd poker player. What does he really mean? What does he mean to mean? Forcing the formulation of these questions and extroverting their implications is perhaps part of his program. But this *attribution* of a command over implications depends,

again, upon the de Manian distinction between a deliberate and a passive knowledge. What is attributed to Derrida here, in 'Envois,' depends on what is brought to the reading (love, or resistance, for example) *and* on what is there. How are these going to be discriminated?

Whatever the case, it appears that Derrida rejects Johnson's *reading*. In 'Le facteur de la vérité,' what Derrida has recognized is the unequivocal, or largely unequivocal, *tendency* (we could call it 'ideology') of the Lacanian text. It is there and unmistakable for those who can see, for those who take the time to read. The evidence is accumulated slowly, meticulously, scrupulously, rigorously, painstakingly, in a text ('Le facteur') three times as long as the published version of Lacan's seminar. What more can be done than this? The statement, 'A letter always arrives at its destination,' is clearly *axiomatized* by Lacan, not ironized or problematized. It is not ambiguous in a significant way. No elaborate sleight of hand by Johnson ought to conceal this fact, Derrida seems to suggest. In the section of 'Envois' we have been considering, in a vigorous way Derrida takes possession again of the course of events, and, in an almost unreadable tone of voice, he demonstrates a fierce command of the implications. In short: the 'tone' of his reply is more than impatience with those who read too hastily (*how much time* would these people require in any case?), more than frustration with misreading, it is itself, in writing, a *pure refusal to be read*. The unreadability of Derrida's tone is a radical multiplication of possible meanings *to anticipate and disrupt or neutralize any possible reading*. This communicative strategy, which is fundamental, can always be confused with the charge of obscurantism frequently leveled against Derrida.<sup>21</sup>

The kind of reversal Johnson proposes is not a *mere* reversal if what it discloses is what is *really the case*. Hence, Johnson argues that Derrida forces 'Lacan's statements into systems and patterns from which they are *actually* trying to escape.' This 'actually' cannot be dispensed with by either Johnson, Derrida, or Lacan. It is the site of the different difference. At the same time, the kind of reversal Johnson demonstrates is *always possible*. The 'there is no last word,' which Derrida affirms as the interminable and as dissemination, can always be (read as) a variation on the last word, for it makes a kind of closure.<sup>22</sup> Every word seeks to end the conversation. There is no thought that does not tend to closure (even as it tends elsewhere). Derrida interprets Johnson as undoing the deconstruction of Lacan, the deconstruction in which the *psychoanalytic*

*difference* is discovered as a return to the same, the deconstruction in which the psychoanalytic difference is reversed.<sup>23</sup> Johnson's perverse reading seems, according to Derrida, to reaffirm Lacan in the place of his deconstruction, and to reaffirm Lacan *as already deconstruction*. Yet this is precisely where Derrida must mark out *his* difference (which is patent). But is this the only choice? To displace one in favor of the other (or vice versa)? Perhaps yes, but this is not certain. Clearly the (systematic) deconstruction of Lacan is a significant enterprise, because, as Derrida claims many years later in 'For the Love of Lacan,' the *Lacanian* psychoanalysis appeared to reproduce, in the contemporary Parisian scene, nearly all the philosophical features associated by Derrida with a classically logocentric metaphysics.

It so happened—and it happened to me—that at the moment when a certain number of major or dominant philosophemes [*philosophèmes*], organized into what I proposed at the time naming phonocentrism and/or phallogocentrism, called for (so to speak, to go quickly) a deconstructive questioning (a questioning that was obviously, by definition, both philosophical and eccentric, ex-centering in relation to the philosophical as such, giving one to think the philosophical from a place that could no longer be simply philosophical or counter-philosophical, within or outside philosophy), at the same moment, exactly the same moment, it was possible to witness a theoretical binding [*reliure*] of the Lacanian discourse that made the most strenuous, and powerfully spectacular, use of all the motifs that were in my view deconstructible, undergoing deconstruction. Even more serious, in my opinion, was the fact that it concerned not only the most deconstructible motifs of philosophy (phonocentrism, logocentrism, phallogocentrism, full speech as truth, the transcendentalism of the signifier, the circular return of reappropriation toward what is most proper about the proper place, whose borders are circumscribed by lack, and so forth, through a handling of philosophical reference whose form, at least, was in the best of cases elliptical and aphoristic, in the worst, dogmatic—I will come to this in a moment) but even that which, crossing through and overflowing philosophy or onto-theology (I mean the Heideggerian discourse), seemed to me already—and this goes back to 1965—to call in its turn for deconstructive questions. (Derrida 1996b, 72-3; Derrida 1998b, 54, translation modified)

Lacanian psychoanalysis was taking shape, according to this deep suspicion, as a classical object of deconstruction.

What is such an object? It is an occasion or opportunity for the appearance of (not just the *difference* but) the *different* difference of deconstruction. A classical object of deconstruction is, despite every paradoxical and deconstructive turn, despite every careful reservation, an occasion for the clear differentiation of deconstruction from its

object. It is only according to this strategic differentiation that deconstruction can appear at all—that it can *be*, that it can *be with* the others. It detaches itself from the rest, and takes a deep breath. 'I am....,' it says, and hesitates. 'I am not....,' it repeats.

'Deconstruction,' says the word. Such an opportunity is not to be foregone. But is this (differentiation) not (precisely) *critique*? This is a difficult moment, for the force of intervention requires this differentiation, even as this differentiation is itself, *of necessity*, strategically or otherwise, deconstructed.

'I am loved,' Derrida says, in the passage from 'Envois,' 'but they cannot stand me, they cannot stand that I might say anything that they might not be able to "reverse" in advance each time that the situation demands it.' This would appear to be a kind of complex strategy with regard to the other. Thus Derrida (deliberately, unconsciously) echoes Lacan's response, in Seminar XX (entitled *Encore*), to the critique (or deconstruction) of 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious' ('L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient') by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe in *The Title of the Letter* (*Le titre de la lettre*), where Lacan says of their reading, 'I have never been so well read—with so much love' (Lacan 1975, 62; Lacan 1998, 65), as though the love and the critical vigor, even hostility, of the reading go hand-in-hand.<sup>24</sup>

But it is not clear on which side of the divide Barbara Johnson stands. She reverses in the name of justice, of fidelity, but the reversal is at the same time, in a sense, courtesy of structure. *She reads*. Perhaps she is a faithful reader, but that depends, one imagines, on who puts their faith in her. Her reading is compelling. She confirms the structural necessity of the deconstruction. In her readerly intervention, she confirms a certain fraught disjunction between the *force of intervention* (strategy) and *reading*. We can express this in the following way:

*The violence of reading intervenes as a divestment of the force of intervention.*

There is an irreducible ambiguity of evaluation, which is always falling one way or the other. The problems and pressures and distortions of Derrida's reading of Lacan are not difficult to discern, and this peculiarity surprises Johnson. It is a gift.

There is a question, then, for the friend: What to do with the gift? What to do when this reversal is, in any case, always possible (at least in theory)?

Johnson deconstructs the differentiation between deconstruction and its other (here, psychoanalysis). Despite the differentiating force Johnson too applies to reverse the direction of Lacan's meaning against the force of Derrida's powerful interpretation, what is questioned in her deconstructive reading, whether deliberately or passively, is the difference and the different difference of deconstruction in its distinction from Lacanian psychoanalysis. Within the space of a violent and mortal contest, where the choice must be made, this is a divisive act. Does it call for a summary response? Perhaps it calls for an excommunication. What are the conditions of possibility for such a contentious interrogation? And how does the specter of Paul de Man figure in this compelling intrigue? It is always possible however that the entire scene already belongs to Derrida, who has stolen it in advance. As Johnson proceeds, she seems almost to *disbelieve* quite how readily Derrida's undoing of the Lacanian difference can itself be undone. It cannot possibly be so easy. Derrida's reading unravels, but not towards a restitution of Lacan (though Lacan is brought closer to *deconstruction*), nor towards the displacement or *redisplacement* of Derrida by Lacan, but, in the pursuit of a faithful reading, *it unravels towards another reading*. In this, to be sure, the reading is in a sense unfaithful to Derrida. It does not follow him. But is this inclination towards the other an infidelity or *another fidelity*? Or *another infidelity*? Are the followers the most faithful readers? These are the most demanding discriminations.

Johnson raises the problem of *deliberation*, and quotes de Man. 'But surely such an oversimplification on Derrida's part does not result from mere blindness, oversight, or error,' writes Johnson. 'As Paul de Man says of Derrida's similar treatment of Rousseau, "the pattern is too interesting not to be deliberate" ' (125).<sup>25</sup> Her tone and her implication here are unclear. She does not quite cross a certain threshold and say: In my reading I have seen what he could not see. This would be an *oversight*. Does my question not already belong to Derrida?, she seems to ask herself. She wavers. Derrida says though, in 'Envois,' in effect: 'They can always do this to me. Reverse me. What's the point?' It is not clear what is the point of an intervention which is *always possible*. 'They cannot stand that I might be able to say anything,' he says. The point is a force of intervention. It is strategic. The strategy (however misguided) is both an auto- and an alter-interpolation. Deconstruction intervenes. It is not neutral. It makes room for and it seeks to expel the other. The intervention raises a deliberation over an unthinking



passivity, even as it opens a system tending to closure to the other. It says: these ungovernable implications are governed here. But it remains unclear: Is this the place of deconstruction's different difference or is it the place of its sameness?

### 1.3 Textualism, Reference and Pure Resistance

According to the course of the interruptions described in the first two sections of this chapter, deconstruction, intervening in the domains of structuralism, of New Criticism, and of Lacanian psychoanalysis, found itself identified as a formalism (or even a hyperformalism) and an anti-formalism. In one instance, it appeared to deny the New Critic the prospect of a communicable intimacy with the literary text based on an intuition of its ultimate unity as a product of imagination, in another it betrayed the founding paradox upon which the structuralist's ambitions rested and opened the structuralist project to the aporia in (the structure of) the particular.<sup>26</sup> It is a formalism, in a sense, which exposes the differential structure of presentation, and an anti-formalism which mobilizes the singularity against the formalizing ambitions of structuralism. How can deconstruction be both of these?<sup>27</sup>

Clearly the story is not a straightforward one, but it is not yet certain that deconstruction is unique in this respect. Performing the task of differentiating deconstruction, we have been seeking at once (1) to observe deconstruction's interventive and differentiating maneuvers, (2) actively to differentiate it, and (3) to recognize it as *already* differentiated. In a sense, in deconstruction's strategic interruptions we have an inkling of a kind of elemental movement of differentiation itself: in one case, for example, a *pure force of intervention*, in which deconstruction might come to be; in another, a *pure refusal to be read*, disputing the altering force of *another* interpretive intervention in order to *preserve something*—the same something no doubt which exhibits the force of intervention, some desolate non- or pre-existent core perhaps. If it suits our purpose, we can observe deconstruction as though it were an *exemplarily formal material of experience* engaged either all of a sudden or over a long period in a field of contested differences. It is not easy to say at this stage what these observations will unearth. One of the key difficulties is to locate precisely *where* (i.e., in what space or place) deconstruction's difference, or its different difference, resides, and this is the subject of this section.

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Within the field of contested differences in and from which deconstruction was seeking to distinguish itself, there arose a disturbing question, sponsored in part by the detachment of certain assertions from their contexts within Derrida's writing in order that they stand as dismal and solitary proclamations—most prominently, of course, the following one: 'There is nothing outside of the text' (Derrida 1967a, 227; Derrida 1976, 158).<sup>28</sup> This sentence was abandoned to the world and its consequences could not be restrained. It was insistently recontextualized and misappropriated. How could this have been averted? The question that arose as a consequence of this proclamation was a peculiar and a peculiarly necessary one. It asked: *Where is the world? Where does it happen?* Though it was not a question entirely foreign to philosophy, certainly it was one whose intractability is an embarrassment to philosophy.

Derrida's proclamation signaled a radical *textualism*, breaking the nexus between words and things, signs and their referents, writing and what is written about, theory and what it theorizes, language and reality, mind and matter. In this new hegemony of the text, the reader could not escape her vocation and she was now stranded on the page, bereft of other resources.<sup>29</sup> Textualism was a sentence to be endured in the 'prison-house of language,' to use Frederic Jameson's evocative phrase. Derrida would argue, against this precipitate apocalypticism, that he had never denied reference, that he merely drew attention to the *difficulties* and *complications* of the referential relation.<sup>30</sup> But there is a problem here which we need to examine—a problem both for those who recognized in textualism such a violent break, and for those rigorous deconstructors who would repudiate the stupid, hyperbolic, even false, claim that deconstruction entails the denial of reference.

Within the field of a contention regarding reference, *what is it* that is at stake? It could be that what is at stake is the nature of the referent of reference. The question, 'What is reference?', will always aim to resolve a referent of reference, which is the place where the question finally rests—that is, with the thing itself, with *reference itself*. It could also be that what is at stake is the nature or status of what I call the *referential nexus*. For example, let us consider the following sentence: *There is a referential nexus*. What is the referential nexus? It is the moment or point or place where the word, for

example, indicates or intersects with the thing which it refers to. It makes a connection. In a sense, the word *touches* the thing. At least for an instant, an impossible instant, they commune and communicate. The word strikes the object like a beam of light, and they are both illuminated there. There is a transmission. There is a way through. There is a passage. There is *reference*. Strangely enough, reference points to the (ideal) unity of the word and the thing, brought together precisely by the mechanism of reference. It is impossible to conceive of doing without it. Otherwise there is only a bizarre solipsism or non-relation of language and external reality—bizarre because even here, in the absence of the referential nexus, the absence of the referential nexus refers to some *thing*, even if that thing is a missing thing. How *different* is it to say this: in the absence of the referential nexus, the absence of the referential nexus *aspires* to some thing? Let me state without hesitation that, though this difference is absolute, it is not *that* different.

*There is a referential nexus*. This is a minimal starting point. But the referential nexus is or has been broken, some argue. (Then) there is no longer a referential nexus. The light has been turned off. Deconstruction, some say, *breaks* or *has broken* the referential nexus. It is not clear, if there is *no* referential nexus, that this is because the referential nexus has been broken or because there never was such a thing. This difference will have to be determined. Deconstruction might well reply to the accusation which labels it as saboteur of the referential nexus that it is not or has not been broken, but this would be to collude with the concept of a referential nexus. How can such a collusion be avoided? Deconstruction, it appears, makes every effort to avoid such a collusion.

Derrida did not deny reference. He merely questioned it. How is it that a mere querying of the mechanism of reference can become a denial or negation of reference? How is it that reference itself can be shaken by this questioning? It is always possible, more than possible, that a sophisticated aporetic of referentiality will have the effect of a denial of reference, particularly where reference is *essential*. If an aporetic of referentiality exposes a kernel of impossibility in reference, then for 'referentists' who follow this movement into difficulty, this exposure will be experienced as a subversion of reference. Where reference *cannot be*, there is no reference. Similarly, the promulgation of an aporetic of possibility, in which possibility must endure its

impossibility, will have the effect of a negation of possibility. Otherwise impossibility is merely possibility all too rapidly inverted and rejuvenated in a jargon of impossibility<sup>31</sup> (in the same way as lack functions as a potency in Lacanian psychoanalysis). Inasmuch as an aporetic of referentiality is pursued as an *intervention* in the complacency of reference, then it is hard to imagine an accumulation of interventive force without some violence of negation. An interrogation of reference has effects that exceed its intentions, naturally.

Of course, it is not clear that an interrogation of reference can be referred in turn to the governance of an intention or a directedness. The interrogation intervenes and the intervention is a violation. Can the concept of reference be queried without consequences for both the concept of reference and for reference *itself*? The rigorous interrogation of the referential nexus takes place in the space of the essential *latency* of reference. Within this space, the interrogation *is itself* a disruption of the referential nexus, and the precipitate response of those we might call the 'pre-deconstructors' does not misread the dire consequences of the deconstruction of reference.<sup>32</sup> The latency of the concept of reference, its functioning-without-attention, is its dim conceptual habitat. The rigorous interrogation of the referential nexus in the space of its essential latency disrupts it. It is broken. But, at the same time, such an interrogation, however rigorous, cannot affect that latency—which is, as such, always out of reach. Hence, the interrogation is an intervention whose violence of disruption is only matched by the brute fact that *nothing happens there*. Despite the power of the connection, there is a radical disjunction between the latency and its manifestation.

Derrida did not deny reference. He merely questioned it. It is not clear what it is that could be denied, not denied, or questioned. Is the referent of reference the same? It seemed then that the nexus of world and word was simply interrogated in the form generally recognized as the realist orthodoxy or as common sense. But there is no such recognition, except perhaps precisely a tacit one. For what is, was or would have been the orthodoxy of this nexus *as such*? And how is, was, or would have been, this *orthodoxy* articulated with the *reality* of the referential nexus to which it would refer? The referential nexus is always in question inasmuch as it remains latent and taciturn. The reality of reference is a perpetual latency. It is *what* is in question, precisely. Is there such a thing, corresponding to the 'what'? It was not clear then what Derridean assertion

prompted the remonstrations of the pre-deconstructors, or from what charge, or what abuse of deconstruction, Derrida was defending himself, for the object of the dispute, reference itself—the nexus it names between the sign or representation, and *what* is represented—demands a reference of reference that is both available immediately as the fact and facility of reference (which makes the debate possible), and quite unforthcoming (which makes the debate impossible).

This is the kind of recursive difficulty that arises with textualism. Textualism signals the crisis of reference inasmuch as the referent designates a *reference point*.<sup>33</sup> For textualism, the referent occupies a paradoxical or contradictory position: both inside and outside the representational system. The text is the system of representations. That the moment of crisis for reference is called 'textualism' is because the aporia of reference (the referent is inside and outside the system simultaneously) intervenes in the oppositions of text and world or word and thing. The aporia does not *necessarily* privilege text, but textualism is the sign of the revolution. To pursue the logic of this aporia of the referent is, in itself, a violence with regard to the taken-for-grantedness or latency of reference. Reference is the mechanism reflecting the externality and (hence) reality of the world. The logic of the aporia of reference (which is equally the aporia of representation) is immediately compelling. Its compulsion may elicit the response of repudiation, for example. In a sense, the aporetic logic of representation, always at work, cannot but be repudiated. It *must* be repudiated for the representational mechanism to *function*. The representational and referential mechanism functions according to a certain (tacit) denial—a denial (of the aporetic logic) of representation, of reference. It functions in oblivion, as it were, and as such it is immediately evident.

Christopher Norris took both the naive textualists and the naive anti-textualists to task, proclaiming that 'there is no excuse for the sloppy misreading of Derrida that represents him as some kind of transcendental solipsist who believes that nothing "real" exists outside the written text' (Norris 1987, 142). Nonetheless, it seemed that something had happened. There were consequences of the deconstructive proclamation that there is nothing outside of the text. It appeared that *something* with regard to the relation of word and world had come about. Something had been exposed. What did Derrida *intend*? What did he mean to happen? This is not readily determined. Perhaps, in a history to come, Derrida will take responsibility for breaking this nexus, although it

was and is not broken and it was not his intention either to break it or to assert that it was or always had been broken. In history, he cannot retreat from the consequences of his intervention. He must take responsibility for interrupting the passage from word to thing, which is not a passage and which has not been interrupted. Where is it broken, in history, in reality, if not in the violent act of its contestation? It is not clear that it is broken, but something has happened. Is there a referential nexus organizing the relation of representations to what they represent?

Textualism is a moment and a crisis of the *event*. Textualism is an event. It is an event staged in the field of a hegemonic, and yet constitutively latent, concept of reference. The event is a revolution there. Something happened there, and the statement, 'There is nothing outside of the text' is the sign of what happened, there, in the field of reference. '[I]f deconstruction had a goal or a regulating idea,' says Geoffrey Bennington in 'Derridabase,' 'it would be: that something happen, that there be some event' (Bennington and Derrida 1993, 264). With regard to a crisis of reference or a breaking of the referential nexus, Derrida asserts that deconstruction never denied or denies reference. That is: in the event of 'There is nothing beyond the text,' nothing really happened. It was, one assumes, a misunderstanding born of inattention. And this is always possible. In a different time (and when is it not a different time?), it is always possible. It is always possible that one did not attend closely enough. It is always possible to say that nothing happened, and this is at least in part because, in truth, nothing did happen there, at the referential nexus. Nothing ever happens there.

Derrida makes the essential link between reference and the other, 'which is beyond language' (in Kearney 1984, 123). Clearly what Derrida resists in the accusation of a denial of reference is the *idealism* of textualism, which erases or represses the outside and brings alterity home as a textual phenomenon and a textual comprehensibility. Realism at least has the virtue of constituting the object, paradoxically, as beyond all possible knowledge—that is, in the idiom of realism, the object as 'mind-independent.'<sup>34</sup> But what is not registered in this defense of a *deconstructive* reference (which is a reference to *and* an ethics of the other) is precisely the *event* of textualism within the latency of the concept of reference, which is the moment of deconstruction's *intervention*. It is an event there: there is *nothing beyond language*. This is the abyss. The stupid abyss. Perhaps therein lies the 'stupidity' of the event. In a sense, the *event* of

a thoughtful intervention does not think, or does not think too well. Though it is those who assert that deconstruction says there is nothing beyond language who are, according to Derrida, given to stupidities, it is at least equally the case that the event of deconstruction is a stupid event.<sup>35</sup> It is the moment of a deconstructive difference, as stupid as the material of inscription. Derrida is compelled to deny this difference in order to sustain the difference of deconstruction with regard to the other: 'It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the "other" of language' (in Kearney 1984, 123). But this reference as reference-to-the-other is *both* the reference that was deconstructed in the event of the proclamation, 'There is nothing outside of the text' (that is, for example, the naive reference of the realist philosopher), and the *transformed* or renovated or different reference which coincides with the revolutionary event of the proclamation, 'There is nothing outside of the text': the other is beyond language, and it is that to which language refers. *Are these two 'references' the same reference or are they different? Are these two 'differences of deconstruction'—the difference of deconstruction which is the event of the disruption of the referential nexus, and the difference of deconstruction which is the difference of reference as reference-to-the-other—the same difference or are they different? Has the essential difference of deconstruction, its different difference, something to do with the moment of a deconstructive intervention in which nothing happened? Is this the event? The event of deconstruction? The event of deconstruction coincides, perhaps, with the difference between something and nothing.*<sup>36</sup>

These are the symptomatic questions and difficulties that arise, and should arise, with textualism, for if the nexus between word and thing is *questioned*, or *is broken*, or *breaks*, or *is broached in a question*, if it *appears* to break or to have been broken—or, to use another example, if God *dies*—then where does this event take place, where between its proclamation and the thing its proclamation proclaims (if it is between and not in one or the other)? Textualism as a revolutionary doctrine already has a kind of answer: *it occurs in the text*. This is where the strategic intervention of 'There is nothing outside of the text' is stripped of nuance, context, and complexity, and instituted. This stripping is a consequence of the interventive force of strategy. Textualism congeals around the idea of text, around the idea of a text in which the external world as dominion of the real is subverted. It is a short step from here to the idea of world-as-

text, which is not necessarily a reductive, though certainly a duplicitous notion, dividing the players. The 'general text' displaces the world-as-non-discursive or non-linguistic. The outside-the-text, which is or ought to be the measure, cannot be supported in its judicial exteriority. There is no world-as-meta-language; that is, there is no *thing-talk* to supervene upon talk-talk and to bring it to a natural terminus. The text becomes a world, and how the worldliness of the text is different from the worldliness of the world is not entirely clear, except as a function of contested expertise.

It is possible to formulate these countervailing inclinations in the following way:

*There is a world of difference between the extra-textual world and the world-as-text.*

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For some engaged with texts as specialists in texts, and invested equally in the distinction between the humanities and the natural sciences, textualism offered some leverage against the derogation of 'mere wordsmith.' The reduction to words brought the world into their study and weighed again in ideology of nuts-and-bolts practicality, of hands-on, of worldliness, of scientism, of the impotence of the bookworm. Textualism was a momentary triumph of the reader, if not always of the careful reader. It opened upon a vista of possible readings.<sup>37</sup>

The notion of a general textuality is one way, said the analytic philosopher John Searle, to elevate the textualist to master of the world: 'It is apparently very congenial for some people who are professionally concerned with fictional texts to be told that all texts are really fictional anyway, and that claims that fiction differs significantly from science and philosophy can be deconstructed as a logocentric prejudice, and it seems positively exhilarating to be told that what we call "reality" is just more textuality' (Searle 1993, 183). No doubt textualism has institutional consequences, as we have noted, and consequences indeed for what we might term, with a carefully constrained relativism, the *institution of reality*—which is, and which takes place in, to take an obvious example, the doctrine of realism. There is a moment when the fall from fact is associated with an affect, which may be a congeniality for those not too heavily invested there; there is, perhaps, a moment of exhilaration in bringing a reality once the province

of other keepers into proximity with a certain textuality. However, of course, this general textuality offers few real advantages to the textualist: it shares many if not all the difficult and elusive features of the 'external' reality it would supplant.

To those with a realist disposition, textualism reads as idealism and is tainted by the same megalomania. The whimsical and erring subject takes charge of things. If the arbiter of reality is not an objective world, different from but accessible to every inquiring mind, then how are the results of any seriously rigorous investigation to be judged? One consequence of textualism then is the substitution of a new law for sound, objective laws (or at least for the *prospect* of these): the new law (or anti-law) of Anything Goes. This new law emerges in the weakening of or release from a classical referentialism and according to the ungoverned play of signifiers. It is the phantom of a textual liberation. There is no responsibility and no obligation to things. No doubt this is one dire and impossible limit of a certain textualism, driven to transgression, to permanent revolution, by the principle which 'allows one to say everything [*tout dire*],' a power ('in principle,' Derrida insists in 'This Strange Institution Called Literature') to 'break free of the rules,' to overturn all laws, resistances, repressive interdictions (Derrida 1992a, 36-7). At this limit, even the narrative (or meta-narrative), as history, and having supplanted history, sacrifices the criterion of plausibility, which depends minimally on *some kind* of stereoscopy or triangulation, some kind of measure or reference point or discipline (though perhaps only the discipline of genre), some kind of obligation to the law, to the other.<sup>38</sup> Is such a situation imaginable?

Those unable or disinclined or never likely by dint of temperament or training to detect the analytical power or consequential force that resides in Derridean discourse attributed its maneuvers and gestures to the law of Anything Goes, no more philosophically compelling than free association, the equivalent of random puffs of wind. They rejected it as incomprehensible nonsense. Because they did not find there what they understood by consensus as the proper path of rational thought they condemned it as irrational, as not philosophy, or as advocating a philosophy of irrationalism.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, despite all these protests, the pre-deconstructors who shut their eyes to deconstruction did recognize something there, if only that the Derridean thing was recognized *elsewhere*. It was a new thing now. A clear sign of this recognition was that



they were thoroughly provoked. They were provoked by *something*. They grouped together on one occasion and wrote to the *Times* of London (May 6, 1992) to protest the prospect of Cambridge conferring upon Jacques Derrida an honorary degree. Their protest showed no evidence of having paid careful attention to texts written by the infamous French purveyor of incomprehension. Their 'every sentence proves clearly,' said Derrida in an interview, 'that they either haven't read or haven't understood one line of the texts they wish to denounce' (Derrida 1995c, 402).<sup>40</sup>

'What can these people have felt threatened by,' asked Derrida, 'to lose their self-control in this way?' (403). Those who shut their eyes to deconstruction were provoked, it might be argued, not only from without but by the return of deconstructions they had themselves performed or experienced in secret. Though these difficulties had been covered over, or ignored, they inhabited their projects and projections in a state of uneasy incubation. The deconstruction from without was only as effective as its correspondence with the deconstruction within. So, most of all the anti-deconstructors resisted the realization that they were deconstructors too, symptoms of a dubious universality they wanted no part of. They would never admit to this general complicity and, it must be said, it was not clear that there was a compelling reason why they should.

What would be this *force* of deconstruction? It was, then, from the point of view of those filiated to deconstruction, the truth of deconstruction, in the form of a fidelity to the movement of the text, which provoked the pre-deconstructors: that it was in them already, this thing, this worm of deconstruction. Inasmuch as there was a deconstructive truth and fidelity, it was no surprise that those exposed by deconstruction either closed their eyes to it, did not hear it, or repudiated it—for this is the classical response to an unwelcome disclosure, to what is called a 'home truth.' These were the signs of its truth and its fidelity—the signs, at least, of its accuracy. But if Derrida has the persistence of the psychoanalyst in these painful interactions, he does not display the patience of the analyst. He responded to the symptomatic repudiations of his patients with a corresponding frustration and indignation: 'colleagues whose every sentence proves clearly that they either haven't read or haven't understood one line of the texts they wish to denounce' (Derrida 1995c, 402). Is this impatience precisely because the 'colleagues' in question were *not*, in fact, his patients? This is a difficult question of *responsibility*. What is the relationship here, and what are its responsibilities?

With a healthy respect for the integrity of their organism, the pre- and anti-deconstructors resisted deconstruction. They resisted it as they should, for such after all was their vocation. But the avowed deconstructors resisted deconstruction no less than their dialectical opponents. The deconstructors have only the most tenuous of privileges here, in the jurisdiction and before the law of a *pure resistance*. There was a resistance to deconstruction, which has been documented, and there is a resistance to deconstruction by deconstruction. We might say, as a convenient simplification, and in the words of many a one who would reform the institution of deconstruction: deconstruction resists the institution of deconstruction, and the institution of deconstruction resists deconstruction; deconstruction is not its institution. That this is a matter of *deconstruction* in particular is a function of the singularity of the word—which, as a singularity, is not a function, and does not function. There is a *pure* resistance, then, at the point where deconstruction no longer signifies anything but the materiality of an inscription, where it no longer signifies anything but the irreducible, unsignifiable, and different difference of deconstruction, where deconstruction no longer signifies anything but the other and the other of itself—where, when most itself, it evanesces and will not quite be. Deconstruction is, or would be, this moment of pure resistance in which it evanesces and will not quite be. There is *the* resistance. In this, deconstruction is on an equal footing with other beings. There is a formative or constitutive moment of pure resistance: the moment of institution. Deconstruction came to signify this resistance, and, duly (that is, with the benefit of hindsight), it was resisted and resisted fiercely.

In the field of this pure resistance which deconstruction signified, there came about then a strange phenomenon: a sense amongst anglophone critics, but also in anglophone philosophy, that Derrida was *the one* who had to be addressed in order to proceed, that somehow he blocked the path, *in general*, that there was something about him that needed to be done, but that what such an engagement demanded was perhaps impossible: to argue with the incomprehensible, to argue with an incomprehensibility that has the peculiar attribute of demanding a comprehensible response—as if this peculiarly demanding incomprehensibility spoke from the pestilential heart of comprehensibility.<sup>41</sup> What was released here that demanded containment? It was not clear, but, whatever it was, it was *irrepressible*. It failed to respond to a simple tactic: it



would not be ignored (that is, it would not abide ignorance). Whatever it was, it demanded that they reason with him in the abyss of reason, where he was the prince of darkness, for this was the place into which he had ventured on his own. He was its earthly representative. The hero ventures in alone and steals the aporetic eye. Derrida was then, above and below, ruler of all he surveyed. He had trained his Hegel eye, the well-tuned hero, and he was indomitable. He was infinitely reasonable. To his unwilling subjects, he was the new tyrant in the world of Text.

How strange that it should come to seem that it was Derrida *himself*, standing astride the threshold and denying access to the world! That he came to be *identified* with a critical negation and aporia. That he came to be, himself, the gate-keeper to whom one must answer. Derrida is the aporia!, they seemed to be saying. Was he responsible for this identification? Who could have calculated this consequence? It was inevitable. Responsible or otherwise, in an important sense Derrida bears this responsibility, even as the consequences exceed every volition, intention, calculation, anticipation, apprehension, prognosis, prescience, every effort of vigilance.<sup>42</sup> It is not easy to know whether such a responsibility can be *assumed*, for it is an ideal (and Nietzschean) harmonization of the *will* with *what happens*. But there he stood, in any case, the one called 'Derrida,' obstructing the passage to the real world beyond.

And no doubt, to realists—to those, to use Hilary Putnam's oxymoronic phrase, possessed by the 'realistic spirit' (Putnam 1990, 42)—it seemed unfair, because how could one reassert the reality of the external world as (absolutely) mind-and-language-independent without engaging in a discourse, without formulating the concept of that reality in the words which serve as the currency and counterfeit of communication? One then fell into the hands of the shrewd textualist whose facility with words and whose expertise in exploiting their inherent duplicity reduced with many an elegant sophism the most deeply held beliefs of the realist to the status of a quaint mysticism, a mere cult of the real.<sup>43</sup>

But the realists and other pre-deconstructors need not have been concerned. Will there in the end be any trace of deconstruction? Will it not have been *impossible* from the beginning?<sup>44</sup> In time, these unthinkable things revert to their unthinkability—for they could not really be thought anyway. They reduce their clamoring, go back to sleep, and cease to make a disturbance. They were barely audible at the best of times, couched

in elaborate obscurities. They were not so irrepressible. Had it been possible to leave them alone from the beginning then things would not have gone so far astray. But commonsense, like nature, reasserts itself. The insistent pressure of the rhythm of representation brings food to mouth and moves the body in its quotidian orbit, steering towards equilibrium. With the sun on my face and my feet on the ground, where now are all those obscure and sophisticated subversions? They are just the holes in the cheese. I eat the *cheese*, which exists, and the holes can take care of themselves.

It was of course precisely against the abuse of rhetorical license in metaphysics, against the empty pronouncements and dubious stratagems of the would-be sages, that (the ideal of) a certain argumentative protocol, (the ideal of) a disciplined regime of philosophical production based on the virtues of clarity and simplicity, developed in the anglophone tradition. Though doctrinal consensus was harder to manifest, there was at the very least a manifest consensus of tone and style. The analytic philosophy would have no time for nonsense. It would at all times be hardheaded and sober and wary of the slide into idle metaphysical speculation about the nature of things in general. Where Derrida, for example, moved or seemed to move with sudden bursts of insight from the particular to the general and back again, from an instance to its formalization and beyond, it seemed as though he was a foolhardy field-mouse who thought he might stalk and kill the eagle. But in the same field there were other mice who had abandoned such pretensions. Analytic philosophers sought to formalize and legitimize argumentative procedures, to establish rules and protocols for deduction and induction, and to set modest goals for the philosophical enterprise.

There is in anglophone philosophy, and not only there, a deep distrust of philosophizing, for talk is not only cheap but interminable. There is always the pressing need that something be *done*. Natural science is the model. If philosophy lags behind asking how and why science works, it is only so that an analysis of the working of science can lead to a further facilitation of the working of science. The distrust of philosophizing is shared by all those preoccupied with action. The philosophy of action ought to be a mere propaedeutic to action.

The dialectic in philosophy between paralysis and movement, meditation and intervention, potential and realization, possibility and manifestation was articulated with clarity and urgency in the eleventh of Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach.'<sup>45</sup> The revolution

must come out of the library and walk the streets. What possible use is all this turning, returning, and overturning of the infernal dialectic if it never leaves the head?

Something of this preoccupation with action, with facilitating the passage to action, with the augmentation of proper action, persists in many philosophies touched by Marxism's concern for (political) change as an antidote to vacillation, meditation, reflection, introspection, idealism. Deleuze, for example, rejects the Heideggerian meditation and affirms the values of action over reaction, and creation over imitation and interpretation. '“Wondering that there is being” [*s'étonner que l'étant est*],’ says Deleuze, is an attitude ‘tiresome... in the long run’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1991; Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 7).

But deconstruction seems to drain the impetus from action, where action is that which follows directly from decisions based on clearly articulated rules and axioms, decisions where there are good and reliable grounds for making them. It is deconstruction's sophistry that it exposes these ‘grounds’ as themselves sophisms, quasi-arbitrary concatenations of sentences which, imbued with conviction, defend the decider against the undecidability of the decision. There is a world out there to act upon, but deconstruction intervenes between the act and its legitimating apparatus. It is deconstruction's sophistical formalism, Hegel *redivivus*, which disarms dialectical materialism, for example, as much subverting the privilege of the material cause as the claim of Marxist materialism to escape the hegemonic field of metaphysics.<sup>46</sup> In this well-meaning caricature, deconstruction's endless textual circuitousness, devoid of the ultimate solace of either determinate meaning or reasonable action, results in paralysis and nihilism: nothing can be justified decisively (with those justifications then able to be coded as rules and transmitted); meaning as the *telos* of communication is a linguistic illusion; all teleologies are futile or merely fantasmatic orientations towards an object which never arrives. Deconstruction brings disappointment. The object itself, goal of the investigation, is irredeemable. It withdraws. It was never in any case truly present. Where there is no *real* likelihood, no possibility of the arrival of the thing itself, which is demonstrably a structural fiction, there are no grounds for hoping that it will come, and the community of hopeful ones is extinguished by such brute enlightenment. It is impossible, after all.

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It can hardly be denied that these were consequences of deconstruction, if not the consequences it intended. Who can say what it intended? Oriented towards a future beyond the calculations of expectation and anticipation and regulation, deconstruction does not intend. Maybe it is *disoriented* then. It intends, perhaps, but it is not clear what. There is an intention without an intention, though surely it always intends *something*. Deconstruction does not know what to intend. It intends the other. But does it have a choice in this? Can it decide to intend something else? Can we be sure of its other intentions?

Deconstruction speaks—that much is clear at least, though we cannot be certain that it intends to speak. It is a speaking thing nonetheless. The representational mechanism, guiding speech, pointing the word towards its intended referent, oriented towards the other of language—it cannot but intend. When it speaks, it intends, calculates, expects, anticipates, hopes, regulates, predicts, foresees, and promises. But *what* does it intend, expect, promise? Representation makes a promise to represent something—but not just anything. What does it promise to represent? Can we say that it promises to represent the other?

*Deconstruction and representation:* the two do seem to go together. Deconstruction promises too, and it forecloses upon the promise. In this, in its promises, broken or otherwise, deconstruction is at least equally as different from the others as they are from it. Thus, though we feel certain that there is a difference or different difference of deconstruction, the difficulty remains to distinguish it from the others, from whose gathering it stands apart absolutely.

#### 1.4 Fidelity, Caricature and the Priority of Consciousness

The debate between deconstructors and pre- or anti-deconstructors in the 1980s followed the familiar course of mutual caricature—though what *genuine* objects were set opposite these caricatures, such that their constitutive deformation was manifest, is unclear. The contours of these deftly caricatured objects were formed by different pressures: the pressures of conflation and of history, of belief and skepticism, of acceptance and rejection, the pressures of reading and non-reading, of strategy and defense, the pressures of position and non-position, transference, resistance and acquiescence, and so on. Deconstruction's sensitivity, philosophical sophistication, and readerly patience did not inure it from these pressures. Caricature is perhaps the fate of the other where the caricaturist is defending the integrity of his own words and intentions in a space of violent contention over the truth of the matter. It is a response to a difference. What would be the alternative? The alternative to caricature is, of course, a fidelity to the text.

While attending to the texts, critical or expository, polemical or conciliatory, from this period of contention about the phenomenon of deconstruction, it is possible, in a space beyond the immediate heat of contention, to recognize in each one the situated validity of its argument—its truth in other words. *Each* text exerts its corrupting, differentiating influence, and unfolds a *singular logic*. Let us say then, together and with arms outstretched in a gesture of embrace: *Beyond the heat of a contention in which I am not invested, each text is harmonized as its own thing in me*. Each text has the elemental virtue of having come to be thus, of having come to be inscribed thus, within its province, its context, according to a particular set of exigencies, and so on. Whether resorting to gross distortions, or patiently reiterating the same argument, whether retaliating violently against a perceived insult, rigorously dissecting a contradiction, rehearsing tired polemics, attacking the impregnable or defending the indefensible, this text is and cannot but be *singular*—for singularity is not a qualitative or laudatory, but (in a sense) a logical designation. The text is true to itself, where such a fidelity is not a symmetry, correspondence, coherence, terminus or ultimate harmony, nor the result of a transparent volition. The fidelity of the text is its passivity within a freedom oriented

invariably towards the other as the referent of a word. It cannot say: *I will have this thought next*. Like deconstruction, it has an essential relationship to *what happens*. Deconstruction is 'what happens,' says Derrida adroitly (Derrida 1995d, 17). In this 'what happens,' the causes and effects, conditions and consequences, are knotted so tightly as to be almost inextricable.

The opponents and critics of deconstruction—who were often defenders of what we have called, for convenience and inclusiveness, 'pre-deconstruction,'—considered their own position caricatured by deconstructors.<sup>47</sup> According to the pre-deconstructors, the deconstructors assumed that they were all wedded to absolute truth, meaning, closure, unity, completion, presence, History, etc., to a degree that the pre-deconstructors did not feel was reflected in their daily practice. Yes, these were important concepts, but their importance did not seem to justify the deconstructors' caricature. The pre-deconstructors understood themselves as less dogmatic and more pragmatic than this exaggerated or distorted characterization made them appear. They were guided by these notions but they were not enslaved to them. The deconstructors were too quick to take every position to its limit.

'There is no piece of knowledge,' writes John Ellis in *Against Deconstruction*, 'such that its complete objectivity can be the occasion of an inner conviction in the mind of the knower that he could not possibly be mistaken.' He continues:

Knowledge, then, is neither completely objective, if by that is meant "incontrovertibly true," nor is it a matter of individually arbitrary responses that are not answerable to anything but the individual's current frame of mind. Yet all the justifications for textuality [i.e., deconstruction]... move from the first extreme to the second, as if abandoning the first left no possibility but the second. (Ellis 1989, 123)

Terry Eagleton makes a related point, using the word 'post-structuralism' as interchangeable with 'deconstruction':

The model of science frequently derided by post-structuralism is usually a positivist one—some version of the nineteenth-century rationalistic claim to a transcendental, value-free knowledge of 'the facts.' This model is a straw target. It does not exhaust the term 'science,' and nothing is to be gained by this caricature of scientific self-reflection. To say that there are no absolute grounds for the use of such words as truth, certainty, reality and so on is not to say that these words lack meaning or are ineffectual. Whoever thought such absolute grounds existed, and what would they look like if they did? (Eagleton 1996, 125)<sup>48</sup>

Positivism was, in a sense, already a parody of scientific methodology. It created a scientism which did not reflect the more moderate and commonsense aspirations of ordinary science. If truth is an important value for science, it is not in the sense of something hyperbolic and grandiose like *absolute truth*, but in the sense of a guiding ideal which assists in the assessment of competing theories and which aims to ensure that the pseudo-knowledge produced by various interests is not allowed to masquerade as fact. There is a necessity to make quite basic discriminations, and the ideal of truth functions pragmatically in these discriminations, which are not only the province of science.

The pre-deconstructors objected to the revolutionary hyperbole of the deconstructors, who seemed not so much disturbed as inspired by the prospect of a world rapidly reducible to a general textuality, a world replete with sudden, abyssal absences and ripe for the anarcho-Dionysian enjoyment of a virulent deconstruction. In *Does Deconstruction Make Any Difference?*, Michael Fischer quotes from Christopher Norris's *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*:

[Norris] attributes enormous power to deconstruction, calling it in his introduction a technique for "making trouble" and "the active antithesis of everything that criticism ought to be if one accepts its traditional values and concepts" (Norris 1982, xii). He repeatedly praises its "unsettling power" (70), "exhilarating spirit" (92), and "liberating force" (21).... The targets of all this "perverse," "devastating," "dangerous," "sinister," "disconcerting" activity are nothing less than "every normal and comfortable habit of thought" (xi), "everything that criticism ought to be if one accepts its traditional values and concepts" (xii), "the whole traditional edifice of Western attitudes to thought and language" (29), "age-old conceptual limits" (57), "every last vestige of philosophic truth and certainty" (77), "the normative constraints of effective communication" (113), "the solemn conventions of Anglo-American academic discourse" (113), and "all proprietary limits" (114). (Fischer 1985, 112-3)

'It should not be necessary,' says Fischer, 'to document the omnipresence of this rhetoric in deconstructionist writing.' It is natural, in this context, he argues, that pre-deconstructive critics have been alarmed by the advent of deconstruction, for they 'see in such comments a massive repudiation of their work' (113). There is here what appears as the familiar friction between the old guard and the avant garde.

The deconstructors, as we have seen, argued that the metaphysical and logocentric adhesions to History, truth, objectivity, and so on, were the inevitable and logical

consequence of the arguments and positions of the pre-deconstructors; these (absolute) values were *entailments* of the pre-deconstructors' doctrinal positions, even were they not made explicit. When Ellis, for example, argues, 'There is no piece of knowledge such that its complete objectivity can be the occasion of an inner conviction in the mind of the knower that he could not possibly be mistaken,' he simply fails to comprehend the consequences of his commitments.

Yet the deconstructors defended themselves vigorously against what was a (formally) related kind of objection: Anything Goes, relativism, nihilism, textualism and the denial of reference are possible—even logical—consequences of pursuing a *certain* deconstructive inclination to its limit. They are gross caricatures of deconstruction, but they are at the same time distinctive limit-phenomena, and here they display their inescapable fidelity—a fidelity of extrapolation, perhaps, or a fidelity of consequences, such that we can say, in a peculiarly empty way, that textualism (for example) is a consequence of deconstruction. Strategically, deconstructors sought to dissociate deconstruction from the doctrinal simplifications registered in these implications. But pursuing the consequences of a deconstructive intervention is always an opening upon that which cannot be governed in the intervention. The links are forged somewhere else. The inclination and the limit of an intervention are not always available in advance. This inclination and this limit can always be recognized as a consequence of deconstruction. This limit appears there, as a consequence of the difference of deconstruction. It appears in the rupture of deconstruction as an unfaithful caricature and as an inescapable fidelity (deconstruction is 'what happens').

*Nihilism is a moment of deconstruction.* It is not *only* a moment of deconstruction. It may not be the (whole) truth of deconstruction. It is a caricature of deconstruction. If Roger Scruton denounces deconstruction as 'pure nihilism' then, for better or worse, he has run aground on this moment.<sup>49</sup> At the very least, if there *is*, in a deconstructive transvaluation, a fall from a place of assumed privilege—which may be the result, in Derrida's words, of deconstruction's 'general *displacement* of the system' (Derrida 1972b, 392; Derrida 1982, 329)—one name for this fall, or for the place this fall falls to, might be nihilism, even as it might, under another interpretation, be called flight, release, abandonment, affirmation, crime, transgression, or liberation. The distinction is one of privilege, inclination, position, strategy, context, and these (so-called) *conditions*

are not only the privilege of deconstructors. That is, it is not only deconstructors who can permit themselves the finitude (contextual limitation) and deconstructibility of a *strategy*—as though to call it a strategy were to control a set of prudent reservations in the name of a possible and local adequation to context.<sup>50</sup> If they maintain this option for themselves, seeking to control contextual limitation by allusion to the localization of a strategy, while deconstructing other strategies equally compromised (limited) philosophically by the demands of strategy, then there is the familiar dissymmetry between the *argument*, which assumes an interventive power, and its *performance*. That is: it is always the strategy, confined and limited by contextual exigency (even when the context itself is indeterminable or ideal), which is deconstructible.

Strategy is recognition of a limitation on the double game within a drama of interruption, critique, negation, resistance, acquiescence, circumscription, avoidance, challenge, affirmation, deconstruction. It is not quite possible for the strategist to be everywhere at once, to bathe in the ether of the universal itself, so there is the *allusion* to a locality and a local strategy, or to the difficulty of transposing a strategic inclination out of context. But nor is it possible to establish what precisely the strategy is, there, where it is, demonstrably, at a certain moment, for the strategy is an embeddedness in context, while functioning with reference to other contexts whose influence cannot be calculated.

There is a gap then between the one who alludes to a strategy and the employer of a strategy. There is a gap between the strategy as a strategic allusion with respect to the intrinsic alteration (or alterability) of universality (i.e., to *sustain* the position of the universal; the strategy mobilized as a *moment* of the always) and strategy as embedded in locality and context. Yet deconstruction is compelled, both by the labor of an adequation to the nature of things and by an aspiration to sovereignty, to assert, '*This* and, at the same time, *that*.' The 'at the same time' not only determines a tension or oscillation of opposites; at the same time it imagines a *stillness*, a quiescence of opposites, that does not or that never pertains. The *never* imagines the same stillness. The *never* (or absolute negation) is a figure of pathos, as much caught in the intrigue of deconstruction as that 'joyous affirmation [*l'affirmation joyeuse*]' which, Derrida says in 'Structure, Sign and Play,' 'determines the non-center otherwise than as loss of the center' (Derrida 1967b, 427; Derrida 1970, 264).

In the same way, deconstruction determines that dialectical reversals or alterations are *always available*. It remains unclear what is the precise status of this availability. They are always available, perhaps, *in theory*.<sup>51</sup> De Man's reversal of Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin is an example; similarly, de Man's reading of Derrida on Rousseau, in which de Man defends Rousseau from Derrida's textual violation by arguing that it is always possible that the Rousseauan text has anticipated its deconstruction; the 'passive' knowledge in the Rousseauan text that provides the opportunity for Derrida's deconstruction can always be reread as 'deliberate' knowledge: Rousseau writes *Of Grammatology*.<sup>52</sup> This 'always possible' is the undecidable. Who is there first? The deconstructor, the text, the deconstructee? Though this would seem a primitive dispute, it retains a residual significance: the difference between a passive (or perhaps unconscious) and a deliberate (or conscious) knowledge. This is always at stake. An elemental commandment is at work here: know thyself! In the spirit of a constitutional belatedness, it can always be argued that the omniscient text has deconstructed itself prior to the intervention of the omniscient deconstructor. It is here that the possibility of a deconstruction, as a fidelity to the text, subsists. But it is less clear what then constitutes the deconstructive *intervention*. It remains a matter of a priority in the temporality of exposure and exposition: the privilege of *consciousness*. Deconstruction is invested there, despite its systematic subversion of the privilege of consciousness according to the Freudian revolution. Can there be a *relinquishment* of the concern for priority, and for the privilege of an exposition which brings the thing into consciousness, while sustaining an orientation towards the future—that is, *while still thinking*?

In support of the strategy which propels his intervention, the deconstructor, if such a one exists, will deploy some careful reservations, and he is in good company. He reminds us, for example, of the double gesture (double game, science, reading, writing, etc.), inside and outside at the same time, as though this were possible, as though this were a sophisticated maneuver in his repertoire. This reminder is a sign of the deliberate knowledge of the deconstructor. Yet the 'double game' (let us call it that despite the fact that it may not be possible to play it) was a prudent strategy in relation to thinking the beyond of metaphysics without recuperation of the deconstructive difference by the wheel of dialectic. Many deconstructees have objected here: if the double game is put to



work as a legitimate *defense* for the deconstructor against being found there, where he *is*, holding a position or simply holding his own, and hence a defense against entering history and being deconstructible in turn, what is the deconstructed one to do when defending herself from the incursion of the deconstructor, an incursion which relied for its *force of intervention* on pressing and exposing a certain (for example, logocentric or metaphysical) inclination concealed in the text of the other? The *force of intervention* is the superimposition of (for example) the deconstructor's deliberate knowledge upon the passive knowledge of the other. Such a deliberate knowledge on the part of the deconstructor (the other) will anticipate his structural deconstructibility in the englobing movement of an aspiration to pure consciousness—which is a strategic *circumvention* of deconstruction.

There is a deconstruction, then, that produces its force by a shrewd and strategic anticipation of the rule. The master is the one most acutely attuned to the rule. He displays a characteristic clairvoyance. He divines and transcribes the rule. He authors it. Perhaps he will keep it to himself, for this reticence offers some strategic benefits. The deconstructor will deploy, on behalf of the other, a sophisticated reading of the rule in a combat of sophisms.

What is the limit to this mortal combat? Who will sue for peace? And, in any case, who are the combatants? There is the *one* and the *other*. There must be at least two for combat. When deconstruction argues (in a sense) *for the other* (does it? and is such a thing possible?), but against *another* (who is, perhaps, the other of deconstruction, one who, for example, propagates 'stupidities' about deconstruction), then what is really happening?

The other, the one who propagates stupidities, transgresses the rule, and is an affront to it. Such a one has not read. She offends at the root, where what is demanded of her is only due attention to the deconstructor's formulation of the rule. *Only this is asked of the other: that she attend to the other (that is, to me)*. Can this circuit be closed? What is demanded by the deconstructor is only that there be attention to the words as they are simply there, to be read, on the page, in the space of their veracity.

And, it is true, the deconstructor could ask for no more than this: that the rule be written in his image. In the image of the other. *Car je est un autre*.<sup>53</sup> It is only to this end that he writes. He 'make[s] room for the Other.' *Car je est un autre*. How could he not

wish for such a reconciliation in which the other is, in fact, as much expelled as endured, dispossessed as accommodated? Then would the romance of the other be consummated. *Car je est un autre*. This duplicity with respect to the other—who (and which) is also the other of deconstruction—is irreducible.<sup>54</sup> This is the fate of strategy, deconstructive or otherwise.

Let us be quite clear on this: though alterity has a strictly structural or hyperstructural dimension (supplementarity, *différance*, etc.), there is no being rid entirely of the *sentiment of the other*, which clings equally to an ethics or politics of alterity as much as to an ethico-politics of identity, or to a humanism, or to any of the fruits of humanism. The deconstructor, much maligned, explores this difficult terrain with care, rigor, vigilance, responsibility, courage, attentiveness, and without the precipitate haste to formulate a decision which would evade the hazards of the experience. He puts his ear to the ground and *listens*. It is here that the different difference of deconstruction must display its acuity if it is to be differentiated.



### 1.5 The Retreat of Play

*God alone is worthy of supreme seriousness.*  
—Plato<sup>55</sup>

*In the autumn of 1966 at Johns Hopkins,... a young philosopher named Jacques Derrida... delivered his blockbuster essay on "Free Play," and poststructuralist deconstruction was here....*  
—Murray Krieger<sup>56</sup>

The division was not only between the deconstructors and the deconstructed, not only between those who worked diligently to propagate the word of the master and those who had to work with equal diligence to ignore the ubiquity of the master's word, or who rejected it as nihilism, or who dismissed it as merely another and not particularly novel version of the old enemy of knowledge called 'skepticism.' There came about a division in deconstruction, and its seeds were sown by those deconstructors who would grant deconstruction a new kind of seriousness. This new variety was not just a seriousness serious enough to question the ground of literary interpretation, to challenge the critical orthodoxy, and to challenge it in the name of textuality, play, contingency, and so on. Though play may well be a serious business when a certain critical solemnity is at stake, the *new* seriousness had a different means and different object: it brought the gravity of its inquisition to bear on the appropriation of deconstruction and the reduction of philosophy to literature by deconstructive literary criticism.

The notion of play, or freeplay, given considerably less emphasis in recent years, was a significant feature in the propagation and reception of deconstruction. Not only did it open and loosen the opposition of work/play and serious/playful, but it worked against the ideological rigidity in the concept of *work* and of *the work*.<sup>57</sup> Later, the *retreat* from play responds to the *institutional force of play's subversion*: the emphasis on play does not necessarily subvert the institution but subverts the institutional viability of the subverter. It appeared, with the deployment of the subversive notion of play, that deconstruction had overplayed its hand and offered its opponents the grounds for its dismissal. Deconstruction could be eliminated from theoretical contention as playful and

hence irrelevant, uninfluential, quietist, textualist, adolescent, apolitical, anethical.

Derrida has clarified the sense of play he intended in 'Structure, Sign and Play' on a number of occasions—not 'free play' but a play or slack derived from (and limited by) a mechanical metaphor.<sup>58</sup>

However it is clear that the apparent misreading of play in deconstruction responded to the *structuring and evaluative force* of the oppositions work/play and serious/playful, which was contested merely by drawing attention to play in the context of a general volatilization of conceptual binaries within the relative stability of the code. There was an event of the concept of *free play*, with its moment in Derrida. The event of free play, in which deconstruction participated, was not controlled by deconstruction. It could not be constrained by deconstructive cautions and reservations and clarifications. Free play was an event in the field of a hegemonic concept of work, linked to legitimation, stabilization, authorization, and so on. Undoubtedly, then as now, when the institutional stakes are high, *play* is a dangerous concept. The academy in its maturity *must* refuse the discipline of the nursery—where, apparently, play rules.<sup>59</sup>

The significance of free play in deconstruction was *appropriately* invested and exaggerated in proportion to the unmasking of the arbitrary status of stabilizing elements within the 'code' (or system, structure, etc.). Hence it is not clear that there were ever any simple-minded *advocates* of free play; no serious advocates, in any case. At least there did not need to be, for there were many who expressed deep concern about an advocacy, even a general advocacy, of free play, which they considered irresponsible. They balked at the *new responsibility* which coincided with the liberation of play within the work of sedimented structures, for such a play released the interrogatives incarcerated in the answers to old questions, and demanded new responses.

Free play appeared as an event of liberation. It was a liberation of style from generic and institutional restraints—a liberation towards writing, perhaps. There was experimentation, and certainly the legitimation provided by the concept of free play did not assure the success of these experiments. Free play was a liberation from the ponderous self-aggrandizement of philosophy. Free play followed the *logic* of this revolution, which overturned some old verities. With a string of bluntly decontextualized citations from *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, Michael Fischer illustrated for us in the previous section that Christopher Norris was one of those freed

in this moment of deconstructive emancipation. Norris was captivated by the critical power and liberation of deconstruction. 'The end-point of deconstructive thought, as Derrida insists,' says Norris, in the paradoxical idiom characteristic of deconstruction, 'is to recognize that there is no end to the interrogative play between text and text' (Norris 1982, 84). Is Norris here an advocate of free play? This is not clear. A little later, he writes:

The zeal for deconstruction has not, on the other hand, always gone along with the kind of argumentative rigour Derrida calls for [in *Of Grammatology*<sup>60</sup>]. Indeed, its appeal for some critics rests very largely on the promise of an open-ended free play of style and speculative thought, untrammelled by 'rules' of any kind. This response has characterized much of what passes for American deconstructionist criticism, at least in its more publicized varieties. With the notable exception of Paul de Man—whose texts display an early-Derridean incisiveness and rigour—the Yale critics have mostly opted for deconstruction on its dizzy, exuberant side. This is not to say that the two can be firmly distinguished, or that one side merits less 'serious' attention than the other. It points, rather, to a choice between rigour and freedom to which Derrida's texts have themselves responded in very different ways. (91)

Though there is a triumphalism of deconstruction in Norris' text, and a number of occasions where the notion of play is given sympathetic treatment, there are also statements like this one, which already articulate a distance from a discourse of free play. Nor does Norris himself perform free play as a liberation of style. This is, he suggests, more the province of 'American deconstructionist' critics—Geoffrey Hartman, for example. But even in Hartman at his most experimental and 'exuberant,' there is never quite the kind of thing which corresponds to what Norris refers to here as 'an open-ended free play of style and speculative thought, untrammelled by "rules" of any kind.'

All Norris' later texts are elaborate correctives and careful qualifications to the revolutionary triumphalism he displays without inhibition in *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, where he is writing with the excitement of the turn in thought signaled by a general deconstruction of received truths, in the spirit of a Nietzschean transvaluation of all values. It is perhaps Norris, above all, who has made a vocation of arguing for the sobriety and political seriousness of a properly Derridean deconstruction, and against what he understands as the broad trend of poststructuralism or postmodernism towards a dangerous affirmation of free play.<sup>61</sup> He has, then, made a vocation of denying the

excitement, and of overwriting the signs of the excitement, with which he greeted, and sought to contribute to, the revolutionary event of the deconstructive difference, wherein deconstruction attacks 'every last vestige of philosophic truth and certainty' (Norris 1982, 77).<sup>62</sup>

Free play did not need to be real or to be practiced—to be, that is, other than a nightmare of reason—to play a significant role. There may well never be, or have been, *free play as such*, even in the phantasmatic kindergarten of life, but undoubtedly the notion of free play is (again) a certain limit exposed in thought—a limit which marks the unlimited, the death of limits, the limit of transcendental-divine authorization and delimitation, the limit of order and reason and regulation. Free play is that which resists instrumentalization. It is that which is not constrained. It is the Nietzschean Dionysus. It is that which cannot be redeemed as functionality.<sup>63</sup> It is that which opens upon a metaphoricity without end. It is a pure (or free) associativity (and there, it must be said, it may be tightly constrained). There is, no doubt, no such thing as free play, but, nonetheless, it is the horizon of a terrible freedom opened with due trepidation in Nietzsche's parable of the madman, harbinger of the fall of the Deity: in such a moment there is liberation, madness, work, anxiety, responsibility, freedom and free play, together, for no longer can urgent questions, difficulties, decisions, and so on, be referred to the judgment of a higher authority, and, at the same time, no longer need we fear the inevitable judgment from on high which attends all our thoughts and actions.<sup>64</sup>

But it is not clear either that this revision of history, in which the significance of the notion of free play is diminished, is not in itself a misrepresentation of what happened. There may be some demonstrable attribution of responsibility for the elevation of free play. It may not be just a figment of the imagination of some literary critics or of opponents to a generic and overly liberated deconstructive critic. In 'Structure, Sign, and Play,' Derrida makes a turn towards play in a mood of liberation:

As a turning towards the presence, lost or impossible, of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediateness is thus the sad, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauist facet of the thinking of freeplay of which the Nietzschean affirmation—the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation—would be the other side. *This affirmation then determines the non-center otherwise than as the loss of the center.* And it plays the game without security. For there is a sure freeplay: that which is limited to the substitution of given and existing, present, pieces. In absolute chance,

affirmation also surrenders itself to *genetic* indetermination, to the *seminal* adventure of the trace. (Derrida 1967b, 427; Derrida 1970, 264)<sup>65</sup>

The emphasis is absolutely clear: Derrida is traveling with a certain Nietzsche on this road. This is not a fence-sitting deconstruction. No amount of de- and re-contextualizing can conceal the anthemic register in this passage, which has been duly broadcast far and wide. What were and are the consequences of *this* deconstruction? Were the advocates and opponents of free play not right to find inspiration and anathema here?

A range of related questions, serious questions, occupied the space of the incipient division in deconstruction, corresponding to the retreat from play. What are the consequences of deconstruction for critical or philosophical practice? Is there an *applied* deconstruction? (Or, perhaps, in the context of a general performativity—Is there *only* applied deconstruction?) Is it possible to synchronize, to harmonize a practice with deconstruction? Is it possible to put in practice what you put in speech? And if not, if there will be this constitutive asymmetry or dissymmetry, how can deconstruction be held to account for what it *does*? For its consequences? For its intentions?<sup>66</sup>

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Let us imagine that there were those deconstructive critics who understood deconstruction as the emancipation of play within criticism, as respite from the dreadful tedium, self-importance and earnestness of criticism as a kind of science, or as a kind of religion, or as redemption, or as ultimate aesthetic consummation.<sup>67</sup> In this sense, deconstruction *lowered* the stakes, for what was at stake turned merely on the serendipity of a pun. No new worlds were to be built here. And the only worlds to be shattered were those built on the foundations of foundational thinking. Hence the inclination to play derived in part from a downbeat realism (there is always a *kind* of realism at work) which said, 'Relax and enjoy yourself, its only words, no big deal.' The consequence of deconstruction was a diminution of consequential force itself.

In 'Construing and Deconstructing,' M. H. Abrams marks this limit of deconstruction and calls it 'skepticism.' He draws the analogy with Hume, another traveler on the road to the general subversion of conceptual investment:

In addition to subverting all the convictions of our common life and common thought, and asserting the inescapable need for a double life and double thinking, Hume's epistemology contains a third moment that has an analogue in Derrida's theory of language. This is the moment when Hume turns his skepticism back upon itself, by what he calls a 'reflective act of the mind' upon 'the nature of our understanding and our reasoning' [(Hume 1928, 182)]. In doing so he finds himself involved in 'manifest absurdities' and 'manifold contradictions,' including the absurdity that his sceptical argument has no recourse but to use reason itself in order 'to prove the fallaciousness and imbecility of reason' (186-7). Hence 'the understanding entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in [sceptical] philosophy or common life' (267). As the only reasonable way to cope with the diverse illogicalities of his philosophical and his social life, Hume recommends that we replace 'the force of reason and conviction' by an attitude of insouciance—'a serious good-humor'd disposition' (270), and a 'careless' (that is, carefree) conduct of philosophy, and a diffidence about the conclusions reached by that philosophy. 'A true skeptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as his philosophical convictions' (273). (Abrams 1989, 44)

There was, then, waiting in the wings, the prospect of a general *weightlessness*, whose debilitating influence would soon be irresistible.

Though it is not easy to find a deconstructive critic who fits the caricature of an advocate of the free play doctrine other than by the display of a certain stylistic license, there is a philosopher from the American pragmatist tradition who exhibits, or who could be interpreted as exhibiting, some of its attributes: Richard Rorty. Certainly Rorty has opposed himself to the ponderous self-aggrandizement of philosophy. In 'Derrida and the Philosophical Tradition,' Rorty compares Nietzsche unfavorably with Derrida, for Nietzsche was an angst-ridden 'nerd,' says Rorty, but Derrida describes himself, in the context of his philosophical life, as 'having a great time' (Rorty 1998, 327). Rorty prefers the later, comic and ironic Derrida to the earlier, more philosophically earnest, version. 'The superiority of later to earlier Derrida seems to me,' writes Rorty in 'From Ironist Theory to Private Allusions: Derrida,' 'precisely that he stops relying on word magic and relies instead on a way of writing—on creating a style rather than on inventing neologisms' (Rorty 1989, 124n). In his earlier work, 'Derrida is torn between the negative theologian's urge to find a new pantheon—"trace," "différance," and the rest of what Gasché calls "infrastructures"—and the comic writer's urge to make something once held sacred look funny. In his later work, it seems to me, he is less torn.

He is content simply to have fun rather than to feel haunted' (Rorty 1989, 212). Rorty contrasts this later Derridean disposition with Paul de Man, who:

needs the "discourse of philosophy" in the way a negative theologian needs positive theology—as an exhibition of what we must forgo. De Man's analogue of negative theology is a way of "reading" that eschews "methods of literary analysis"—eschews the idea that structures of historical, scientific, psychoanalytic, or sociopolitical thought can be used to filter out what is essential from what is accidental in a literary text (in the way in which such structures *are* legitimately used in dealing with "the phenomenal world"). But, at his best, Derrida offers not a way of reading but a kind of writing—comic writing that does not presuppose "the discourse of philosophy" as anything more than a butt. (212)

'At his best,' says Rorty, 'Derrida realizes that one good way to make something look enigmatic is to treat it as a joke' (213). Rorty opposes this attitude to the kind of Derrida promulgated by Gasché and Norris, one who makes a serious contribution to the 'discourse of philosophy.'

Rorty is one of the survivors of the free play revolution, a revolution whose moment of liberation is now difficult, perhaps, to reconstitute. The Rortyan ease, candor and laconicism are both symptomatic and propagative of this revolution which coincided with what is called 'poststructuralism.' There was some relief then—relief from critical drudgery, relief from the necessity first to discern and then slavishly to follow the rules, relief from the 'sad, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauist facet' of a critical practice enslaved to origin and presentation. There was, it seemed, the freedom of absence, lifting the veil of representation upon nothing: no merciless referent bearing down on the adequacy of an assertion, no constant tyranny of the counter-example, ever imminent and fatal, no responsibility for the ultimate fate of the human endeavor, no overweening truth demanding adequation. The playfully inclined philosopher-critic was thus set free. She would make what she would with her palette of many colors. This break with a *representational* responsibility opened in numerous directions. No longer, for concepts, the labor of their discovery and analysis, but instead the freedom of *invention* or *creation*: this is how Deleuze, for example, construes the task of philosophers.<sup>68</sup> No longer the labor of foundation and establishment, but, in the company of the urbane neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty, to participate in the enduring conversation of the liberal humanities.

This was precisely the consequence of deconstruction that most concerned those who were only too well aware of the gravity of their responsibilities as keepers of the discourse of science and humanism, and of political resistance. Here was the *textualism* that threatened to reduce science and politics and ethics to aesthetics, and then to make of aesthetics merely the site of an interminable interplay of equally valid or invalid evaluations, distinguished only by their relative mastery of the conventions of the language-game, the vibrancy of their word-play, and the seductiveness of their narratives and meta-narratives. This was a limit of deconstruction not to be approached at any cost. Its ability to arouse concern was proportional to its proximity: this limit was, indeed, very near.

It was against this familiar caricature that some deconstructors responded by seeking to redress an imbalance regarding the reception of deconstruction perpetrated both by its antagonists and also by a number of its overly enthusiastic adherents. They sought to reclaim American deconstruction from literary theorists and to return it to its place, its proper context, in the company of philosophers. They wanted to perform a service for the future of deconstruction by re-placing it at the center of philosophical debate, rather than leaving it to languish in literary studies, where it was largely misunderstood and misapplied.

Deconstruction was not merely a license for discursive experimentation, for stylistic excess, for aimless adventures in automatic writing. There was a serious (if aporetic) logic of deconstruction that needed to be worked through. Here the stakes were indeed high, and so must be the standards of philosophical scholarliness. With this development came a tendency to eschew the expansive and experimental and rococo style, which had drawn from the example of Derridean texts like *Glas* and 'Envois' and *Spurs*, and to reassert a more orthodox and familiar form of commentary and exegesis. No longer would readers have to wait endlessly for a deconstructor to overcome the aporia of beginning before coming to the point. There was then much less quibbling over tiny, trivial problems, less tedious self-consciousness, less mind-numbing self-indulgence, less contrived word-play, less (what simply amounts to) bad writing in imitation of the master's example. The era of free play was passing. The time of the great liberation of style was coming to an end.



### 1.6 Philosophy, Adequation, and the Division in Deconstruction

American philosophy had been able to ignore deconstruction, confining it to a moment of aberration to which critics of literature were susceptible, no doubt because a tendency to mental lassitude was a consequence of an immoderate preoccupation with fiction—which was, after all, self-evidently *fictional*. Deconstruction was *irrelevant* to philosophy, and this fact was attested precisely by its success in departments of literature.

Did Rodolphe Gasché, the comparatist and philosopher most clearly identified with the philosophical reclamation program for deconstruction, respond at least in part to this *institutional exigency*—to recuperate deconstruction as properly philosophical, to recuperate deconstruction for philosophy and for a philosophical seriousness? Gasché, philosopher, stands at the opening of this division in deconstruction. His bold polemic would more than redress the balance in favor of a philosophically literate reading of deconstruction. 'I believe,' said Gasché, 'that Derrida's thought can be adequately understood only if approached philosophically...' (Gasché 1986, 2). In the heat of polemic—though not necessarily in the more equivocal space of its interstices—it became the *restoration* of deconstruction to philosophy as a homecoming: deconstruction has always been more properly *philosophical* (that is, says Gasché carefully, given a certain deconstructive understanding of the philosophical, and given that the philosophical entails attention to philosophical context). Deconstruction belongs with philosophical texts. This is the cutting edge of Gasché's intervention in the politics of deconstruction, and it was surprising, in the end, how readily literary critics accepted the judgment of the philosopher.

But we must be cautious here in the unavoidable engagement with caricature. Gasché's argument is both reducible to an opposition of philosopher to literary critic, and more complex—irreducible to this opposition. This is the historico-conceptual double. Gasché pursues a deconstructive rigor in the consideration of the difference between literature and philosophy. He does not resort to simplifications:

If deconstruction represents an invitation to rethink the relation between philosophy and literature, it does so by calling our attention to the relation itself as a relation of constitution. The question with deconstruction is no longer whether literature or philosophy is primordial, more essential, or broader,... but of how philosophy and literature become—more precisely, begin to become—what they are in their respective difference. A deconstructive focus on the relation between philosophy and literature not only requires that both be taken seriously in their irreducible difference, but also that that difference is seen as resting on an indefinite bringing forth of itself and its differents. (Gasché 1995, 116)

There is close attention, then, to the mechanism of a differentiation between philosophy and literature.<sup>69</sup> But also, Gasché is concerned with the deconstructive interrogation of the category of literature:

[I]t is by suspending its *being* as literature that literature becomes capable of challenging philosophy's dominant categorization. Literature puts itself between quotation marks by opening itself to the absolute loss of its meaning, whether of content or of form. Literature becomes a radical interrogation of philosophy, and of most past literature as well, not only by refusing its foundation in a preceding and prior being of meaning but also by disclaiming any formal essence as concerns its substance of expression. Therefore, Derrida must regard the use of the term *literature* for that sort of literary writing with suspicion, since it "subjects the concept to belles-lettres, to the arts, to poetry, to rhetoric, and to philosophy." He must write "literature" or "literary" between quotation marks precisely because the new practice of this sort of writing "supposes a break with what has tied the history of the literary arts to the history of metaphysics." "Literature" thus acquires a subversive function with regard to philosophy and the literature under its dominion, not by restoring its specificity at any cost but, precisely, by recognizing that it can effect such a subversion only by hardly being literature. "Literature" (is) almost no literature. It appears, then, that the disruptive and subversive effects of "literature" are directed not against logocentric philosophy alone but against literature as well, to the extent that the latter submits to philosophy's demands. Hence, what subverts philosophy is not in fact literature, for it also solicits the very foundations of literature, depriving it of its external foundation in philosophy, or in other words of its being. (Gasché 1986, 258-59)

Gasché makes a distinction between literature and 'literature.' It is the second one, in inverted commas, 'literature,' that belongs, in a sense, to the moment of deconstruction. The implication here is that deconstructive criticism has practiced its pseudo-deconstructive art *within* the undeconstructed category of literature—that deconstructive criticism has not in fact questioned the category of the literary. Thus Gasché's position is a peculiar one: in bringing the category of the literary itself into question, he practices

a properly literary deconstruction in the name of a return to the philosophical. And yet, it is *not* immediately clear that deconstructive criticism has not already initiated or undertaken this questioning. Like the advocate of free play, the deconstructive critic who practices the 'deconstructive criticism' to which Gasché repeatedly refers is strangely absent in her particularity. Like the advocate of free play, the deconstructive literary critic is something of a phantom, perhaps only available, as such, when divorced from any particular individual, argument or context. There is a familiar process which leads to the formation of this kind of generic figure, the object of a critique—a figure who, having written nothing in particular, *cannot be read*. Is this process faithful to deconstruction? Or is it, alternatively, a function of a strategy of intervention in an institutional scene? Or is it both?

What is at issue for Gasché is the question of a fidelity to deconstruction. '[A]ll I want to establish here,' says Gasché in the introduction to *The Tain of the Mirror*, is an 'elucidation of that which deconstructionist criticism is unfaithful to in Derrida's writing' (Gasché 1986, 3-4). Thus, primarily, Gasché's book is a work of fidelity to Derrida and deconstruction. 'To quarry from Derrida's writings,' as do the deconstructive critics, 'is not automatically to become deconstructive in the eminent sense' (2), writes Gasché. Clearly this is Gasché's task: not just to aspire to become deconstructive, but 'to become deconstructive *in the eminent sense*.' Thus, despite his careful, attentive, and sophisticated arguments, one outcome, perhaps for Gasché not such an unfortunate one, is an inevitable characterization of this division in deconstruction as a division between *hard* (or philosophical) deconstruction and *soft* (or literary) deconstruction. It is this hard deconstruction that deploys the word 'philosophy' strategically in order to intervene in the field of deconstructive criticism.

From Gasché's institutional perspective—Gasché, professor of comparative literature—there was an orthodoxy formed prematurely within deconstructive criticism. This orthodoxy claimed that there was something intrinsic to deconstruction that lent itself to appropriation by literary criticism; that deconstruction legitimized the introduction, as part of a general interdisciplinarity, of a (false or misleading) continuity between literature and philosophy which permitted the *same* critical-rhetorical analyses to be applied to both literary and philosophical texts equally. It was, for Paul de Man, precisely the moment of a genuinely *literary* theory that introduced rhetorical analysis to

philosophical texts, and it was this rhetorical criticism that opened the possibility of the (de Manian) deconstruction of philosophy. The literary critic was elevated to the vertiginous position of master (relatively speaking) of the masterless in philosophy: that is, *rhetoric*.

This elevation of the deconstructive critic must be interpreted in the context of another orthodoxy with a longer history: philosophy as the ground of the humanities in general. Philosophy since Plato had been privileged to think the place of poetry. Initially, Yale critics like Geoffrey Hartman began to question and explore the boundaries between literary criticism and literature, criticism and philosophy, philosophy and literature. What did really constitute these differences? Were they not a hierarchization or stratification that served certain interests? Did they not call for deconstruction? For overturning and displacement? This was the moment of a crisis in disciplinary boundaries, whose legitimacy had been taken for granted.

Gasché's intervention in the scene of deconstructive criticism in the early 1980s acquired an ambiguity. He analyzed the relation of philosophy to literature, pointing out that the Romantic tendency to 'minimiz[e] the difference between literature and philosophy... remains within the tradition of literary secondariness' (Gasché 1986, 256-7). He was, at the same time, reminding literary critics of what they already knew was their constitutional inadequacy in the field of philosophy.<sup>70</sup> Thus Gasché's intervention was always unavoidably ambiguous: *both* a reasonable call for the care and sobriety of a certain discipline of philosophy (rigor, context, attention to logical and micrological detail, etc.) in order to accommodate the densely philosophical intrication of deconstruction, and a reminder to literary critics that they would always be foreigners in the land of deconstruction—that deconstruction was not literature, or essentially literary or literary-critical, and hence that it was not *theirs*.

Whatever was Gasché's intention, and certainly he meant at the very least to intervene, his argument was received by literary deconstructors as a reproach. In fact, a considerable number of the texts by Gasché from this period begin with or contain a reference to the parlous state of deconstructive studies within departments of literature. Gasché frequently expresses a 'sense of perplexity at Derrida's reception in North America, a perplexity that has motivated a significant portion of my research toward the clarification of various issues relevant to his work' (Gasché 1994, 1). Gasché's



intervention appeared as an attack on deconstructive criticism—in his own words, a 'harsh judgment of that sought of criticism' (Gasché 1986, 3). It appeared as an attack on the privilege of literature with regard to the encounter with deconstruction, with the aim, despite his protestations otherwise, of reclaiming that privilege for philosophy.

Derek Attridge is careful and humble in accepting, on behalf of his literary colleagues—and, it would seem, with only the gentlest of ironies—the accuracy of the critique, understood to come not only from philosophically oriented and erudite theorists like Gasché but from Derrida himself. 'We now know—or have no excuse for not knowing—that deconstruction is not a technique or method, and hence that there is no question of "applying" it,' writes Attridge. 'We know,' he continues, 'that it is not a moment of carnival or liberation, but a moment of the deepest concern with limits. We know that it is not a hymn to indeterminacy, or a life-imprisonment within language, or a denial of history.... And we know—though this myth perhaps dies hardest of all—that the ethical and the political are not avoided by deconstruction, but implicated at every step' (Attridge 1995, 109-10).<sup>71</sup>

Yet Attridge concedes too much too quickly. Deconstruction shifts its *emphases* according to strategic exigency, and the logic of reproach and concession here (or, as we will see shortly, reproach and reaction) responds in a curious way both to *transference* and to the labor of an *adequation to a truth of deconstruction*. This labor is indispensable and unavoidable, and it involves its laborers in the contention over property. Attridge is ready to hand over his keys to a higher authority. But it is not clear that deconstruction is *not* a method. It is not clear that there is *not* a moment (at least) of carnival or liberation in deconstruction. A certain *indeterminacy* may well be one limit of deconstruction. Imprisonment within language is a justified anxiety when the representational relation is interrogated closely. Deconstruction cannot give the notion of History a shake without undermining the investment in *History*: there is, inevitably, and not just as a consequence of a deconstruction, a moment of the denial of History itself.

Geoffrey Bennington responds to the reproach of the philosophers in a very different way. He is anything but contrite. He draws our attention to a wave of revisionist readings by philosophers of the reception of Derridean deconstruction, all published in the mid 1980s (Gasché 1986; Harvey 1986; Llewelyn 1986; Melville 1986). As a

member of the community of literary critics targeted by these authors, he chooses to respond to them collectively in 'Deconstruction and the Philosophers.' Yet it is clear as Bennington's essay unfolds that, though Harvey, Llewelyn and Melville receive some attention, Gasché is the main focus.

There is a pronounced stylistic contrast between Bennington and Gasché, upon which Bennington comments: 'Gasché... expound[s] Derrida and philosophy with undertaker's *gravitas* and many a stylistic solecism, to the point of provoking an irrepressible hilarity in the reader' (14). Bennington is incensed, and his mocking laughter proportionate to the insult and provocation that constitute Gasché's intervention.

Bennington's essay, placed at the head of his 1995 collection, *Legislations*, is a remarkable thing. Its style is at once relaxed and urbane, facetious and irritable, hostile and defensive, tolerant and careful, vitriolic and cantankerous, malicious and sarcastic, in a curious amalgam. 'Don't get me wrong,' he writes, 'Of course we're delighted with these excellent books. After years of warning students off almost *all* secondary reading on Derrida, it's a relief to have these books to turn to' (Bennington 1994, 14). What is *not* assumed by Bennington is the characteristic *posture* that generally accompanies the assumption of scholarly authority. Though such an assumption does not have to result in the *gravitas* he attributes to Gasché, it does establish a broad protocol and set of prohibitions: for example, the high philosophical seriousness in Gasché that both amuses and irritates Bennington.

Bennington's style, and his comments on Gasché's style, reflect his tacit understanding that some of the consequences of deconstruction are, or ought to be, (in a sense) *stylistic*.<sup>72</sup> The assumption of a properly philosophical style accompanies an apprehension of philosophy's (proper) place, its superior position, within the economy of writing. There are philosophical proprieties, and these convey authority. The deconstruction of these proprieties opens philosophical writing to the pressure of the economy of writing (language, thought, etc.) in general. It is less clear then what must be excluded from philosophical writing. This muddying of the waters, this testing of frontiers, *might* be a liberation—and certainly, in terms of style, Bennington writes without some of the stylistic restraints conventionally associated with scholarliness. There is a liquidity of reaction and response, an immediate proximity of volatile affect; there is evidence of the 'stream of consciousness,' of the storm and the indignant tirade,

that precedes the work of formalization, of making proper, of self-censorship. The voice is not *formal*. The result is not refined, but something a little less than entirely sober. The casual talk and colloquialisms (for example, 'Don't get us wrong,' 'we admit to wincing a bit...') which a *certain* inhibition might have excised in the process of revision (if they had ever made it onto the page in the first place) remain, and, remaining, *stand for something*. Bennington marks out his distance from Gasché.

There is a precedent for this kind of writing in texts (signed) by Derrida and, in Derrida, for the abutment of this kind of writing with philosophy proper. There may be a transgression of scholarly protocols—be they literary-critical or more dourly philosophical. There is no *absolute* limitation on how far such transgressions might travel and, it must be said, oftentimes this decision becomes a matter of genre or generic ethos or aesthetics.<sup>73</sup> Those apprenticed to Derrida, for example, and recognizing there some generic innovations, may walk down that same road, or, on the other hand, they may assume the style appropriate within the institution to the apprentice, explicator, commentator, classical exegete.

In Bennington, then, there are signs of some consequences of deconstruction—one of which might be called, not unequivocally, a 'liberation of style,' which is an opening of scholarly protocol to the pressure of a writing in general, an opening towards an ideal or an irreducible performativity perhaps. But there is also, entirely consonant with this (limited) liberation, an enforcement or discipline: there are words whose conceptual commitments have been shown by Derrida to be, in Bennington's word, 'problematic.'<sup>74</sup> They have been deconstructed. Since this deconstruction *has* consequences, one of them is that these words become subject to proscription, as though they point to a conceptual naivety. They become indicators of this naivety, of a pre-deconstructive attitude. This is Bennington's main line of attack against Gasché and Harvey. Bennington asserts his contiguity to the truth of deconstruction by a policing of the word. There is a separation of good words from bad words as a process of lexical filiation. Some words are simply 'taken out,' removed from circulation. But Bennington is not aberrant in exercising this veto. At one equivocal limit of this *same* process of adequation is the Heideggerian writing of the copula under erasure: it must be, but it cannot; we cannot evade the *is*, but we cannot let it stand unrecognized in its imposture: the imposture of being. The crossing out of the copula says, 'I need you, but I *know* you're lying. I am closer to your

prevaricating truth when I make this sign. I can deliberately make your aporia a conscious thing—or thinking.'<sup>75</sup>

Part of Bennington's strategy against the philosophers is a function of the acquisition of the Derridean lexicon and its commensurate valuations. Bennington takes Harvey to task for the lack of rigorous Derridean protocol in her lexical (hence conceptual) choices:

Harvey... suggests that [the] notion of a "fil conducteur... is always Derrida's point of departure for his deconstructive projects," and yet manages to end the same paragraph with the statement that "we must begin in the beginning." Lest this last injunction be thought a joke in the circumstances..., the next paragraph states that, "As deconstruction moves towards the text of its choice, it approaches armed with certain goals or intentions" (p. 25): the notions here of "moving towards", "approach", "choice", "goals" and "intentions" are all extremely problematical. (Bennington 1994, 16)

There are consequences of deconstruction not only for the commentator's language, but also for the status of the commentator. Deconstructive literary critics have always been alert to these elements and relations, and this has been their self-consciousness, their reflexivity: that they have been sensitive, sometimes paralyzingly so, to the language of their own (quasi-Derridean) articulations and expositions.

At work here (or at play) is a labor of adequation; of double adequation—adequation to Derrida and adequation to things; adequation to Derrida as the thing himself. This labor can hardly be relinquished. The *symmetry* of a conceptual probity in general and a formulation in particular (or vice versa) can hardly be a realistic expectation. There will always be a gap here into which a deconstruction or a critique may venture, driven by who knows what covert inclination. The residue of an insuperable asymmetry of theory and practice (whose difference as much as whose interpenetration is always at play, or at work) will be *irony*. Can there be this ironic residue, as a pseudo-recuperation in the labor of adequation, of enlightenment, if the labor of adequation is *not* relinquished? This makes of course for deconstruction and deconstructibility without end.

Conversely, Gasché's critique of deconstructive criticism as conservative, as continuous with New Criticism, as apolitical and rapidly reverting to orthodoxy, as not altering anything, as naive textualism and free play, as conceptual anarchy, involves Gasché's reviving traditional scholarly protocols, reinvesting a certain idea of

philosophy and philosophical seriousness, renewing and deproblematizing the traditional relationship of primary to secondary text, and abandoning a certain 'hyper-reflexive' close reading practice. This practical rejection of a radicalized reciprocal involvement of theory and practice, of concepts and *concrete* formulations (i.e., lexical decisions of the kind to which Bennington draws our attention), with stylistic consequences, this restabilization of the exegetical relation, occurs within a deconstruction of the notion of *philosophical reflection*, which is 'philosophy's eternal aspiration toward self-foundation' (Gasché 1986, 13).

Thus, Gasché appears to work comfortably at the level of paraphrase: that is, of meaning. It is not so much that paraphrase can be eliminated and the aporia of meaning transcended, but that Gasché is not driven by his material towards a radical or novel formal adequation (impossible at the level of attainment in any case). The orthodox paraphrastic or commentative mode is dominant. His style does not emphasize the kind of self-conscious and circuitous intrigues associated with deconstructive literary-critical discourse. There is not a problematization of the form of his appropriation of Derrida and deconstruction, and he speaks equally and candidly for the truth of both. This characteristic feature of Gasché's text is not a mere omission, for his clairvoyant role in relation to Derrida is repeatedly emphasized as a function of his polemical debate with American deconstructive literary criticism. It is not clear that this characteristic feature is a radical rethinking of the exegetical relation.

Curiously then, despite the detail, acuity, complexity, scrupulousness, rigor, and concentration of his arguments in *The Tain of the Mirror*—which would perform, we imagine, an essential cautionary part in the re-education of the deconstructive critics who are his colleagues—Gasché is not, in an important sense, a *reader*. There is a kind of attentive reading which is itself intrinsically deconstructive, simply as a function of attention to the aporetic instance of textual particularity. This instance has become a deconstructive commonplace. For example, there are texts by deconstructors which follow Derrida in constructing a textual and intimate moment which draws attention to an aporetic quasi-immediacy or non-present present of reading: here, now, where I am, before you, *this* paper, *this* word, right now, with you, here, etc.<sup>76</sup> Gasché does not rehearse this event, or any version of it. He is not oriented towards the extroversion of an aporetics of reading, which takes place with attention to meaning construction. This

produces the peculiar situation that Gasché constantly reproaches deconstructive critics *and yet* he is not a reader. He is one of the most thorough, percipient and attentive readers of Paul de Man, but he is not a reader, in de Man's sense. His attention is always first and foremost to the determination of a strict Derridean meaning, and not to any complication in its transmission.<sup>77</sup> Often, it appears, he has a clear line to the meaning of deconstruction. He is its medium and cypher.<sup>78</sup>

Bennington is incensed by all this, and he plays out his indignation without inhibition. But Bennington is, perhaps, nonetheless, as Gasché describes literary deconstructors, an *intuitive* critic, though it is not immediately clear how we might develop this tendentious characterization. Bennington is not a meticulous or systematic thinker, inasmuch as these attributes entail certain familiar formal or stylistic or methodological protocols. He has not traced the difficult logic of deconstruction with a logician's minute concern for each step and entailment, though again it is not clear what kind of derogation this might imply. He is certainly not, in Gasché's terms, a *philosopher*. In the field of contention determined by Gasché's polemic, Bennington makes an attempt to out-philosophize Gasché, which is a strategic error. Bennington cannot see clearly through his tears of outrage or of hilarity, and he floods the page. Gasché is untouched, and, indeed, could not be so unless crossed by the master's disapprobation.<sup>79</sup> Yet, there is a signal difficulty for Gasché's redemptive program: Gasché's evident philosophical facility cannot account for the fact that Bennington's perhaps philosophically undernourished intuitions may be *no more nor less deconstruction* than Gasché's own careful elucidations. Gasché's prudent formulations are not necessarily, for all their apparent rigor, any *more* capable of the ideal vigilance called for by deconstruction, an ideal located by Gasché in a strategic return to the intrication of deconstruction with philosophy.

This 'no more nor less deconstruction' is not a deconstructive egalitarianism. It does not mean that deconstruction is indefinable and ineffable, and hence belongs to everyone equally (though it may do). Nonetheless, it is not clear that Gasché's appropriation can any more guarantee or deliver deconstruction than Bennington's. It is not necessarily closer to deconstruction. How could this proximity be determined? What is the measure? The measure is the difference, or the different difference of deconstruction. This difference may well have something to do with Derrida himself

(that is, Derrida is the difference of deconstruction), but it is not certain. It is only in such a determination that an intimate critical or commentative relation to deconstruction might be established.

In the style of their contention, Bennington and Gasché are mirror images of each other, crudely consigned by the nature of such a conflict to an opposition of *literature* and *philosophy* to whose blunt differentiation neither one subscribes. Looking through their eyes, or between them, we ought to be able to see reflected *the deconstructor himself*. The symptom with regard to deconstruction is something Gasché and Bennington share. What is critical for those approaching the Derridean thing is to establish a *relationship* to it. What might be this critical relation? They would, in a sense, see themselves reflected there. Perhaps Derrida makes this difficult. He politely undermines the adequacy of the paraphrases of deconstruction with which he is besieged. Does he seek to educate his readers in the art of this difficulty? What is difficult for those approaching the *Derridean thing* with the necessity of establishing a relationship to it is to reconcile its multiple inclinations in the course of a critical or commentative appropriation. How is this difficult task to be achieved? How is the relation to Derrida, and to the deconstruction with which the deconstructor identifies, to be determined?

There could well be, for example, an approach towards the Derridean text with the critical preoccupations characterizing the New Critics, who were attentive to irony, complexity, paradox, ambiguity. Where would this strategy lead? It might lead to the discovery, after an appropriate and protracted period of apprenticeship, of the coherence or 'continuity' (Gasché 1986, 4) that Gasché discovers in the Derridean work.<sup>80</sup> Or it might lead elsewhere. Gasché's method, which is not a close reading method, tends, despite his precautions, to the reinstatement or deproblematization of the (philosophical) meaning of deconstruction. This provides for a worthy and scholarly elucidation of deconstruction. Alternatively, a work of reading, drawing on New Critical method, but not limited by its prescriptive teleology, might discover in the marks and spaces of the Derridean text something more resistant and less readily elucidated. In the presence of such a resistance and the absence of such a reduction, the debate to which Gasché would make a decisive contribution would not, however, be very far advanced.

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The division in deconstruction takes the form of rival adequations to deconstruction, a process mediated in a complex way by the one who, despite every hesitation and qualification, is nonetheless licensed to speak with a singular authority about the thing called deconstruction. But the divisions that divide deconstruction and deconstructors are a set of bifurcations that can appear anywhere and at any level (this characteristic is not attributable only to deconstruction). There was a time, for example, when it seemed reasonable to assume that the presuppositions of a notion like *enlightenment* were the target of a deconstruction. If Jurgen Habermas was, at that time, the contemporary figure of enlightenment, our champion of the project of modernity, then it was clear that Habermasian theory and deconstruction did not harmonize. In fact, they were at odds. Indeed, *more* at odds than Habermas and Foucauldian theory. Deconstruction seemed to make the Habermasian project that much more difficult, as if it was not already difficult enough. Deconstruction pressed it towards the limit of its possibility. Though there was not, perhaps, a *critique* of the notion of enlightenment, there was, at least, a deconstruction of its metaphors and its presuppositions.<sup>81</sup> Was this not the tendency? Was this not the *perception*? It was the case—then and there, where he, the one who signs himself Derrida, where he was, *there*, then, strategically or otherwise, *singularly*, within what Gasché calls a 'pragmatic and historical context' (Gasché 1986, 139). But then, time passes, or seems to. Some time later, perhaps when Derrida discovers himself understood, without nuance, and identified, altogether too coarsely, as the nemesis of enlightenment, as anti-enlightenment (which is certainly a foolish notion), there is a Derrida, the same or another (it is not easy to tell), who announces, with some impatience, that he has never not been, in a sense, an enlightenment philosopher.<sup>82</sup> It *never* was so. And, truly, it never was. It was a misconception, a false constraint within the frame of dialectics. Within this false frame, to interrogate the concept of enlightenment is the same as to oppose the concept of enlightenment.

Is this what Werner Hamacher calls Derrida's 'ambidexterity'? It is not clear exactly to whom or to what such an ambidexterity can be attributed. This elusiveness, this resistance to reading—is it not that of the thing itself? Be that as it may, the *interventive force* leaves the deconstruction of the presuppositions of enlightenment.

Deconstruction's pressure to be no longer requires this instance. The moment of revolution has departed from this place. Such a deconstruction is now, in any case, altogether *de rigueur*. It is a stale remainder.<sup>83</sup> With an alteration, the word 'enlightenment' returns to the lexicon in a new affirmation, an affirmation the word always carried.<sup>84</sup> It is not always easy to distinguish the affirmative from the critical-negative moments of deconstruction, and yet deconstructive *effects* tend, irrespective of intention, towards one or other of the two poles of judgment, called Good and Bad respectively.

In pursuit of the thing itself, deconstruction too is on the run. It must run from itself. It runs into itself as another. It flees from itself. It is (the) flight from itself. The thing is on the run. We cannot step twice into the same deconstruction. Deconstruction's vigilance is not necessarily dedicated to an ideal awareness, but to motility. There is a motile awareness. Derridean discipleship will appear as displaced residues and pockets and petrification of these discernible inclinations where they were extracted or distilled: views held, reserved, qualified, concealed, discarded when the time is right, reinstated (or interpreted as such), all according to a law whose mechanism is not yet clear. Is there a law of context? The very least we can ask of such a law is that it *should not shift its ground*. Is this not an eminently reasonable request?

## 1.7 The Disciple and the Discipline of Double Reading

In 'The Discipline of Deconstruction' (Nealon 1992), Jeffrey Nealon seeks to describe the institutional environment in which it is possible to speak of what Peter Baker calls the 'ethical turn' in deconstruction (Baker 1995). In other words, there can only be an ethical (or political) *turn* if there was a non-ethical or anethical orthodoxy or complacency prior to the turn. According to this perspective, institutional deconstruction in American departments of English had become 'impotent,' to use Nealon's word, if it had ever been otherwise. It warranted the proclamation of the death of deconstruction, for what remained of deconstruction under the heading of deconstruction was moribund. With an emphasis on (a certain interpretation of) aporia and undecidability, it preached, if inadvertently, resignation and nihilism and quietism.

Nealon launches his revisionary project of an appropriately disciplined deconstruction with a small ploy. He quotes Rodolphe Gasché, but without naming him, and the quotations appear as though written by anonymous *critics* of deconstruction:

Deconstructive criticism, which, however important, is but an offspring of New Criticism,... has done little more than apply what it takes to be a method for reading literary texts to the unproblematized horizon of its discipline.

By neglecting the pragmatic and historical context of the utterance of what is dramatized in such a manner as to cancel it out, the criticism in question reveals its origins in Romantic (as well as, in a certain interpretation, Idealist) philosophy. It is a suprahistorical criticism that pretends to speak from a position free of ideology—that is, from an absolute point of view. (Gasché 1986, 255, 139 respectively)

Nealon sustains the suspense of his dramatization for half a page or so, developing a critique consonant with the direction of these passages, before unveiling the identity of their author—who is not, as it turns out, a combatant from outside deconstruction but a dissenter from within. Thus Nealon uses Gasché's remarks to determine a division in deconstruction, in the ranks of deconstructors, which he proceeds to cultivate. It is the success of this kind of critique, says Nealon, that brought deconstruction's 'short, happy life in American literature departments to an end' (Nealon 1992, 1266). The responsibility for this outcome does not fall equally upon all exponents of



deconstruction, but mainly upon the Yale school critics, most prominently de Man and Hillis Miller, and their disciples.<sup>85</sup>

Nealon's strategy is clear. Gasché is the critic of deconstruction from within deconstruction who can save it from the death of a thousand professors of literature professing deconstruction. Indeed, the *deconstruction* which was practiced 'in literature departments in the 1970s and later usually had little to do with Derrida's thought' (1267). The assumption, not an entirely unreasonable one, is that whatever deconstruction *ought to be* should harmonize with what Derrida writes. But, what happened was otherwise. Deconstruction was 'commodified for an American market, simplified and watered down for use in how-to books that gave (and continue to give) a generation of literature students an overview of what was supposedly Derrida's work without paying corresponding attention to his texts' (1269). Amongst critics and revisionists of deconstruction, there is often talk of these over-simplified primers in deconstructive practice, but rarely are they specified. Nealon does specify them. Two of the how-to books Nealon has in mind are Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction* and Christopher Norris's *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. These, he says, are typical since both succeed in pulling the teeth from the deconstructive tiger. Such a deconstruction is certainly in danger of not making any difference.

Curiously, it is as a thinker of deconstruction not distracted by circuitous subtleties and tedious quibbles nor lured into elaborate argumentative pirouettes that Nealon can mount his bold case, draw out its essential points and set them in relief. Despite its blunt construction and its clear derivation from Gasché,<sup>86</sup> the terms in which Nealon formulates his argument are useful in setting out the issues facing deconstruction—where it is engaged, willingly or not, in a politics of the institution, of institutionalization, and also a broader politics.

Nealon quotes Culler:

In undoing the oppositions on which it relies and between which it urges the reader to choose, the text places the reader in an impossible situation that cannot end in triumph but only in an outcome already deemed inappropriate: an unwarranted choice or a failure to choose. (Culler 1982, 81)<sup>87</sup>

Against this passage—Nealon describes it as advocating a 'formalist reading method that emphasizes a predetermined fall into meaninglessness resulting from the self-

cancellation of oppositions in any text' (1269)—Nealon opposes the following quotation from the closing pages of 'Signature, Event, Context' ('Signature, Événement, Contexte'):

Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice an overturning of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system. It is only on this condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to intervene in the field of oppositions that it criticizes, which is also a field of non-discursive forces. (Derrida 1972b, 392; Derrida 1982, 329)

Here then are two opposed positions, one ending, according to Nealon, in mere neutralization, in the prison house of language (equally the prison house of text, or of writing), the other in active intervention and displacement (of the system). Culler and his cohorts are on the side of the same, of orthodoxy, of continuity with New Criticism, of institutional stability, etc., whereas Nealon (and Gasché) and Derrida are on the side of difference: intervention, change, revolution, displacement, transformation, overturning, and so on.

Derrida is invoked by Nealon to reclaim deconstruction from its American demise. If anyone should possess the *right* of deconstruction it must be Derrida. Nealon quotes from Derrida with an emphasis on exhortations to intervention and displacement. Derrida is not at one with the American deconstructors; on the contrary, it is a case of Derrida *against* the deconstructors, for he has always been much more overtly and actively ethical and political. Indeed, it is the second position in Nealon's pair of oppositions, Derrida's position, which overturns and displaces the first, Culler's, representing the dominant viewpoint in American deconstruction. Nealon resolves the opposition of Derrida to Culler, of master to (failed) disciple, in favor of the former. There is no question of aporia here, no question of being impaled on the horns of *this* opposition.

Nealon quotes from Derrida in *Dissemination*:

Deconstruction involves an indispensable phase of reversal [i.e. first-level deconstruction]. To remain content with reversal is of course to operate within the immanence of the system to be destroyed. But to sit back... and take an attitude of neutralizing indifference with respect to be classical oppositions would be to give free rein to the existing forces that effectively and historically dominate the field. It



would be, for not having seized the means to intervene, to confirm the established equilibrium. (Derrida 1981a, 6, Nealon's insertion, 1270)<sup>88</sup>

In this way, Nealon discerns a two-level deconstruction which he calls 'double reading.' Unfortunately, American literary critics and deconstructors practice only first-level deconstruction: 'If deconstruction as literary criticism limits itself to neutralization, to first-level deconstruction, Derrida agrees that it is then politically impotent and even reactionary; it leaves the field of oppositions undisrupted, a field that [Derrida] emphasizes is made up of both discursive and non-discursive forces. To fail to make the second move of double reading would be simply "to confirm the established equilibrium." This limitation is the unfortunate legacy of deconstructive literary criticism in America' (1270).<sup>89</sup>

Despite the blunt contrivance by which Derrida is made to agree with the terms of Nealon's critique, it is clear that Nealon has not misread the basic thrust of the Derrida of *Dissemination's* opening section, entitled 'Outwork,' which manifests a right of intervention. This section has the force of establishment. It lays down the law without equivocation: 'No concept, no name, no signifier,' says Derrida emphatically, 'can escape this structure' of a '*double science*' (Derrida 1981a, 4).<sup>90</sup> Thus the double science is instituted. But does this extend to the idea of a 'two-level' deconstruction? Nealon is right to recognize this *possibility*, which Derrida deliberately invests with its possibility, but can a strategy of double reading be orchestrated or articulated in this way, as two-level? Moreover, a question mark hangs over the possibility of recognizing the operation of these levels as discrete and attributable (attributable, that is, to the practice of this or that reader). Can the '*double science*' be realized as *structure* and then *practiced* as double (two-level) reading? There is no doubt that the *difference* of deconstruction, as an active and intervening difference, depends upon what Nealon determines, and would mobilize, as 'double reading.'

Let us mark out the parameters of this question, at least provisionally, with the aid of 'Outwork':

This structure of the *double mark* (caught—both seized and entangled—in a binary opposition, one of the terms retains its old name so as to destroy the opposition to which it no longer quite belongs, to which in *any* event it has *never* quite yielded, the history of this opposition being one of incessant struggles generative of hierarchical

configurations) works the entire field within which these texts move. This structure itself is worked in turn: the rule according to which every concept necessarily receives two similar marks—a repetition without identity—one mark inside and the other outside the deconstructed system, should give rise to a double reading and a double writing. And, as will appear in due course: a *double science*. (Derrida 1981a, 4)<sup>91</sup>

Where the 'structure of the *double mark*' is 'itself... worked in turn,' the 'rule' of the double mark 'should give rise to a double reading....' In other words, what *works* (and *should* work) the double mark is the double reading (this is to rely on reading the colon after 'worked in turn' as a 'that is'). No doubt then, the double reading and double writing do *work*: recall, as corroboration, the quotation from 'Signature, Event, Context,' where '[d]econstruction... must, *by means of* a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, *practice* an overturning of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system' (my emphases).

There is an ambiguity here: if the structure of the double mark is itself 'worked in turn,' then this being 'worked in turn' is also a *doubling* of the (structure and rule of the) double mark. This doubling produces, as doubles, a 'doubled' (a differentiated pair of indiscernibles) and a '*non-doubled*' (unity, singularity, the undifferentiated), a structure of the double and a meta- or hyper-structural *de*-structuring of the double. The *possibility* of a double reading is a symptom of this doubling (here it is not the reality but the *possibility* of a double reading that is at stake: the reality is *given*). The double reading, inside and outside, is *oppositonality*. As a symptom of the doubling of the double mark, which would absorb the double reading *into another opposition*, the doubling produces an 'absolute exteriority' (absolutely *resistant* exteriority) with regard to the recuperation of alterity by the binary-opposition-as-double. There is the other *within* the binary opposition (the other pole) and (then) the *radical* other of the opposition and of the binary structure in general. This is the disruption of binarism integral to the different difference of the following deconstructive names: 'the name "unconscious" [as] that which can never have been the symmetrical negative or the potential reservoir of "consciousness" '; 'the name "matter" [as] that which lies outside all classical oppositions and which... should no longer be able to assume any reassuring form...'; ' "différance" [as that] which brings the radical otherness or the absolute

exteriority of the outside into relation with the closed, agonistic, hierarchical field of philosophical oppositions...' (Derrida 1972a, 10-11; Derrida 1981a, 4-5).

The possibility of the *program* (or 'practice') of double reading resides here, with these names, which must *resist* and resist absolutely the doubling of the double mark, which integrates them into a redoubled binarism. To resist it, they *are and are always* this doubling itself. And they are *signs* (names) of an absolute resistance, and, to this extent, they are each in their difference the same: unconscious, matter, *différance*, supplement, trace, hymen, *khôra*, and so on. It is only thus that they can be gathered together in a litany. Their resistance, absolute and irresistible, is a *fixity* or *reference*: the alterior mastery of the masterless. Their resistance *stabilizes* the program of a double reading in its (radical) opposition to mastery (and to program, project, etc.):

' "Difference" also designate[s]... an economic movement of the trace that implies both its mark and its erasure... according to a relation that no speculative dialectic of the same and the other can master, for the simple reason that such a dialectic always remains an operation of mastery' (Derrida 1972a, 11; Derrida 1981a, 5). This masterless *relation* (mediation) is what is signified by the names '*différance*,' 'unconscious,' 'matter' and the others. It is a relation, however, that *can always* return in and as the 'dialectic of the same and the other' which is *repressed*, as it were, in the assertion of an masterless non-word, non-concept named, for example, '*différance*.' In this *différance*—which is an absolute resistance to the doubling of the double mark and which licenses the practice of a double reading—lies the assertion of the (different) difference of deconstruction and of its force (that it intervenes, displaces, etc).<sup>92</sup>

Let us now proceed to the long and difficult passage of 'Outwork' from which Nealon cuts his short excerpt:

To put the old names to work, or even just to leave them in circulation, will always, of course, involve some risk: the risk of settling down or of regressing into the system that has been, or is in the process of being, deconstructed. To deny this risk would be to confirm it: it would be to see the signifier—in this case the name—as a merely circumstantial, conventional occurrence of the concept or as a concession without any specific effect. It would be an affirmation of the autonomy of meaning, of the ideal purity of an abstract, theoretical history of the concept. Inversely, to claim to do away immediately with previous marks and to cross over, by decree, by a simple leap, into the outside of the classical oppositions is, apart from the risk of engaging in an interminable "negative theology," to forget that these oppositions have never constituted a *given* system, a sort of ahistorical, thoroughly homogeneous

table, but rather a dissymmetric, hierarchically ordered space whose closure is constantly being traversed by the forces, and worked by the exteriority, that it represses: that is, expels and, which amounts to the same, internalizes as one of *its* moments. This is why deconstruction involves an indispensable phase of *reversal*. To remain content with reversal is of course to operate within the immanence of the system to be destroyed. But to sit back, in order to go *further*, in order to be more radical or more daring, and take an attitude of neutralizing indifference with respect to the classical oppositions would be to give free rein to the existing forces that effectively and historically dominate the field. It would be, for not having seized the means to *intervene*, to confirm the established equilibrium.

These two operations must be conducted in a kind of disconcerting *simul*, in a movement of the entire field that must be coherent, of course, but at the same time divided, differentiated, and stratified. The gap between the two operations must remain open, must let itself be ceaselessly marked and remarked. This is already a sufficient indication of the necessary heterogeneity of each text participating in this operation and of the impossibility of summing up the gap at a single point or under a single name. Responsibility and individuality are values that can no longer predominate here: that is the first effect of dissemination. (Derrida 1981a, 5-6)<sup>93</sup>

One moment or operation of deconstructive double reading is 'to put the old names to work,' and thus to stay on the inside—*within* metaphysics, for example (though Derrida does not explicitly invoke this example here until later). This 'involves some risk,' which is the risk of a conservation or non-difference masked by the familiar practice of *critique* or *reversal*, a risk 'of settling down or of regressing into the system,' which is only a *risk* in relation to the strategy and exigency of a different difference or intervention which is not a mere reversal or critique. The risk is to do nothing but reverse the polarities of the opposition and to leave the system untouched. 'To deny this risk would be to confirm it': that is, to deny the risk of non-difference and conservation of the system would be to confirm the system in its (relative) stability, equilibrium and hierarchy, in its structure of domination. The signifier is not a merely contingent instance of the concept but is an effect within a structure of *power*. The concept unchallenged in its specificity and contextual effects would thus be purified of its commitments and collaborations within the hierarchy and given to 'the ideal purity of an abstract, theoretical history of the concept.' This then is one essential operation but a problematic or inadequate or risky one if not articulated in the double gesture (double reading, science, etc.).

'Inversely [*inversement*],' says Derrida. This is the sign of the turn toward the other moment. The inverse operation moves altogether too rapidly 'into the outside of the

classical oppositions.' It says, for example, in a modernist gesture: there is a radical thought which has gone beyond metaphysics and which leaves behind all the old machinery of metaphysics and establishes what is entirely *new* in the beyond of it. Because this *is* a classical gesture of metaphysics, it does not depart from it but signals instead its belonging to metaphysics. But Derrida does not press this familiar argument in this instance. The risk in this 'simple leap [*geste simple*]' beyond the system of binary oppositions is 'to forget that these oppositions have never constituted a *given* system, a sort of ahistorical, thoroughly homogeneous table, but rather a dissymmetric, hierarchically ordered space whose closure is constantly being traversed by the forces, and worked by the exteriority, that it represses: that is, expels and, which amounts to the same [*ce qui revient au même*], internalizes as one of *its* moments.' The risk is related to that of the other operation. To go beyond the classical oppositions is to forget the dynamism and permeability of the system itself, to *assume* its closure rather than to recognize its *work* of closure and the consequent violence where it represses (expels) what must exceed it as its exteriority. The system is alive and agile, not frozen; its opposition is still at war, not dead and decided in a permanent hegemonic relation. As said classically of the Hegelian dialectic, the system would internalize its outside 'as one of *its* moments' rather than endure a difficult, even impossible, relation to a non-appropriable moment of *absolute* exteriority internal to and aporetic within the system, disrupting and opening it to the outside.

'This is why,' says Derrida, turning the argument again, 'deconstruction involves an indispensable phase of *reversal* [*renversement*].' Reversal is the first operation, which 'leave[s] [the old names] in circulation.' There is a reservation about reversal: 'to remain content with reversal is of course to operate within the immanence of the system to be destroyed [*à détruire*].' 'But [note the change of direction again] to sit back,' and to eschew reversal 'in order to go *further*, in order to be more radical or more daring, and take an attitude of neutralizing indifference with respect to the classical oppositions [i.e., to bypass or exceed the phase of reversal] would be to give free rein to the existing forces that effectively and historically dominate the field. It would be, for not having seized the means to *intervene*, to confirm the established equilibrium.'

Despite the compelling formalism of the classical oppositions, and the compelling formalism of their bloodless neutralization, Derrida here invokes a certain *pragmatism*

in the name of politics and intervention: despite the philosophical evidence, there must be a resistance to 'the existing forces that *effectively* and *historically* dominate the field': that is, *in reality, concretely*. We should not be too hasty to put history behind us. 'Effectively' and 'historically' here are reference points in the reality of power and domination; they are political reference points, providing for the possibility of an ethics and pointing clearly towards political imperatives for which the discourse of Marxism provides many apt illustrations.

There comes a point when a certain logic indicates a 'more radical or more daring [*audacieux*]' alternative, which is 'to *sit back* and take an attitude of neutralizing indifference with respect to the classical oppositions.' At this point then two possibilities: (1) After working a reversal in the opposition, the reversibility within the opposition is recognized as an effective sameness (the critic's position is *essentially* the same as what she critiques, but *merely* reversed); the binarism is self-canceling and ultimately neutral and indifferent; the difference lies beyond the binarism and in abandoning or exceeding classical oppositions entirely. (2) One can proceed straight to neutralization without engaging the phase of reversal at all, because it is a futile gesture internal to the functioning of the system.

This passage from 'Outwork' shows some signs of haste. The characterization is insufficiently exact and the syntax of Derrida's argument, over-extended, tends on account of this towards an impressionism, where a more sharply punctuated and systematic description would no doubt result in clarity. The tone is didactic but the exposition somewhat cursory and impatient. One cannot go *too* slowly here, just as it is impossible to go slowly enough, where what must be approached is the nature of the double reading. Perhaps something is being avoided with regard to the question of double reading, which demands an elaboration of infinite patience. Or perhaps Derrida remains content with a provisional articulation. But this does not justify Nealon's interpretive error. Quoting Derrida, he adds an annotation in square brackets: '[D]econstruction involves an indispensable phase of *reversal* [i.e., first-level deconstruction].' Then immediately after the quotation: 'If deconstruction as literary criticism limits itself to neutralization, to first-level deconstruction,' says Nealon, 'Derrida agrees that it is then politically impotent and even reactionary.' Even at this preliminary level of his project of a two-level, double-reading deconstruction, Nealon

has confused the levels: Derrida clearly makes *reversal* and *neutralization* the two *different* operations with regard to the system of classical oppositions. The thrust of Derrida's argument is a caution *against* being too clever and moving peremptorily beyond the 'phase of reversal' as though ascending to a superior plane of being, beyond the mundane world of binary oppositions, and hence leaving the system behind and losing the force of intervention in the system.

It appears then that Nealon's 'double reading' is not a *close* reading—upon which, we would imagine, it ought to be predicated.<sup>94</sup> Nealon's reading of Derrida's double reading seems to lose the plot in the opening scene. Nealon's account of Derrida's reading of the double reading is not an exact double. Nealon wants his double reading to substitute for Derrida's reading, but it is not clear that it does. The reading does not double. Is this a fair assessment? It is possible that the difficulty lies in the Derridean exposition, which is itself not a true double of the double reading. And there is, perhaps, more specifically, an intrinsic similarity between *reversal* and *neutralization*. But we would do best to proceed in any case to Derrida's characterization in 'Outwork' of the sophisticated temporality of the double reading, a slender account which follows the preceding articulation of its two moments or operations:

These two operations must be conducted in a kind of disconcerting *simul*, in a movement of the entire field that must be coherent, of course, but at the same time divided, differentiated, and stratified. The gap [*l'écart*] between the two operations must remain open, must let itself be ceaselessly marked and remarked. (Derrida 1972a, 12; Derrida 1981a, 6)

Though the *difficulty* of the double reading (of its articulation) is dealt with cursorily in this passage, even skirted, there is some, symptomatic, indication of it: 'in a kind of disconcerting *simul*...'; 'coherent... but *at the same time* divided...'; '[t]he gap between the two operations....'

For there to be the (possibility of the) deconstructive difference as a different difference, the double reading prescribes that the 'two operations *must* be conducted in a kind of disconcerting *simul*....'<sup>95</sup> Yet what are the terms of this '*simul*'? What is disconcerted in this *simul*-which-is-not-quite-a-*simul* or *simul*-with-a-gap is not just the system subject to deconstruction but the deconstructive difference articulated by (the possibility of) double reading. The deconstructive difference is linked, *despite all*

*cautions and reservations*, to the possibility of the double reading. Nealon is not wrong to recognize the necessity of this possibility. In this, he is an exemplary student. In this *possibility* lies the basis of an initiation into deconstruction, an initiation into the mystery and mystique of the double reading. Does this not follow with the implacability of a law? It subsists as a promise (the promise of a double reading) despite a reversal or overturning of possibility which would affirm, at the same time, that double reading is *impossible*. In the jargon of impossibility, this impossibility is no obstacle, for it is merely the doubling of possibility, raising it to the next level. The impossible is the *source*, and deconstruction is at least equally one of those things which promises the impossible.

It is useful at this point to be reminded again of the other characterization of double reading that Nealon selects from Derrida, from 'Signature, Event, Context,' which was cited earlier:

Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice an overturning of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system. It is only on this condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to intervene in the field of oppositions that it criticizes, which is also a field of non-discursive forces. (Derrida 1972b, 392; Derrida 1982, 329)

It is not clear whether the alternatives 'deconstruction cannot limit itself' and 'deconstruction cannot proceed immediately to a neutralization' produce exclusive alternatives. It is not clear what is the sense of neutralization: is it active or passive? Nonetheless we can assume that neutralization is a kind of stalemate, cul-de-sac, paralysis, within the opposition. It is not clear what emphasis falls on 'immediately,' which would then help to situate the alternative which follows the colon in relation to what comes before. There is a moment of neutralization, but deconstruction does not proceed there *immediately*. Here enters the doubling, which pivots on the colon after 'neutralization.' But is an 'overturning of the classical opposition' a *reversal* of hierarchical values *within* the opposition, or does it overturn the classical opposition itself? Overturn it with regard to what? Is the 'classical opposition' a system unto itself or is it part of a system of classical oppositions? Probably both. What then constitutes a 'general displacement of the system'? What is this displacement *relative to*? What



double reading (double science, etc.) *is* would provide some responses to these questions. Deconstruction *must* meet this 'double' condition to 'provide itself the means with which to intervene in the field of oppositions that it criticizes.' (Is the 'field' the 'system' or, what is likely, something more general?) It remains less than entirely clear how the double science is articulated here. It is intuitively available, but it is not clearly formulated.

This difficulty of precise formulation responds to an intrigue of double reading, inadequately elaborated in order that deconstruction can respond to its imperative: to 'provide itself the means with which to intervene.' Thus the *possibility* of double reading is kept open.

There are two moments of the double science but they are inextricable or simultaneous: double. How are two *simultaneous* moments to be distinguished when the moment is *precisely* the smallest discrete unit of temporal integrity? Their simultaneity will be necessarily their sameness. The two simultaneous *moments* are and must in fact be distinguished by their sequence or non-simultaneity. Sequential but simultaneous..., simultaneous but sequential, and so on (the *myth* of 'and so on'). It is in this sense that the double gesture, double science, double writing, double reading is a sophisticated ruse. The 'at the same time' necessary for the deconstructive and different difference of the double gesture, the 'at the same time' which adequates it to the truth of reading, the 'at the same time' of the 'coherent' and the 'divided,' of the gap between the operations, clearly determines a deconstructive logocentrism, which remains so despite all vigilance, despite the acknowledgment of the impossibility of the double reading and the impossibility of its constitutive simultaneity. The *institutional* moment of deconstruction in the double reading can hardly be abrogated. It is ineradicable. It gathers around a logocentrism, which is its center of gravity: the *logos* to come. The (prospect of, possibility of) double reading fosters a community. It sustains a quiet voluntarism, symptom of an (a)symmetrical operation where what emerges in reading is converted into a program of anticipation. What is *requisite* (no less than presence) is an 'at the same time.' In the double reading, deconstruction is coming together and falling apart—simultaneously.

The practice of a double reading is *as impossible as the presence of the thing itself*. No more nor less. Deconstruction maintains its force of intervention, its different (and

divisive) difference in the unity of the double reading, if, at the same time, it forgoes its force of intervention, because that force depends and can only ever depend upon the *same* possibility and impossibility as the logocentrism (for example) against whose domination deconstruction intervenes (has intervened). The alternative is a *radical* dissymmetry between the disseminated moments of deconstruction—*whatever we call them* (strategic, passive, active, rigorous, close readerly, interventive, critical, responsible, ethical, playful, deconstructive)—making it unaccountable to itself, in its own history. It would not be answerable to itself—as a *consistency*, or *coherence*. It could not be responsible—where a certain responsibility is always opposed to dissemination. It would be free, perhaps. This remains an ever present possibility, despite the unification of the moments of deconstruction under the arch of the word 'deconstruction' and in the person of the deconstructor.

Deconstruction determines and characterizes these difficult alternatives in the space of a relentless self-deconstruction, to which it does not willingly accede. Responsible to the other, to itself, it resists, but even so deconstruction is still widely disseminated. It has been let loose. This is no more than deconstruction's consistent alteration, which it shares equally with the others. However, responsibility, resistant, can only attempt to (re)constitute the whole, in a labor of fidelity. The responsible question is the one that gathers the pieces together, as though they had always belonged there. 'What is deconstruction?', it asks, with a genuine expectation. But, as it happens, there is no other path towards the thing than to take the other path. It is not clear which master deconstruction serves, at once throwing its words to the wind and gathering them in for the final reckoning.

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In the conclusion to his essay, Nealon asks why Derrida himself has not made the distinction that Nealon makes between a genuinely deconstructive, two-level deconstruction and a misguided, one-level, deconstructive literary criticism. Why has not Derrida denounced the errancy of de Man and the Yale critics? They are *unfaithful to the different difference of deconstruction*. They are masters only of first-level deconstruction and remain stranded there in the prison-house of language unable to



ascend to second-level deconstruction. The latter, according to Nealon, is the practice of the double reading and conquest of the paralysis of the aporia. Nealon is convinced by the adequation of his argument to the deconstruction expounded by Derrida. As a function of this conviction, he cannot but attribute, without reservation, the same argument to Derrida. Hence he is *genuinely* at a loss to understand Derrida's silence on this difference:

My analysis attempts to show that Derrida's work has been conflated with a kind of de Manian deconstructive criticism and then to distinguish between the two. I am left at the end, however, with an odd problem or question: Derrida himself makes no such rigid distinction—and he is, in fact, quite generous in his readings of critics like de Man and Culler. (Nealon 1992, 1275)

But the decision between Culler (for example) and Derrida is not so straightforward. And the passage from page 81 of Culler's *On Deconstruction* cited above and in Nealon's essay is not entirely at odds with Derrida. Not *decisively* at odds. Not only is the quotation from Culler out of context, but its relation to an (at least) plural deconstruction is not clear. The decision by which the distinction between the Derridean deconstruction characterized by Nealon and Culler's deconstruction can be made depends upon a *measure* of the difference or different difference of deconstruction. Not only the difference of deconstruction (that it is different, and that its difference can be identified), but also the difference deconstruction *makes*, though these two are invariably and necessarily confused. Nealon, with an absence of circumspection and reserve, has laid this out for us, for this is quite the terrain where deconstruction will be contested—both in its capacity and its incapacity, its potency and its impotence, its force and its weakness, its interventions and its inability to intervene, its differences and its identities, its reversals and its neutralizations, its possibility and its impossibility.

These issues bear upon the so-called 'turn' to ethics in deconstruction. Derrida argues that deconstruction has never not been ethical and political.<sup>96</sup> There has always been at least an ethico-political *implication*. However, it is not so easy, as Derrida has taught us, to be ethical or political, for ethics and politics mark an *ideal*: an ideal program and programatics; an ideal of action; an ideal intervention; an ideal strategy; an ideal active translation of philosophy. Deconstruction cannot *already have been* ethical and political without a manifest transformation of the conditions of ethics and politics. In the

field of this transformation, it is not certain what would be left of ethics and politics. Would they be recognizable? Would they bear these names? It is possible that such a transformation might remain, in a sense, *indiscernible*. Yet deconstruction is called upon, and responds to the call, to demonstrate its ethical and political commitment in relation to an as yet untransformed political space. Can deconstruction *enact* this transformation? Can it transform according to a program? Political space awaits the transformation-to-come. The Derridean ethico-politics of the promise and the 'to-come'—what kind of change do they procure? They are oriented towards a transformation, towards a difference. This difference is subject to a constitutive deferral. The deconstructive ethico-political orientation is no more nor less than the ethico-political orientation deliberately invested or passively retained in ethico-political discourse. There is, without doubt perhaps, a deconstructive difference here, but it is not readily identified other than as a temporal aporetic. There is the enmeshment of deconstruction and ethics and politics in ideals of a *possible action* and of a *possible harmony of thought and action* from which it is impossible to escape, and from which it is, equally, always exigent that an exit be found, as Derrida has taught us in the form of the logic of the double bind.

Nealon uses Derrida to indicate an *escape* from deconstruction as the determination of the true deconstruction. Nealon's symptom here opens deconstruction at its most perplexing point. He quotes de Man in order to condemn him, adding his own emphasis: 'the result of this self-cancellation is that texts "compel us to choose while destroying the foundations of any choice"' (de Man 1979, 245, Nealon, 1271).<sup>97</sup> A little later Nealon adds, 'the unreadable or the undecidable... is the "place" where deconstruction becomes most *enabling*, most aware of the need to displace the system that would lead to such an impasse' (1271). Here, it has slipped out. The displacement of the system is a *disabling of (the systemic conditions of) the impasse itself*.

Nealon blanches at the thought of a general undecidability which destroys 'the foundations of any choice.' But his emphasis is misplaced: what are destroyed (if they are) are 'the foundations of any choice.' Implicit in the concept of choice is the idea that choices *can be made* and that choosing is a manageable operation. There will be choices, but is there *choosing*? It must be said, nonetheless, that the glibness of the assertion of undecidability, of its assertion *in general*, is one of the least fortunate

outcomes of the propagation of deconstruction. And Nealon seems entirely right to recognize an undecidability at the beginning of reading as well as at its end (as its result or telos): 'The undecidability fostered by unreadability turns out to be the lesson, the end, the telos, of deconstruction for de Man,' says Nealon (1271), but, 'For Derrida, undecidability is a condition of possibility for reading; reading's impossibility... allows reading to be set in motion' (1272).<sup>98</sup> Yet the idea of undecidability as a *result* or *telos* is already completely paradoxical. It takes us to the heart of the repetition (compulsion) in deconstruction, which is what it cannot master under any circumstances. It is also that masterless element towards which its *vigilance* is always directed, as though a mastery were possible.

The outcome of the opposition of an obstructive deconstruction, in which the aporia appears like a harbinger of doom with an unerring repetition, and a fluent deconstruction—in which in an affirmation the aporia opens each moment upon the unexpected, upon the future-as-radically-other—is not itself readily predicted. The philosophical and arguable character of this opposition might be neutralized, at its limit and in favor of one position or the other, by reference to, say, the base matter of temperament. That is to say: there is a pronounced *disposition*, even a *predisposition*. But this would be *already* to have decided in favor of repetition, of genetics, of essence, of the same, of intractability, of destiny, of finitude and death, of obsession and depression, of identity as the *inescapable itself*. Yet, it must be said, *each* of these things can always be discovered reinscribed somewhere on the other side—on the sunny side, as it were.

Is it only a matter of how fast the wheel turns? This metaphor speaks also and already for an undecidability in general. There is a real choice here, a difficult one, between an already oxymoronic undecidability-in-general as obstruction and paralysis, and an undecidability-in-particular as facility, wonder, shock, surprise, risk, event. Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, ever the friend of free spirits, would have loved to live this derangement of decision when he announced, without equivocation, 'I love not knowing the future.' This is the *yes* which abandons all resistance and anticipation. Such a love is eminently reversible. It stands for an *ideal* which inhabits (which *is*) the real but cannot be realized. But it is also, in an enduring sense of the philosophical, essentially *unphilosophical*, for the project of thought is a circuitous labor of anticipation and

preemption. Anticipation, calculation, rule, etc., all the detritus of deferral and deference, these do have a limit, both inside and outside philosophy, where they are annihilated, a limit that Derrida has been keen to invoke in the context of the gift and of responsibility, but he has not quite given it *this* name: presence. Has he not given it this name?

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Let us reconsider the question that arises for Nealon at the end. Would Derrida support Nealon's case against American deconstruction resident in departments of literature? Does he not give it tacit approbation?

There are two prominent Derridean assertions which, naturally enough, cannot be harmonized though they are bedfellows: the assertion of *always*, of the law, and the assertion of *otherwise*, of the transgression of the law, which is the law of the transgression of the law ('always otherwise') until this law too is sundered ('otherwise than always otherwise'). But there is an illusion propagated here, which underwrites the institution of deconstruction. There is an emphasis on the Levinasian 'otherwise' ('*autrement*') which makes an ethical ground on the side of (irreducible) difference and the alterior. Inevitably, irrespective of careful reservations, a certain moral sentiment adheres to otherness, espoused as (in a sense) a value. Strategically, it appears, this simplification has to *stand*. What is the alternative? By means of the *always*, and despite every careful reservation, there is the appropriation of universality and right, of a power, which can *then* be bestowed like charity, from on high, in the form of the 'otherwise.' The deference to the otherwise is the sign of the victory of the *always*. This is the classically Hegelian motif of perpetual appropriation, perpetual reappropriation.

What is the alternative? The alternative is that the otherwise be conceded (if this is the right word) from the place of abjection (an abjection which is not a resignation to abjection). But is that not an *ideal*?<sup>99</sup> The less charitable interpretation is not necessarily more true or less of an ideal but it is nonetheless always possible; it is always a possible transformation or transvaluation: the deference to the otherwise is the sign of the victory of the *always*. Nothing resists this reversal except resistance itself. What *inevitability* in *the other* makes this uncharitable interpretation available? There are times perhaps when

these interruptions should be forgone for the sake of other things (good will, friendship, hospitality, for example). But this, no doubt, is irresponsible. There can be no charity or discrimination here, no deference to powerful interests. Yet it remains an ethical question: what to do with what is recognized as a deconstructibility in the other and what can always be recognized as such? What is the time for truth (if such it is)? This deconstructibility is an exposure to the other—but for whom? It is a colonization moving in multiple directions. It is not clear what it would be *not* to take up such an invitation to a deconstruction. There is a time, we imagine, when the thirst for the blood of the other is quenched. If such an opening is foregone, perhaps it is only when the battle is over, in effect, and other conflicts are more pressing.<sup>100</sup>

Derrida combines the otherwise and the always in a remarkably powerful and exemplary way, saying in effect, and while seeking at the same time to maintain a certain constitutional integrity of his system:

—I am always otherwise.<sup>101</sup>

This affirmation is ambivalently and ambiguously an *impregnability* of the deconstructor. It is ambivalently and ambiguously a voluntarism. It is an ideal and a fact, a wish and that which one would not wish upon one's worst enemy. Is this the condition of the subject ever on the run? Is it to be wished? It is necessary to understand the similarities and differences between this statement and its partner:

—Always, for me, there is the other.

How can this symmetrical dissymmetry be thought? From what place? Looking for that place is a task, assigned by the other, that cannot be relinquished. Of course, it *cannot* be thought and it is *always already* thought in every thought, and the *place* from which it is and might be thought is absolutely determined. It is the 'always already' that governs a past without extension or origin, and which approaches from the future, as a prospect or potential or possibility or promise: it *will* be thought. Derrida locates this coincidence or quasi-coincidence, this tension and collusion of tenses, in the obscurity of the future anterior: it *will have been* thought. There is an irresistible temptation here, and with the necessary reservations, Derrida succumbs to it when he states that deconstruction is (...) what happens (*ce qui arrive*) (Derrida 1995d, 17). The *reservation*, which moves

simultaneously towards and away from the truth (of deconstruction), is that what happens does not happen (*ce qui arrive n'arrive pas*). Deconstruction would sustain this double gesture (deconstruction is what happens, and what happens does not happen) both as the different difference of deconstruction, a double reading, and as what approaches, perhaps, in an adequation, the truth of aporia. But it remains unclear whether there are any *degrees* of proximity: perhaps, with regard to truth, or aporia, or truth of aporia, there is a *radical equality of distance, or equi-distance*. Such a thought is made possible at the limit of a certain *deconstruction*, but not only there. *Equally* there, perhaps, at the limit, where it is unclear what exactly constitutes the different difference of deconstruction other than that it is.

## 1.8 Deconstruction is Dead

In 1992, at the beginning of 'The Discipline of Deconstruction,' Jeffrey Nealon wrote:

Deconstruction, it seems, is dead in literature departments today. While plenty of discourse is still produced concerning deconstruction, its heyday has apparently passed: precious few critics would identify themselves any longer as deconstructionists.... (Nealon 1992, 1266)

As we know, Nealon is a revisionist, and often it suits the purposes of revisionists to pronounce the old guard dead: it is an appropriate, even necessary, moment of hyperbole and melodrama in the narrative of rebirth. In any case, his pronouncement is cautious: dead 'it seems' and 'apparently'; dead but not dead; dead, but, in Nealon's terms, awaiting revival in a form more true to the word of its originator and less contaminated by the deviance of its American variety.

But Nealon was not alone in rehearsing this pronouncement. There were many who claimed that the time of deconstruction had passed, that the craze was over or nearly over. To be sure, it seemed that *something* had passed. Certainly, if the rumors were an accurate reflection of the reality, deconstruction had not proved as durable as its precursor, New Criticism. Nealon suggests (via Gasché) that perhaps deconstruction died because it failed in the end adequately to distinguish itself from its precursor: American deconstruction fell back all too readily into New Criticism, having never really understood what deconstruction was in truth anyway. Nealon is not concerned with the notion of death nor with the notion of the death of deconstruction *per se*. The death attests to the failure of American literary deconstruction to make a difference. In the space of its sameness and indifference, it died. It died of an impotence with regard to the power to effect transformation.

In the same context—the context of speculations about the recent or imminent death of deconstruction—Derrida is more careful about the character of the pronouncement of death. The death of deconstruction was a pronouncement that had accompanied it right from the beginning. In a sense, its death was always entangled with its inception or

conception. This feature of deconstruction is, according to Derrida, a *distinguishing* feature:

[F]rom the beginning of, let's say, the institutionalization of [the word deconstruction] in academic circles in the Western world, people have been saying, especially in the United States, it's waning, it's on the wane. I've heard this for at least twenty-five years: it is finished, it is dying. Why do I say dying? It is dead! I tell you it's dead! And, every time I hear this I say, well, that's interesting, because usually when someone... dies, you read in the newspaper 'So-and-so died.' Now, if, the next day, you read, 'He or she died,' and then, on the third, and the fourth days, you read this yet again, after a year you would start asking the question, 'What's happening with this dead person?' Because she goes on dying for years and years and years! This is the truth! I'm totally convinced that deconstruction started dying from the very first day. If there is a distinction between deconstruction and any other fashion, doctrine, method, whatever, it is that deconstruction began by dying. (Derrida 1996a, 224-25)

This last is an odd point and it is difficult to imagine it being made other than in an interview: 'If there is a distinction,' says Derrida, 'between deconstruction and any other fashion, doctrine, method, whatever, it is that deconstruction began by dying.' Surely, of all the differences that might distinguish deconstruction from other fashions, doctrines, methods, and so on, it would not be that feature which it undoubtedly *shares* with every other fashion, doctrine, and method: that it began or begins by dying. In a strange and obvious way, this appears as an argument for deconstruction's immortality, which is related to its resistance to critique (its resistance to death-by-critique).<sup>102</sup> This resistance is in this instance indistinguishable, perhaps, from a permeability: deconstruction is not arrested but permeated by death. But there is another death, more sinister than forced or attributed extinction.

Deconstruction was welcomed by many critics in American departments of literature because it offered an alternative to the orthodoxy of a New Criticism grown old and arthritic, stale and tedious, repetitious and mechanical. This restlessness, an impatience with the New Criticism in its dotage, was, amongst other factors, an opening for deconstruction.

Certainly the problem for deconstruction, as for any method, is repetition and tedium, a predictability against which deconstruction was not immunized despite its emphasis on singularity, risk, the-future-as-other, and so on. Deconstruction succumbs to sameness. The formalism of deconstruction which accompanies its anti-formalism

produces certain calculable effects. Jeffrey Nealon, for example, complains that deconstruction inevitably ends in 'a predetermined fall into meaninglessness resulting from the self-cancellation of opposites in any text' (1269).

There are perhaps recognizable transitions between what Christopher Johnson calls Derrida's early, 'programmatic' deconstruction (Johnson 1993, 5), or what Rorty calls Derrida's 'professorial period' (Rorty 1989, 123), and later texts like 'Envois' and *Glas* ('eccentric, personal, and original,' says Rorty), and then later texts, like *The Gift of Death*, which seem to pursue a different ideal again. Can these transitions be determined? Periodization is always a hazardous work. But, nonetheless, there is a Derridean style or tone or voice (call it what you like)—a style, tone, or voice which is, in a sense, a transcendental residue or image—almost instantly recognizable. It is a signature. It is not necessarily as a function of stylistic variety that Derrida is not the same as himself, though the classically Derridean sentence and syntax may participate in different kinds of philosophical enterprises. There is something almost inescapable here. It might arouse in the self-reader's self-recognition either nausea or narcissism or both: an ineradicable accretion of self, like a stain on an ideal transparency. Something is (always already) formed and will not budge. There are habits of formulation and these signal finitude: the resistance of otherness.

Within the field of a *tendency-to-sameness*, of a falling-into-the-same, where the program runs silently in the background, the risk of an exhaustion of alterior or transformative resources is not a remote one.<sup>103</sup> Sameness already attests to this intrinsic exhaustion of possibility, like a failure of the will to alterity—were it a matter of will.<sup>104</sup>

The seductive pressure of the obsession which drives a sequence of thoughts can diminish. This obsession, tied to an intractable sameness, something which cannot be let go, drives its nurturer towards the other on a path of flight from it. The obsession is an empty repetition, monotony and tedium. It exhausts exhaustion with its dissatisfaction. At the very least, it needs a new disguise. The staging needs changing. But for how long can old tricks be dressed up in new clothes? Nakedness is no solution.

At the terminus, deconstruction has grown tired. It is worn out. It no longer holds anyone's interest. It no longer captivates. It has lost its drawing power. It has grown old. It has no vigor left. Its energy has been spent. There is no life in deconstruction any

more. It has run its course. It can only rehearse the same tired old things. It has nothing new to say or to contribute. It was a dead-end anyway.

Will it be the difference of deconstruction that it can make all these predicates its own? 'If there is a distinction between deconstruction and any other fashion, doctrine, method, whatever,' says Derrida, 'it is that deconstruction began by dying.' Will this special relationship between deconstruction and dying preserve it?

Impatience with the same in the other is a kind of law here, a triumph of the metonymic, of dissemination. Can this tendency be resisted? *Ought* it to be resisted? Inasmuch as deconstruction is bound to *this* inscription, it will perish with it. This is a terrible trial for that which is wedded to the inscription: deconstruction. Perhaps deconstruction is, as Alexander García Düttmann argues, another word for *permanent revolution*. Will it not then survive as the infinite and immortal element in every overturning, reversal, antithesis, contradiction, sublation, revolution—will it not survive as *the* transcendental thing itself?

What is deconstruction to do here, in the face of repetition, of belatedness, of indifference, of petrification, of a so-called radicalism surrendered to the routine and regime of institution? It will reinvent itself. It flirts with the ineffable. It turns to God. It will find new objects and bring them home by way of the other. To think otherwise is the thinking that is the home of deconstruction. A prison-house called home. There is no such home but destitution. There comes a time when the deconstructor turns towards home. Can he save this thing?

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The history recounted here, with a concern for fidelity to what happened, constructs a vantage point from which to respond to the questions, 'What is deconstruction?', 'Does deconstruction make any difference?' and 'What is the difference or different difference of deconstruction?' A response to these questions governs the relations, and the possible relations, to the thing called deconstruction (if such it is).

The difficulty, however, is located precisely in this fidelity, or concern for fidelity, to what happened. Such a fidelity is impossible, for how could a history, constitutively belated, discern amongst the pandemonium of present stimuli a clear path that would



retrace the steps of deconstruction through the epoch in which it first stood out, as itself, against the background of other words and other things? There is an unbridgable gulf between now and then. How could such a fidelity be measured, as a faithfulness, other than, in this case, according to the *actual difference of deconstruction*? Fidelity is a relation too.

Such a fidelity is unavoidable. Even in a history which seeks the way forward towards what happened, towards the truth of what happened, there is only what happens. History, for example, is what happens, and its ecstatic or abortive relation to what happened, with all its attendant anguish and vexation, is simply what happens. It is what happens, even if, in a sense, it doesn't happen. This fidelity cannot be escaped. There is no decision, intention, volition, or method which can contrive it. Even the *gap* or *interval* which makes any fidelity possible is at once open and closed: it can be that there is no gap; there is always a gap.

A short history of the different difference of deconstruction is written between these two incongruous fidelities, though it is not clear that such an interval is available. Derrida and Gasché remind us, as we have seen, not to be too hasty to collapse the opposites in a binary system, for their relation is not stable but dynamic; they are opposites but they are not equals; they do not cancel out each other. There is, then, in a concern for fidelity, the radical asymmetry of faithfulness and unfaithfulness: that they do not coincide, that one dominates the other. But, even in this, at the same time, there is no escaping a perfect fidelity whose perfection is elusive, and which provides only a token reconciliation. Such a fidelity is truly monstrous.

Does deconstruction make any difference? It is only inasmuch as deconstruction is unfaithful to itself that it intervenes, interrupts, overturns, revolts, and, perhaps, makes a difference. It intervenes in a dynamic relation. It *deconstructs*. It *critiques*. It introduces an active difference. It is partisan. It 'make[s] room for the Other.' It *inclines*, just as every binary relation is skewed in favor of a certain interest. Deconstruction participates here, with the others, in making a difference. It *exists* there, as a different thing. It is deconstructible.<sup>105</sup>

Deconstruction is unfaithful to itself where it intervenes. Here it follows another fidelity. It is faithful to something else: to the other of deconstruction. This is deconstruction *itself*. It is faithful to itself, and therein lies its infidelity. It is divided

here. At its point of greatest fidelity to itself, when it approaches that which it cannot not already be (after all, *deconstruction is what happens*), deconstruction enters a space of enormous and insuperable difficulty. It can barely intersect with the institution at all. It can neither resist nor acquiesce. It is free. It cannot speak. There is a coincidence, very nearly a coincidence, of freedom and of paralysis. It cannot avoid speaking, so it speaks up. It differs and it makes no difference. It sees its own name, 'deconstruction.' The eyes are almost open, and something intensifies. The call to wakefulness is very strong, though it is not clear who is calling and whether the wakefulness to which it is summoned *is* in fact what it advertises itself to be. The eyes, should they open, open upon something else. What do they see? Deconstruction, some say, can see the blindness in the eyes. 'Deconstruction can see blindness': Is this the difference or the different difference of deconstruction? There may be a different difference of deconstruction which is visible, but who can see it? No doubt, it can be seen. It must be possible to see it: to see the sight of a deconstruction which can see the blindness in the other.

## NOTES

### Part One

<sup>1</sup> Respectively: *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* (Derrida 1978a, 153), *L'origine de la géométrie* (Derrida 1962, 171); 'Pas,' in *Parages* (Derrida 1986, 62, my translation); *Memoires for Paul de Man* (Derrida 1989b, 18), *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Derrida 1988b, 41). In the English translation of *Mémoires*, the sentence quoted in my epigraph appears in English and French: 'I would risk, with a smile, the following hypothesis: America is deconstruction (l'Amérique, mais c'est la déconstruction).' In *Mémoires*, the sentence appears thus: 'l'Amérique, mais c'est la déconstruction.'

### Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> The term 'New Criticism' derives from John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism*, first published in 1941 (Ransom 1941). My intention in this section is, however, as I have indicated, to keep my distance both from New Criticism and from structuralism, and thereby at this early stage to avoid the inevitable loss of momentum that occurs when the engagement is at close quarters. Unfortunately, to maintain this momentum is perhaps to forgo thinking, or at least to avoid the problem and responsibility of history (I discuss this problem briefly in the section of my introduction which anticipates Chapter One). As a result, the New Critics themselves are barely shadows here, though were we to bring to their words and formulations the concern for fidelity that is sometimes called 'close reading,' there might well be then a different kind of spectralization. There are many useful accounts of New Critical practice and of its practitioners. See, for example, Murray Krieger, *New Apologists for Poetry* (Krieger 1977), or Rick Ryland's synoptic account, 'The New Criticism' (Ryland 1990).

<sup>2</sup> There might be a case for making a distinction between French structuralist literary criticism and structuralist anthropology or linguistics. Surely the French literary critics were attentive *readers*, despite the tendency of structuralism I have insisted upon: Michael Riffaterre, for example. In 'Hypogram and Inscription,' however, Paul de Man expresses a skepticism in this regard: 'French literary criticism developed and flourished by bypassing the question of reading altogether. Up till very recently, French critics never bothered to read at all..., which did not prevent them from writing abundantly, and often with great perspicacity, about texts they did not read' (de Man 1986, 33). Riffaterre is the exception rather than the rule: his 'orientation toward reader reception,' says de Man, 'makes him an "American" rather than a "French" critic' (33).

In 'Force and Signification' ('Force et Signification'), Derrida first describes the structuralist critic Jean Rousset attending to the independence of the literary text: 'the structuralism proper to Rousset is defined, at least theoretically, against the temptation to overlook this [aesthetic] specificity..., putting Rousset close to Leo Spitzer and Marcel Raymond in his scrupulousness about the formal autonomy of the work—an "independent, absolute organism that is self-sufficient" (*Forme et Signification*)' (Derrida 1967b, 25; Derrida 1978b, 13; Rousset 1962, xx). The word 'organism' suggests a link with New Critical organicism. But Derrida discerns that these claims of fidelity to the singularity of the text are sooner or later overwhelmed by the more clearly spatializing and totalizing tendencies associated with the structuralist endeavor. Though 'Rousset's avowed plan is to avoid the stasis of form' (14/26), invariably, says Derrida, he 'grants an absolute privilege to spatial models, mathematical functions, lines, and forms'; hence 'time itself is always reduced' (16/29).

In 'Structuralism: The Anglo-American Adventure,' Geoffrey Hartman calls structuralism 'a "unified field" theory. Its subject is not this or that culture... but the very process of mediation....' (Hartman 1970, 4). Though Hartman discusses European structuralism, his focus in this essay is on structuralism's Anglo-American variety.

<sup>3</sup> Remember that deconstruction is equally an extension (and not a repudiation) of structuralism. American literary deconstruction is equally an extension (and not a repudiation) of New Criticism. Hence, equally: 'How was it that deconstruction managed at the same time to perform this double extension? How could it make that much easier the march of an all-conquering structuralism over the bodies of works littered like so many discarded symptoms across the human plane and facilitate the tender devotion of the New Critic awaiting the arrival of the aesthetic moment, wherein the work would *be* and be itself, eternally?' It is the precise character of this 'equally' that is of key importance when determining what are the consequences of deconstruction and whether it makes any difference.

<sup>4</sup> 'Derrida makes... the dream of seeking philosophical "truth" seem a version of the spectator who leaps on the stage in order to save Desdemona,' writes Charles Altieri in *Act and Quality* (Altieri 1981, 26).

<sup>5</sup> The difficulty with the notion of 'presence as such' is similar to the difficulty with the notion of singularity. 'Presence as such' is *both* the presence of the thing itself (or the self-presence of the subject as a thing unto itself) in its absolutely concrete moment, where it is before me, singularly and without any abstraction or representation or mediation, in the immediate event and instant of its being and being there, *and* it is the *notion* of presence, of the presence of things which are before me, singularly and without any abstraction, in the immediate event and instant of their being there. The notion of 'presence as such' is already its own negation, already impossible.

<sup>6</sup> Though it is a *jargon* of impossibility, it is nonetheless no simple task to determine an *authentic* discourse of impossibility, one less compromised by facile reversals and appropriations thinly masked by a veneer of difficulty or paradox. The impossible is, in a

sense, always brought home in a jargon, always 'repressed.' Or is it? Here what would be useful would be to distinguish in a careful way—perhaps stylistically or according to temperament, or perhaps according to conceptual formation, but not necessarily as a function of authenticity—between Blanchot, Bataille, and Derrida, with regard to impossibility. For instance, and most pertinently, Bataille, *The Impossible* (Bataille 1991), *L'impossible* (Bataille 1962). What could I say here in a few hasty words, a few notes, on this question? Let me put it aside for the time being with just a couple of secondary references (it is in the 'secondary' texts that the risk of a jargon is most pronounced, one imagines). (1) One would almost certainly begin with a text that nonetheless only addresses Derrida in passing: Joseph Libertson, *Proximity: Levinas, Blanchot, Bataille, and Communication* (Libertson 1982). This uncompromising document is the measure for any 'jargon of impossibility.' (2) In *Politiques de l'écriture: Bataille/Derrida* (Heimonet 1989), particularly in Part Three, Jean-Michel Heimonet brings into proximity two names (Bataille and Derrida) that resonate so strangely together: such a strong relation of themes, such an impossible difference of means. Is the impossibility of Derrida the same as the impossibility of Bataille? This peculiar resonance-dissonance *demand*s comparison, '[m]ême s'il demeure impossible,' as Heimonet says, 'à décrire en tant que phénomène' (Heimonet 1989, 204). Heimonet attends closely to the relation between Bataille and Derrida in a way that makes fruitful the difficulty of the comparative gesture, marked in Heimonet's title by the muted violence of the slash. It is at once an absolutely necessary gesture—because each new world grows from the abutment, the friction of incommensurables and intangibles—and a futile one.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase 'metaphysics of presence' recurs relentlessly in the unsympathetic secondary accounts of Derridean deconstruction in American literary criticism of the 1970s and 1980s. Clearly the deconstructive argument about presence (linked to the notoriety of the term *différance*), however well or poorly understood in its detail, was a powerful intervention in the orthodox characterization or expectation of the literary experience. Close scrutiny of the mechanism of presentation does not necessarily require a specialist in philosophy, and no doubt though the phrase 'metaphysics of presence' was also a convenient shorthand, its frequency reflects a certain dissatisfaction the consequence of an excess of reflection. In other words, it was not immediately clear how these questions about the presentation of the thing, about the self-presence of the subject, or about the cognitive event of meaning, might be dispelled.

The terms of an interrogation of a 'metaphysics of presence' are developed in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*), where Heidegger, reading Greek ontology, recognizes the meaning of Being as presence (*Anwesenheit*) (Heidegger 1957, 25; Heidegger 1962, 47). The more immediate context for both Heidegger's and Derrida's reading of the 'metaphysics of presence' is Husserlian phenomenology. 'Presence does play a privileged role in Husserl's analyses,' writes J. Claude Evans in *Strategies of Deconstruction*, 'a role that Husserl considers necessary for any analysis of cognition and truth' (Evans 1991, 10). Evans' book seeks to critique Derrida's reading of Husserl by demonstrating the absence of genuine rigor in the arguments of *Speech and Phenomena* (*La voix et le phénomène*). In his introduction, Evans quotes John Scanlon's 'Pure Presence: A Modest Proposal,' where Scanlon suggests that Derrida's purpose in *Speech and Phenomena* can only be satirical, because his 'reading [of Husserl] is dictated throughout by a pedantic fixation upon the conceit that the text being interpreted must, in every respect, be subordinated to a mythic master text known as the metaphysics of presence' (Evans 1991, xiii; Scanlon 1995, 99). (Note that Evans refers to Scanlon's essay as forthcoming in a volume entitled *Derrida and Deconstruction*, edited by Lester Embree and William McKenna, however the essay in question eventually appeared in 1995 in *Derrida and Phenomenology*, edited by William McKenna and J. Claude Evans.)

- <sup>8</sup> In 'Structuralism and Poststructuralism,' Steven Connor uses the metaphor of center and margin to characterize the movements of structuralism and poststructuralism as a whole. Connor uses the notion of center to organize his brief history, and 'Structure, Sign and Play' is the pivotal text in his account (Connor 1990).
- <sup>9</sup> The word 'toujours' appears nine times in the first two paragraphs of 'La structure, le signe et le jeu,' and recurs insistently throughout the whole.  
I call this text 'epochal' because it opens the epoch of deconstruction, though it would take a little work to transform this delimitation into something more than a rhetorical gesture which seeks a concrete historical referent for the consequences of deconstruction.
- <sup>10</sup> For example, in 'There is No One Narcissism' ('Il n'y a pas le narcissisme') Derrida notes that, 'Deconstruction was considered then at the same time to be a structuralist and anti-structuralist gesture. Which it was, in a certain manner' (Derrida 1992d, 225; Derrida 1995c, 211-12). In 'Entre,' Éric Clémens traces the story of his encounters with deconstruction. 'De la grammatologie,' he reflects, 'ne nous apparut-il pas contradictoirement comme un ultra-Nietzschéisme et un ultra-structuralisme?' (Clémens 1996, 162).
- <sup>11</sup> With the aim of *being*, perhaps. To be is to be perceived.
- <sup>12</sup> Derrida speaks of *strategy* on numerous occasions. For example, significantly, in 'Différance': 'In the delineation of *différance* everything is strategic and adventurous. Strategic because no transcendent truth present outside the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field. Adventurous because this strategy is not a simple strategy in the sense that strategy orients tactics according to a final goal, a *telos* or theme of domination, a mastery and ultimate reappropriation of the development of the field. Finally, a strategy without finality, what might be called blind tactics, or empirical wandering if the value of empiricism did not itself acquire its entire meaning in its opposition to philosophical responsibility....  
'Also, by decision and as a rule of the game, if you will, turning these propositions back on themselves, we will be introduced to the thought of *différance* by the theme of strategy or the strategem. By means of this solely strategic justification, I wish to underline that the efficacy of the thematic of *différance* may very well, indeed must, one day be superseded, lending itself if not to its own replacement, at least to its enmeshing itself in a chain that in truth it never will have governed. Whereby, once again, it is not theological' (Derrida 1972b, 7; Derrida 1982, 7).  
If I have outlined two intricate moments of strategy (in a sense), here Derrida is preoccupied with the second moment. Strategy is an intimate contextuality without totalization of context, it is a 'thrownness' without the possibility of universalization: 'Strategic because no transcendent truth present outside the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field.' Hence it is transparent here that a certain avowed acceptance or immersion in the inevitability of the strategic *as* temporal and (in a sense) historical (or as, perhaps, at least actively *non-supra*historical) is a sign of the difference or different difference of *différance* and therefore of deconstruction too—specifically here its difference from theology.
- <sup>13</sup> See, for example, the third interview in *Positions*, called 'Positions' (Derrida 1981b, 37-97), which reads today as prophetic. See also my conclusion, 'Patience or Politics.'
- <sup>14</sup> This issue is addressed in more detail in the discussion of Barbara Johnson's 'The Frame of Reference' below.
- <sup>15</sup> The logic of exemplification is ubiquitous and essential, and it is unfortunate that there is no opportunity to address it explicitly here, though there is an important sense in which we can include exemplification with representation. The latter is a subject I address at some length later. On the logic of exemplification, which is always at work, see Steven Connor's account

- in 'In Exemplification' (Connor 1993), Andrzej Warminski, 'Prepositional By-play,' in *Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger* (Warminski 1987), and the collection edited by Alexander Gelley entitled *Unruly Examples: On the Rhetoric of Exemplarity* (Gelley 1995).
- <sup>16</sup> See the discussion of Julian Wolfreys in Chapter Two, 'Deconstruction is a Thing.'
- <sup>17</sup> Johnson's essay is reprinted along with Lacan's seminar and Alan Bass' translation of 'Le facteur' in a collection entitled *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading* (Muller and Richardson 1988), a collection whose very rationale testifies to the intensity of the engagement between Lacan and Derrida by way of the deconstruction of Lacan's psychoanalytic reading in 'Le facteur.' Nonetheless, the choice here between one and the other, *between* Derrida and Lacan (if it is a choice), is not the only choice of course, though when it is for a time demonstrably *the* choice, it has the effect of making other choices insignificant. In 1984, in a Symposium at the University of Oklahoma, J. Hillis Miller describes another equally compelling choice in which Derrida again figures. '[I]t's often seen now in America,' says Miller, 'as a choice between Derrida and Foucault. You can't have them both together, they are a kind of binary opposition. Its even east coast/west coast since Foucault clearly has a stronger valence in California.... Of course its not quite that simple, but I find it interesting: why California-Foucault, New Haven-Derrida?' (Davis and Schleifer 1985, 95).
- <sup>18</sup> There is an interesting analogy to Derrida's remarks in 'Envois' in his response to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reading of *Specters of Marx* in 'Ghostwriting' (Spivak 1995). Derrida's remarks are in 'Marx and Sons,' which closes the collection *Ghostly Demarcations* (Derrida 1999b, 223). Though Derrida's irritation with Spivak's reading may well be justified, nonetheless the broader mechanism is clear: *there is a violent resistance to an unauthorized alteration*. In this context, it is possible to understand deconstruction as a very sophisticated attempt to *dictate the value of alteration*. What requires further analysis here is the relation between the 'I have not been read!' and the 'I have not been understood!,' which is no doubt a very complex one.
- <sup>19</sup> See note 52.
- <sup>20</sup> There is some overlapping between the Kantian and the other senses of the term 'critique.' Nonetheless the sense I have in mind here is not specifically the Kantian, but the vulgar one. The distinction between deconstruction and critique would then be deconstruction's difference from critique as (1) the negation of a certain power or truth invested or understood to reside in the object of the critique, and (2) the assumption of that power or truth by the critique. In 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering"' ('Passions: «L'offrande oblique»'), Derrida opposes deconstruction to what appears to be the more Kantian sense of critique. 'To answer for oneself,' says Derrida, 'would here be... to posit that the same "I think" accompanies all "my" representations, which themselves form a systematic, homogeneous tissue of "theses," "themes," "objects," of "narratives," of "critiques," or of "evaluations," a tissue which cannot be subjectivized and of which I would have a total and intact memory, would know all the premises and all the consequences, etc.; this would also be to suppose that deconstruction is of the same order as the critique whose concept and history it precisely [*justement*] deconstructs' (Derrida 1993d, 48-9; Derrida 1995b, 20).  
In 'De la condition la plus générale de la philosophie politique,' Denis Kambouchner says of his essay that 'cet exposé... n'est pas critique.' Critique implies, he says, 'une position de surplomb à laquelle nul ne saurait ici prétendre' (Kambouchner 1983, 114). There is not therefore an *intention* to avoid or abandon critique for, say, polemic, rather is 'la détermination polémique' the result of the *condition* of critique: that is, 'l'impossibilité du surplomb' (114). In a sense, the aspiration of *le surplomb* does combine both the vulgar and the Kantian senses of critique. In both cases, critique is a transcendental gesture, whether



systematic or otherwise. It is not clear however what kind of flattening of discourse would eliminate the transcendental gesture, which gestures towards the other. 'L'impossibilité du surplomb' does not necessarily mean of course that *le surplomb* ceases to be, ideally, or to function in its ideal or alterior capacity. In fact, a distinctive functioning-in-impossibility is thematized explicitly by deconstruction. Thus, though it is right and necessary to distinguish deconstruction from critique, the distinction is only satisfactory at one level of what we might call 'tendency' or 'inclination,' or at the level of a certain material opacity of the word (which is the subject of Chapter Three); at other levels and in other instances, critique and deconstruction are of course the same. There is no space here to consider the question that is entailed by these considerations: How are these 'levels' (as I have designated them) articulated or co-ordinated?

<sup>21</sup> In a well-known footnote in 'Positions,' Derrida describes Lacan's style as 'an art of evasion [*un art de l'esquive*]. The vivacity of ellipsis,' Derrida continues, 'too often seemed to me to serve as an avoidance or an envelopment of diverse problems' (Derrida 1972c, 115; Derrida 1981b, 110). Early in 'Le facteur de la vérité' Derrida offers another interpretation of Lacan's style, presumably to anticipate the deconstruction of this (more or less orthodox) interpretation. 'Lacan's "style" was constructed,' writes Derrida, 'so as to check almost permanently any access to an isolatable content, to an unequivocal, determinable meaning beyond writing' (Derrida 1980, 449; Derrida 1987c, 420). No doubt it is a demanding undertaking to discriminate accurately between (1) a careful resistance to 'naïve semanticism,' (2) willful obscurity, and (3) a pure refusal to be read. Somehow, one must reconstitute an intention; somehow one must discern the underlying strategy. This can hardly be achieved without an ascension to meaning, without some kind of *transcendence of the text*.

In the Afterword to *Limited Inc*, entitled 'Toward an Ethic of Discussion,' Derrida tries to describe in retrospect what he was doing in 'Limited Inc a b c...', with its multiplication of 'statements, discursive gestures, forms of writing.... It was as though I was telling Searle,' Derrida writes, 'in addition: Try to interpret this text too with your categories—and to you, as well as the reader, I say: enjoy!' (Derrida 1988a, 114). Derrida suggests that he employs a rhetorical strategy in 'Limited Inc a b c...' to render his text effectively uninterpretable—to remove it perhaps from the possibility of a kind of reading (a reading by categories) in which his text becomes something other than what was intended. 'Toward an Ethic of Discussion,' alternatively, *responds to the necessity to communicate what was intended*, despite so much distance and so many differences.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida spends some time considering the theme of 'le dernier mot' at the beginning of 'Comme si c'était possible, «within such limits», which comes at the end of an issue of *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* devoted to Derrida's texts. 'Une modalité irréductible du «peut-être»... ferait trembler toute instance du «dernier mot», Derrida writes with assurance (Derrida 1998a, 498). I would reiterate at this point that as much as the 'peut-être' is irreducible (which it surely is), it is at the same time ever-reducible. Even in the 'peut-être' itself (if there is such a thing), the 'peut-être' is being reduced towards a last word. Perhaps then, we can certainly represent this aporia in a simple double, at once hesitant and imperative: *peut-être peut-être*. Or perhaps *peut-être peut-être....* In the second instance, the ellipsis still has the last word... last word... last word..., and so on.

<sup>23</sup> This may be the plight of all differences, just as it may be the tendency of all identities to dissipate in differences.

<sup>24</sup> Lacan continues: 'Of course, as is attested by the end of the book, it is a love about which the least one can say is that its usual underside [*doublure*] in analytic theory need not be ruled out here' (65/62). Similarly, Derrida's 'I am loved but they cannot stand... not be able to "reverse" [me]' is already an 'I am loved but they cannot stand me' and hence a transformation of the love into its double or opposite. Lacan claims in *Encore* that the process

by which Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe attempt to 'desuppose' (69/66) him of knowledge (i.e., to contest or neutralize the transference to Lacan as the One who knows) takes place at the behest, in a sense, of Derrida. 'They seem to me to be no more than pawns in this case,' says Lacan (65/62). Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy are apprenticed to Derrida, according to Lacan, and the engagement with Lacan is at least in part symptomatic of a kind of transferential intrigue. The love for Lacan, which detests him too, is on the condition of a love for Derrida, but they are incompatible. In their preface, the translators of *Le titre*, François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, also make this connection explicit: 'Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's work exceeds being merely a commentary, but rather amounts to a *strategy of reading* which they place under the authority of deconstruction; in particular the kind of deconstruction practiced by Jacques Derrida' (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1992, viii). Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy describe the debt of filiation in the context of an interrogation of 'the logic of Lacan's discourse, that is, its strategic intention, in order to measure its "displacing" efficacy' (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1990, 121; Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1992, 91-2). 'War is philosophical,' they argue, 'and whatever its destructive power, it always maintains itself within the limits of the philosophical, and it even maintains those very limits. We should thus have recourse to something which is neither a strategy of a strategy nor, clearly, a counter-strategy. Therefore, for obvious reasons, we shall speak of deconstruction, if deconstruction, which is indeed discursive and strategic, nevertheless always gravitates [*gravite*] as it were in excess of itself and does not cease to undo [*ne cesse de défaire*] the discursive and the strategic within itself' (92/122). Here then a *difference* is attributed to deconstruction (a 'displacing' efficacy perhaps) which in a sense would exceed the martial strategies and alliances of the transferential drama, while nonetheless invoking the name of deconstruction. What one would need to examine more closely is the difference of deconstruction as a deconstruction which 'gravitates' and 'does not cease to undo,' where it is the *precise* character of these actions that is in question.

<sup>25</sup> Given the question of passivity and deliberation that de Man poses in his essay, it is not easy to know exactly what de Man is saying here. As it happens, it is not only 'sympathetic' readers of Derrida who make or appear to make this attribution of deliberation. John Scanlon, for example, cannot understand how Derrida's reading of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena* (*La voix et le phénomène*) could possibly be so inaccurate unless his intention was parodic: 'the distortions must be deliberate,' Scanlon concludes (Scanlon 1995, 98). Though Scanlon attributes to Derrida a parodic intent, Scanlon does so in order to diminish the validity of Derrida's argument. The dominant mode in Scanlon's essay is sarcasm.

<sup>26</sup> There is a *hyperformalism* and an *anti-formalism* of deconstruction. An anti-formalism tends, perhaps, to a *materialism*. At times, both de Man and Derrida have responded to (the idea of) a materialism of inscription. This is the aporetic moment with which we will be concerned in Chapter Three, 'Deconstruction is a Word.' See, for example, Paul de Man, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant' (de Man 1996); Jacques Derrida, 'Positions: Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta' (Derrida 1981b, 64).

<sup>27</sup> There is a formal resolution to this contradiction, but it is not a particularly satisfying one and it takes a distinctively deconstructive form: Deconstruction is *both* both a formalism and an anti-formalism *and* neither a formalism nor an anti-formalism, and *neither* both a formalism and an anti-formalism *nor* neither a formalism nor an anti-formalism. It is in this sense, according to such a recursion, that deconstruction is a formalism. It moves with the same synechdochic enthusiasm as structuralism from the particular to the general, as from the bedsit of the moment to the palace of eternity—but it cannot rest there. (Who can rest there, in any case?) Derrida attends to the assertoric or adequational dilemma of both-and/neither-nor in a number of places, for example in 'Khôra' (Derrida 1993b, 15-19; Derrida 1995b, 89-91).

<sup>28</sup> Spivak presents this sentence both with the French text and an alternative or parallel translation in square brackets: 'There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; il n'y a pas de hors-texte].'

<sup>29</sup> The loss of the world was frequently registered as a consequence of deconstruction. For example: in *Deconstruction Reframed*, Floyd Merrell writes, 'signifiers can do no more than relate to and become other signifiers which are divorced from the world "out there"' (Merrell 1985, 1); Robert Alter, in 'The Decline and Fall of Literary Criticism,' calls deconstruction a 'denial of the authority or authenticity of literary realism... [which] unmasks its pretense to represent reality' (Alter 1984, 51); Charles Altieri calls Derrida a 'textualist' and describes his writing as 'pure text, a circulation and recirculation of language which multiplies possibilities of meaning' (Altieri 1981, 26); in another text Altieri remarks that, for Derrida, 'critical statements are essentially unique acts of writing—referring to the code of language if they refer to anything at all and intelligible only on their own terms as commentary upon commentary' (Altieri 1972, 971).

<sup>30</sup> To take one example of Derrida's clarifications on this issue: 'There have been several misinterpretations of what I and other deconstructionists are trying to do. It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the "other" of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the "other" and the "other of language". Every week I receive critical commentaries and studies on deconstruction which operate on the assumption that what they call "post-structuralism" amounts to saying that there is nothing beyond language, that we are submerged in words—and other stupidities of that sort. Certainly, deconstruction tries to show that the question of reference is much more complex and problematic than traditional theories supposed. It even asks whether our term "reference" is entirely adequate for designating the "other". The other, which is beyond language and which summons language, is perhaps not a "referent" in the normal sense which linguists attached to this term. But to distance oneself thus from the habitual structure of reference, to challenge or complicate our common assumptions about it, does not amount to saying that there is *nothing* beyond language' (in Kearney 1984, 123-4).

<sup>31</sup> See note 6.

<sup>32</sup> Let us use the terms 'pre-deconstructor' and 'pre-deconstruction' to determine a heterogeneous group which Frank Lentricchia calls the 'Traditionalists': 'The traditional historicists, the Chicago neo-Aristotelians, the specialists in American literature, the Stanford moralists, the myth critics of the Frye type, old-line Freudians, critics of consciousness (such as were left), the budding structuralists, and the grandchildren of the New Critics now gathered under the umbrella of Murray Krieger's contextualism—all have found themselves united against a common enemy in a Traditionalism which, though imposed upon them by Derridean polemic, has seemed to suit these strange bedfellows just fine' (Lentricchia 1980, 159).

<sup>33</sup> A reference book is a book to which one *refers*, but not just when one says, 'There is a book on the table.' A reference book is the terminus of process of inquiry, which anchors a response in the field of the decidable which the reference book governs. That is, the reference book is the law, or at least its worldly representative.

<sup>34</sup> I discuss at greater length the characterization of deconstruction as idealism—in the context of the distinction between realism and idealism, and between analytic and continental philosophy—in 'Analytic and Continental: The Division in Philosophy' (Humphries 1999).

<sup>35</sup> In the interview with Richard Kearney, for example, Derrida says, 'Every week I receive critical commentaries and studies on deconstruction which operate on the assumption that what they call "post-structuralism" amounts to saying that there is nothing beyond language, that we are submerged in words—and other stupidities of that sort' (in Kearney 1984, 123). It is, perhaps, a kind of *responsibility* that leads Derrida to thus castigate his misinterpreters. He repeats the comment in the interview with Derek Attridge, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature,' in *Acts of Literature*. 'These texts [literary texts] operate a sort of turning back,' says Derrida, 'they are themselves a sort of turning back on the literary institution. Not that they are only reflexive, specular or speculative, not that they suspend reference to something else, as is so often suggested by stupid and uninformed rumor' (Derrida 1992a, 41).

<sup>36</sup> On the difference and coincidence of something and nothing, see Chapter Five, 'The Appearance of the Aporia of Representation in Kant.'

<sup>37</sup> Who are the avid textualists released from the demand of adequation to the real by textualism? Later, we do discuss one or two by name. But it is important to recognize that these historical characters (the 'textualists') are peculiar representatives. They are conjured into their general existence by a kind of repetition of attributes. Perhaps, less helpfully, they are the residues of local inclinations or tendencies, and hence quite possibly the mere materialization of various prejudices and presumptions. It does usually seem helpful to document a few exemplary cases, but the relationship between the specific example of a textualist and a textualist in general is a fraught one. Though this situation is not exclusive to textualism, it is interesting that the textualist him or herself seems to be largely a textual phenomenon.

<sup>38</sup> It is the utility of *two* eyes that they permit the fixing of objects in three-dimensional space, by way of triangulation. A single eye cannot judge distances as effectively.

<sup>39</sup> At one extreme, John Scanlon calls Derrida's arguments 'preposterous' (Scanlon 1995, 97). J. Claude Evans seeks to test the rigor of Derrida's arguments in a book length study and reaches 'the inescapable conclusion that Derrida's texts must be measured in terms of their own standards of rigor, and that they fail to live up to those standards.... [T]he success of Derrida's work,' writes Evans, 'has been based on a failure to subject those texts to the kind of critical reading that is supposed to be the norm in intellectual discussions' (Evans 1991, 169, 180). 'Rigor' is a term Evans borrows from Derrida, who borrows it in turn from Husserl. Herbert Spiegelberg comments that Husserl 'never discusses the sense of [his] omnipresent term [*rigor*] explicitly' (Spiegelberg 1971, 81; quoted in White 1995, 110). There must be a sense, one imagines, for Derrida, in which rigor is more than in the eye of the beholder, but such a rigor cannot, one equally imagines, be straightforwardly available in the form of a rule or formula.

<sup>40</sup> I have analyzed the Cambridge affair in more detail in 'Analytic and Continental: The Division in Philosophy' (Humphries 1999).

<sup>41</sup> In many instances, of course, philosophical critics of Derrida were troubled by the task of having to argue with an incomprehensibility that demanded a comprehensible response without conceding that this entailed any contamination of comprehensibility itself. 'To construct elaborate arguments,' writes John Scanlon in 'Pure Presence,' 'in order to show conclusively that this strange little piece [i.e., *Speech and Phenomena*] distorts Husserl's texts would be rather like constructing an elaborate argument to show that it is wrong to eat one-year-old Irish children, even if one pays the market price for them' (Scanlon 1995, 98).

<sup>42</sup> Derrida pursues the question of the other-self relation, a relation of responsibility, in 'As if I were Dead': 'When I take responsibility in my name for me, and since I am not identical with myself..., then taking a responsibility for myself means that I act under the law of someone else in me.... So the strange thing is that I have to respond in the sense of having



responsibility for another, which means also that we are not active in doing so, we are passive.... We take responsibility in a situation of heteronomy; that is, in obeying actively-passively, in what I would call a passion, the law of the other....' (Derrida 1996a, 222-23). This passage is quoted in Eric Woehrling, 'Is the Novel Original?' (Woehrling 1999, 85). I discuss the question of responsibility in more detail in the final chapter.

<sup>43</sup> On the intrication of signification and reference, see, for example, Judith Butler, 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism,"' where Butler writes: 'The body posited as prior to the sign is always *posited* or signified as prior. This signification works through producing an *effect* of its own procedure, the body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* signification. If the body signified as prior to signification is only known as an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all; on the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act appears to produce the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification. This is not to claim that language causes or composes the body which it signifies. It is only to claim that there is no reference to the body outside of the apparent circularity of this metalepsis' (Butler 1995, 232n13).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other': '[T]he most rigorous deconstructions have never claimed to be... *possible*. And I would say that deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible; and also that those who would rush to delight in that admission lose nothing from having to wait. For a deconstructive operation *possibility* would rather be the danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible approaches. The interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible' (Derrida 1987d, 26-7; Derrida 1989d, 36). This passage is quoted by Derrida in 'Force of Law' ('Force de loi') (Derrida 1992c, 30; Derrida 1994b, 78n1), with some minor alterations to the translation.

<sup>45</sup> 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it' (Marx and Engels 1976, 8).

<sup>46</sup> See, in particular, Derrida, 'Positions,' in *Positions* (Derrida 1972c, 53-133; Derrida 1981b, 37-97).

<sup>47</sup> On the notion of 'pre-deconstruction,' see note 32.

<sup>48</sup> John Searle makes another variation on this point in 'The World Turned Upside Down' (Searle 1993, 182-3).

<sup>49</sup> In the interview 'Honoris Causa' in *Points*, Derrida recalls this accusation while arguing that for thirty years he has protested against it and maintained 'a way of thinking which is affirmative and not nihilist...' (Derrida 1995c, 406, Derrida's emphasis). But is it possible for the affirmative to negate nihilism? Or is nihilism merely a false attribution in the first place? Nihilism is attributed to deconstruction because deconstruction appears to inhibit facility. It appears to be paralyzing, in other words. Of course, the sense of paralysis may well be only a moment of the ordeal of undecidability, which is itself interpretable as an affirmative movement. In any case, as much as deconstruction too must endure the ordeal of undecidability, it must also endure the ordeal of the accusations of nihilism, where it experiences certain familiar social and institutional pressures. 'Deconstruction would be purely nihilist—and negative—if it could not lead to an alternative way of thinking,' writes Michel Meyer in 'From Grammatology to Problematology' (Meyer 1998, 359). This pressure upon deconstruction to produce something 'constructive' is at once dialectical and transformative, an alteration and a return to the fold. Meyer's path beyond deconstruction and beyond nihilism is by way of 'problematology,' which would elude the aporia of *différance* by abandoning altogether what Meyer calls 'propositionalism.' 'Derrida invites us to do so,'

he writes. Meyer's argument is one of many which find in deconstruction an accurate diagnosis of the ills of western metaphysics but a failure to follow through with the cure, which is then usually presented as a strict alternative: in this case, propositionalism/problematology.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*: 'All deconstructive discourse is strategic and adventurous; which is to say that it cannot be justified absolutely' (Critchley 1992, 35). This absence of absolute justification is an accession to locality, localization, context and contextuality, by way of justification.

<sup>51</sup> The status of this availability is always in question here.

<sup>52</sup> See 'Heidegger's Exegeses of Hölderlin' and 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau' (de Man 1983). The argument in 'Heidegger's Exegeses of Hölderlin' is complex and cannot be recreated here. At a certain point in its progress, de Man writes the following: 'Heidegger's need for a witness is understandable, then, but why must it be Hölderlin? There are, to be sure, secondary reasons, of a sentimental and national nature, in his favor. Heidegger's commentaries were thought out just before and during World War II, and are directly linked to an anguished meditation upon the historical destiny of Germany, a meditation that finds an echo in the "national" poems of Hölderlin. But that is a side issue that would take us away from our topic. There is, however, another and much deeper reason that justifies this choice: *it is the fact that Hölderlin says exactly the opposite of what Heidegger makes him say*. Such an assertion is paradoxical only in appearance. At this level of thought it is difficult to distinguish between a proposition and that which constitutes its opposite. In fact, to state the opposite is still to talk of the same thing though in an opposite sense, and it is already a major achievement to have, in a dialogue of this sort, the two interlocutors manage to speak of the same thing. It can indeed be said that Heidegger and Hölderlin speak of the same thing; whatever one may otherwise reproach in Heidegger's commentaries, their great merit remains to have brought out precisely the central "concern" of Hölderlin's work; and in this, they surpass other studies. Nonetheless, they reverse his thought' (254-55). In 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau,' what is and remains in question for de Man is the relation of the deconstructive reader to the text under deconstruction, a relation which preoccupies us here. 'The "difference between an implied meaning, a nominal presence and a thematic exposition" and all such distinctions within the cognitive status of language,' says de Man, 'are really Rousseau's central problem, but it remains questionable whether he approached the problem explicitly or implicitly in terms of the categories of presence and distance. Derrida is brought face to face with the problem, but his terminology cannot take him any further. The structurization of Rousseau's text in terms of a presence-absence system leaves the cognitive system of deliberate knowledge versus passive knowledge unresolved and distributes it evenly on both sides' (118). A problematic of 'deliberate knowledge versus passive knowledge' subtends the question of the different difference of deconstruction.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, letter to Paul Demeny (15 May, 1871), in *Collected Poems* (Rimbaud 1986, 9).

<sup>54</sup> In 'There is No One Narcissism' ('Il n'y a pas le narcissisme'), Derrida makes this point in terms of what he calls a 'narcissistic reappropriation': 'I believe that without a movement of narcissistic reappropriation, the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed, it would be destroyed in advance. The relation to the other—even if it remains asymmetrical, open, without possible reappropriation—must trace a movement of reappropriation in the image of oneself for love to the possible, for example' (Derrida 1992d, 212; Derrida 1995c, 199). The 'movement of narcissistic reappropriation' which would expel or destroy the other is, at the same time, that without which 'the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed.' This

is clearly true. The difficulty, however, is a question of articulation, inclination, strategy, emphasis, interruption, the 'at the same time,' evaluation, and so on.

<sup>55</sup> *Laws*, vii, 803 (Plato 1961, 1375), quoted in Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga 1949, 37).

<sup>56</sup> *Words about Words about Words* (Krieger 1988, 74).

<sup>57</sup> So strong was this counter-ideology that the word 'work' was almost entirely replaced by an alternative, for example 'text'—no longer the *works* of Shakespeare but the *texts* of Shakespeare. A similar displacement or substitution in favor of the text occurred with the word 'book' (see Derrida 1981b, 3-4).

<sup>58</sup> Derrida was not slow to make this clarification: see the discussion after Derrida's presentation of 'Structure, Sign, and Play' at the 1966 symposium in Baltimore entitled 'The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man' (Derrida 1970, 268). In 'Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion,' Derrida cautions that 'this notion of "freeplay" is an inadequate translation of the lexical network connected to the word *jeu*, which I used in my first texts, but sparingly and in a highly defined manner' (Derrida 1988a, 115-16).

<sup>59</sup> There is a very interesting thread in the sociological tradition concerned with the concept of *play*: see, for example, Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga 1949), and Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (Caillois 1961), *Les jeux et les hommes* (Caillois 1958).

<sup>60</sup> Norris quotes Derrida from *Of Grammatology*: '[Deconstruction] always in a certain way falls prey to its own work. This is what the person who has begun the same work in another area of the same habitation does not fail to point out with zeal. No exercise is more widespread today and one should be able to formalize its rules' (Derrida 1967a, 39; Derrida 1976, 24; Norris 1982, 91).

<sup>61</sup> In the 1982 book, for example, Norris broadly supports Rorty's reading of deconstruction: 'Rorty has stated the issue [regarding the deconstruction of the role of rationality in philosophy] with fine lucidity in his essay "Philosophy As a Kind of Writing"' (Norris 1982, 128). Later, however, Norris reverses his view of Rorty, and makes this the subject of a critical polemic in 'Philosophy as Not Just a "Kind of Writing": Derrida and the Claim of Reason' (Dasenbrock 1989, 189-203). Norris' project in the 1990s is to disentangle a careful deconstruction from a careless postmodernism and postmodern appropriation of deconstruction. See, for example: *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy* (1990); *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War* (1992); *The Truth About Postmodernism* (1993); *Reclaiming Truth: Contribution to a Critique of Cultural Relativism* (1996); *Against Relativism: Philosophy of Science, Deconstruction, and Critical Theory* (1997).

<sup>62</sup> Fischer quotes this sentence in his critique of Norris, but it is a little misleading without its context. Norris is talking about Nietzsche, 'who carries out what amounts to a full-scale programme of deconstruction, attacking every last vestige of philosophic truth and certainty' (Norris 1982, 77). Can the relatively uncritical tone of Norris' *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* be attributed to its expository brief as a contributor to the 'New Accents' series?

<sup>63</sup> In this sense 'play' or 'free play' belongs with Georges Bataille's term 'dépense,' often translated as 'expenditure.' See, for example, Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure' (Bataille 1985), 'La notion de dépense' (Bataille 1970, 302-20).

<sup>64</sup> See Nietzsche, 'The Madman,' in *The Gay Science* (Nietzsche 1974, 181-2).

<sup>65</sup> The Macksey and Donato translation in *The Structuralist Controversy* translates *jeu* by the word 'freeplay.' Alan Bass, in his translation of 'Structure, Sign and Play' for *Writing and Difference*, translates *jeu* by 'play' (Derrida 1978b, 278-93).

<sup>66</sup> These questions constitute an opening towards the aporia of the political, which is no doubt already opening or open. Let me say a few words on the matter here, though it will be taken

up again later. The question of politics (or of the political) is implicit in the question which asks, 'What are the consequences of deconstruction?' or, 'Does deconstruction make any difference?' The politics of deconstruction, for example, are articulated in a complex assessment of its theory-practice relation, even where these two terms (theory and practice) cannot be clearly distinguished. At the beginning of Chapter Six of *Derrida: From Phenomenology to Ethics*, entitled 'The Ethics and Politics of Deconstruction and the Deconstruction of Ethics and Politics,' Christina Howells claims that the question of the politics of deconstruction 'is by no means a simple one. In the first place,' she says, 'Derrida's own (left-wing) politics must not be confused with the politics of deconstruction' (Howells 1998, 122). She does not say more about this particular distinction (between two politics), so there is much regarding the relation of theory and practice to be elucidated in Howell's pithy statement. For example: What are Derrida's politics? How are they to be read or discerned? By his actions? By his statements? By the (political) ideology informing his statements? By the implications of his statements with regard to the virtue of action? How are Derrida's politics 'left-wing' (though this is certainly a frequent and uncontroversial attribution)? How are his politics articulated with the politics of deconstruction (if they are not the same, as Howells suggests)? How might the two be distinguished in the first place in order to be compared? (Which entails the question: Is everything Derrida publishes deconstruction?) An individual's politics may be understood, we suppose, as what they *practice*, and that is the place where we look for a synchronization with what they preach, for an adequation between the two, in both directions. Did they do as they say to do? Politics are interpreted, but also they must exceed interpretation, as a concrete outcome: the done thing. Politics are in this sense a transcendental-material indicator (where the *material* of politics is what is transcendental), a registration of the concrete meaning of a discourse, in the world, as it were, according to what Niall Lucy calls the 'political imperative' (Lucy 1995, ix). But here we can only begin to draw out the implications condensed in Howell's claim insofar as they bear on the classical dualism of theory and practice. Some of these issues are developed in the section of this chapter entitled 'The Disciple and the Discipline of Double Reading,' and in the conclusion, 'Patience or Politics.'

<sup>67</sup> Though Geoffrey Hartman, for example, is often regarded as a prominent member of the 'play' group, this characterization is not very helpful. What is interpreted as playful in Hartman is often an extended and precise form of speculative or reflective criticism which punctuates his close, attentive readings. Moreover, Hartman's intentions are hardly frivolous: 'Our best readers,' writes Hartman, 'use poetry up in a desperate effort to save a sublime discipline: they see it as secular scripture and surround it with a minute, religious, self-institutionalizing body of commentary' (Hartman 1975, xii).

<sup>68</sup> 'Philosophy is the discipline,' writes Deleuze, 'that involves *creating* concepts' (Deleuze and Guattari 1991, 10; Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 5).

<sup>69</sup> Deconstruction is often understood to have problematized the boundary between literature and philosophy, or between literature and literary criticism. The limit of such a problematization is the conflation of literature and philosophy, and this reductive maneuver has been attributed to deconstruction. Derrida has commented on this misrepresentative or hyperbolic attribution on a number of occasions. For example, in 'Passions: An "Oblique Offering"' ('Passions: «L'offrande oblique»'): 'Perhaps all I wanted to do was to confide or confirm my taste (probably unconditional) for literature, more precisely for literary writing. Not that I like literature in general, nor that I prefer it to something else, to philosophy, for example, as they suppose who ultimately discern neither one nor the other [*ni que je la préfère à quoi que ce soit, et par exemple, comme le pensent souvent ceux qui ne discernent finalement ni l'une ni l'autre, à la philosophie*]. Not that I want to reduce everything to it, especially not philosophy' (Derrida 1993d, 63; Derrida 1995b, 27).

<sup>70</sup> Derek Attridge: 'We literary critics are doubtless always a little intimidated by philosophy.... At the backs of our minds is the discomfiting thought—implanted by three millennia of cultural history—that in the largest scale of things, the practice of literature can provide only an attractive garnish for the strong meat of philosophical enquiry' (Attridge 1995, 106).

<sup>71</sup> Attridge's 'we know' gathers together the literary deconstructors, chastened collectively at the hands of the philosophers. But despite this sense of a general edification for literary critics, spreading like a wave through the community, there is not a complete conformity to the more careful and sophisticated exposition of deconstruction that gathered momentum in the mid 1980s. Stuart Sim, for example, is a professor of English Studies and an advocate of deconstruction. In 1999, in *Derrida and the End of History*, he sets out to define what he calls the 'deconstructive ethos': '[T]he basic assumptions of deconstruction [are] as follows: (i) that language is ineradicably marked by instability and indeterminacy of meaning; (ii) that given such instability and indeterminacy, no method of analysis... can have any special claim to authority as regards textual interpretation; (iii) that interpretation is, therefore, a free-ranging activity more akin to game-playing than to analysis...' (Sim 1999, 30-31). Sim's recent and sympathetic account is barely distinguishable from the hostile accounts of deconstruction formulated by its antagonists in the 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>72</sup> Were it possible to give them fuller consideration, the stylistic consequences of deconstruction would need to be examined in relation to the notion of *performativity*. With regard to style and to the performative, attention must be paid to the relation of the *representation* to *what is represented*. The tendency is towards an ideal coincidence of the representation with what is represented in the *act*—the speech act, for example. For style, therefore, there is an ideal harmonization of form and content—with form, in a sense, responsive or attuned to content. Hence the stylistic consequences of a deconstructive 'content' would be an alteration of the form of exposition.

<sup>73</sup> At one limit is automatic writing, whose value was explored by surrealism but which was judged an aesthetic failure, despite its goal of an *ideal or total exposure*. There was, it was said, too much exposure and too little of the finer arts of intrigue and seduction. Related to the matter of a liberation of style is the literary principle which, says Derrida, 'allows one to say everything [*tout dire*]', a power ('in principle,' Derrida insists in 'This Strange Institution Called Literature') to 'break free of the rules,' to overturn all laws, resistances, repressive interdictions (Derrida 1992a, 36-7).

<sup>74</sup> The consequences of questioning the metaphysical, ideological, or other implications of a term had the effect of making the use of that term appear naive, unrigorous, lacking in proper vigilance, anachronistic, unethical, and so on. To give a minor example of how such a discourse might be deployed, let us read a passage from the interview with Henri Ronse in *Positions*, entitled 'Implications':

Ronse: In a concluding note to *Writing and Difference* you stated: "what remains here the displacement of a question certainly forms a system." Is this not equally true for all your books? How are they organized?

Derrida: In effect they form, but indeed as a *displacement* and as the displacement of a *question*, a certain system somewhere open to an undecidable resource that sets the system in motion. The note to which you allude also recalled the necessity of those "blank spaces" which we know, at least since Mallarmé, "take on importance" in every text.

Ronse: And yet these books do not form a single Book...

Derrida: No. In what you call my books, what is first of all put in question is the unity of the book and the unity "book" considered as a perfect totality, with all the implications of such a concept. And you know that these implications concern the entirety of our culture, directly or indirectly. At the moment when such a closure *demarcates* itself, dare one maintain that one is the author of books, be they one, two, or three? Under these titles it is solely a question of

a unique and differentiated textual "operation," if you will, whose unfinished movement assigns itself no absolute beginning, and which, although it is entirely consumed by the reading of other texts, in a certain fashion refers only to its own writing. We must adjust to conceiving these two contradictory ideas [*motifs*] together. Therefore it would be impossible to provide a linear, deductive representation of these works that would correspond to some "logical order." Such an order is also in question, even if, I think, an entire phase or face of my texts conforms to its demands, at least by simulacrum, in order to inscribe it, in turn, into a composition that this order no longer governs. You know, in fact, that above all it is necessary to read and reread those in whose wake I write, the "books" in whose margins and between whose lines I mark out and read a text simultaneously almost identical and entirely other, that I would even hesitate, for obvious reasons, to call fragmentary.... (Derrida 1972c, 11-12; Derrida 1981b, 3-4)

The effect of such a passage is an interdiction on the use of the word 'book.' Less 'problematic' terms, terms with more appropriate implications or metaphorical resonances, come to be substituted for it, as though a certain adequation were possible. Is this a movement of identification or alteration?

<sup>75</sup> The different difference of deconstruction, with its lexicon of 'undecidables,' would lay claim to this deliberation, and in this it would only distinguish its thinking as *exemplary*, as it were, inasmuch as it can *bring something to our attention*. Again, then, for deconstruction as much as for the others, there is the essential (de Manian) distinction between a deliberate and a passive knowledge—an undecidable distinction in which deconstruction's different difference is perhaps indiscernible.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, 'At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am' ('*En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici*') (Derrida 1987d; Derrida 1991a), where an entire spatio-temporal aporetic is relentlessly dramatized.

<sup>77</sup> For example: 'The difference between the more "philosophical" and the more "literary" approach consists, primarily, in making philosophical arguments in a nondiscursive manner, on the level of the signifier, syntax, and textual organization' (Gasché 1986, 4), or, a few pages later, 'In short, whether discussing Hegel, Husserl, or Heidegger, Derrida is primarily engaged in a debate with the main philosophical question regarding the ultimate foundation of what is' (7).

<sup>78</sup> For example: 'Some might want to call my efforts a retranslation of Derrida's writings back into the technical language of philosophy and its accepted set of questions' (Gasché 1986, 8). Gasché does not reject this description.

<sup>79</sup> In the interview that opens *Acts of Literature*, Derek Attridge poses a question regarding Gasché's use of the term 'infrastructure.' 'The word *infrastructure* troubles me a bit,' says Derrida in response, 'even though I once used it myself for pedagogical and analogical purposes, at the time of *Of Grammatology*, in a very specific rhetorical and demonstrative context, and even though I understand what justifies the strategic use of it proposed by Gasché (and I talked to him about it). In an analysis of "literary" writing, you do of course have to take account of the most "general" structures (I don't dare say "fundamental," "originary," "transcendental," "ontological," or "infra-structural," and I think it has to be avoided) of textuality in general. You were reminding us of them: *différance*, arche-trace, supplement, and everything I called "quasi-transcendental" in *Glas*. They are implicated in every literary text, but not all texts are literary—Gasché is right to remind us of this. Once you have situated the structure of textuality in general, you have to determine its becoming-literature, if I can put it like that, and then distinguish between fiction in general (not all fiction is literature, all literature is not strictly of the order of fiction), poetry and belles-lettres, the literature which has been called that for only a few centuries, etc. Also—and this



is just what we're talking about here—you have to discern exactly the historically determined phenomenon of social conventions and the institutions which give rise, give its place, to literature. Gasché is right to point out that this historico-institutional structure is not a general "infrastructure" of the text. It is not the same level as what I won't call an infrastructure but rather the limitless generality of *différance*, the trace, the supplement, etc. Having said this, it is perhaps at this point that there could be a discussion with Gasché beyond the strategic choice of terminology, although literature is not the text in general, although not all arch-writing is "literary." I wonder whether literature is simply an example, one effect or region among others, of some general textuality. And I wonder if you can simply apply the classic question to it: what, on the basis of this general textuality, makes the specificity of literature, literariness?" (Derrida 1992a, 70-71).

<sup>80</sup> On the inclination in Gasché towards a unificatory reading of deconstruction, in the context of philosophy, see the second quotation from note 77. This inclination exceeds in practice Gasché's other, cautious, pronouncements about the 'plurality,' or 'openness,' or irreducibility to orthodoxy of Derrida's philosophy. It must be said, such an inclination is hardly avoidable, and the value of unity or unification, much prized by the New Critics and much disparaged subsequently, is a compelling one; it has yet to receive a thorough analysis, whether with regard to literary or philosophical or other texts. Nonetheless, what is noteworthy in Gasché is an absence of conformity to these characteristically deconstructive prohibitions.

<sup>81</sup> It wasn't necessary for deconstruction to address the Habermasian program directly for the effect of deconstruction to be registered. Part of the complexity here resides in the confusion of deconstruction with a postmodernism whose relationship to the progressivist Enlightenment program is less circumspect. Nonetheless it is clear that deconstruction in the 1970s and 1980s does appear to place substantial obstacles in the path of such a program. In the interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida says, 'I have never been very happy with the term "modernity." Of course, I feel that what is happening in the world today is something unique and singular. As soon, however, as we give it the label of "modernity," we describe it in a certain historical system of evolution or progress,' which is, says Derrida, 'a notion derived from Enlightenment rationalism' (in Kearney 1984, 112). The issues around Marxism that are raised and developed in 'Positions' (Derrida 1981b) are applicable to Habermasian critical theory also. Habermas replies to the implication of a deconstruction of his project in two chapters of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Habermas 1987), *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (Habermas 1985), and the reply manifests all the signs of repudiation. The differences between Derrida and Habermas are discussed in a number of places, for example, Richard Bernstein, 'An Allegory of Modernity/Postmodernity: Habermas and Derrida' (Bernstein 1993), David Couzens Hoy, 'Splitting the Difference: Habermas's Critique of Derrida' (Hoy 1993).

<sup>82</sup> 'We come here then to one of the most serious problems of today, in my view,' says Derrida in the interview 'Honoris Causa' (collected in *Points*), 'a problem which is at the same time intellectual, political, and ethical. It concerns the whole of society, but particularly all of those who, like us, intellectuals, researchers, or teachers, retain some hope and want to take some responsibility for what I would call the "Enlightenment" of today and tomorrow...'; 'And we continue to hope, perhaps in vain, for a new Enlightenment, and that a small number of clear-minded readers may in the end count for more than millions of the other sort' (Derrida 1995c, 399-400, 406-7). Caputo takes up this theme in his commentary upon the discussion with Derrida entitled 'Deconstruction in a Nutshell.' 'While Derrida is often made out to be the sworn enemy of the Enlightenment, he would contend, and we with him, that in fact the deconstruction he advocates is a continuation of what is best about the Enlightenment, but by another means. His idea of the right that deconstruction reserves to ask

any question illustrates very nicely Derrida's relationship to the Enlightenment, which is not uncomplicated. As he often says, his interests lie in provoking not an anti-Enlightenment but a new Enlightenment, in questioning the "axioms and certainties of Enlightenment," but to do so precisely in order to effect "what should be the Enlightenment of our time" [(Derrida 1995c, 428)]. True, he is a critic of the Enlightenment, but critique is the most honorable of Enlightenment works, even when it is directed at the Enlightenment, which must be thick-skinned enough to undergo self-critique. For it may be that what the Enlightenment seeks cannot be found on the basis that the Enlightenment lays' (Caputo 1997, 54).

<sup>83</sup> Derrida characterizes this motile character of deconstruction in 'There is No One Narcissism' ('Il n'y a pas le narcissisme'), not in this case with regard to the concept of enlightenment, but to the (classical) opposition of speech and writing. 'I think the concept of writing has now been sufficiently transformed,' he says, 'that we should no longer let ourselves be taken in by the somewhat trivial opposition between speech and writing [pour qu'on ne se laisse pas prendre à cette opposition un peu triviale entre la parole et l'écriture]' (Derrida 1992d, 211; Derrida 1995c, 198). There is more than just dry humor in this comment, which abrades and subverts the normativity that has come, under the heading of *phonocentrism* for example, to characterize the opposition of speech and writing, of the spoken word to the written word. An emphasis grown old and stale is now a 'trivial' one. But what transformative force has diminished in this opposition? Curiously, the opposition still remains to be thought, as Roger Laporte demonstrates in 'S'entendre-parler,' where with reference specifically to Derrida he reinvests an interest in the difference between hearing a text read and reading a text, between reading a text aloud and reading it to oneself. At one point, Laporte seeks assistance on this matter from Blanchot: 'Si Kafka aimait lire à ses amis ce qu'il écrivait, c'est, nous dit Blanchot, non par vanité littéraire, mais «par le besoin de se presser physiquement contre son oeuvre»' (Laporte 1990, 91). What is 'le besoin de se presser physiquement contre [l']oeuvre' other than that which at the same time entails the privilege (the ideal, if you like) of the voice and of speech? What is interesting here then is the question of the moral force that comes to adhere to the deconstruction of phonocentrism (for example), which quickly becomes a rule, but which may leave the question of the opposition of speech and writing strangely untouched, other than as a function of fluctuations in normative value. If the opposition in question is now a trivial one, then it is because it no longer has strategic utility perhaps—where strategy is a force of intervention.

<sup>84</sup> The confusion can partly be dispelled, or at least displaced, by making the distinction between a 'new' and an 'old' enlightenment, as does Caputo, following Derrida. '[T]he Philosopher on Derrida's telling is not an *Aufklärer* who sits in judgment over all our judgments, a meta-judge or hyper-judge presiding over our judgments as a court of last appeal, picking things to pieces,' says Caputo. 'That is the seat the old Enlightenment seeks to fill. But in the new Enlightenment, quite the opposite is the case. For Derrida, the philosopher is a bit of a "rag picker" himself, looking for the bits and pieces that tend to drop from sight in the prevailing view of things, listening with cocked ear for the still small voices of what he, following Levinas, calls the "other" or even the "wholly other" (*tout autre*)' (Caputo 1997, 52). Caputo's opposition of a 'new' to an 'old' Enlightenment is not a strategy alien to the 'old' Enlightenment: in fact, it is the essence of the 'old' Enlightenment.

<sup>85</sup> In *Ethical Criticism*, Robert Eaglestone makes a case for the same criticism of Hillis Miller (Eaglestone 1997, 61-97).

<sup>86</sup> Compare Nealon's article with, for example, the section entitled 'Against Neutrality' in Gasché's *The Tain of the Mirror* (Gasché 1986, 136-42). Nealon's opening ploy of presenting quotations from Gasché while deferring the attribution of their authorship confirms Gasché as the silent partner in Nealon's discourse.

- <sup>87</sup> What is 'the text' in the passage quoted by Nealon from Culler's book? Nealon does not indicate this, but it is not *the text in general*. Culler is paraphrasing de Man's reading of Rousseau's *Profession de foi* in *Allegories of Reading* (de Man 1979, 245) and Rousseau's text is 'the text' in question.
- <sup>88</sup> The analysis of double reading that follows is at times a close one, so I have reproduced the French texts of my citations, mainly from a *La dissémination*, in full. 'C'est pourquoi la déconstruction comporte une phase indispensable de *renversement*. En rester au renversement, c'est opérer, certes, dans l'immanence du système à détruire. Mais s'en tenir, pour aller *plus loin*, être plus radical ou plus audacieux, à une attitude d'indifférence neutralisante à l'égard des oppositions classiques, ce serait laisser libre cours aux forces qui dominant effectivement et historiquement le champ. Ce serait, faute de s'emparer des moyens d'y *intervenir*, confirmer l'équilibre établi' (Derrida 1972a, 11-12).
- <sup>89</sup> Eagleton says the same thing too in *Literary Theory*, making the distinction between Derrida and the American deconstructors (Eagleton 1996, 123).
- <sup>90</sup> 'Aucun concept, aucun nom, aucun signifiant n'y échappe [cette structure]... [d']une *double science*' (Derrida 1972a, 10).
- <sup>91</sup> 'Cette structure de la *double marque* (*pris*—emprunté et enfermé—dans un couple d'opposition, un terme garde son vieux nom pour détruire l'opposition à laquelle il n'appartient plus tout à fait, à laquelle il n'aura d'ailleurs *jamais* cédé, l'histoire de cette opposition étant celle d'une lutte incessante et hiérarchisante) travaille tout le champ dans lequel se déplacent ces textes-ci. Elle y est aussi travaillée: la règle selon laquelle chaque concept reçoit nécessairement deux marques semblables—répétition sans identité—, l'une à l'intérieur, l'autre à l'extérieur du système déconstruit, doit donner lieu à une double lecture et à une double écriture. Cela apparaîtra en son temps: à une *double science*' (Derrida 1972a, 10).
- <sup>92</sup> Derrida situates the genesis of *différance* in relation to a dialecticism and a hyperdialecticism (a raising of the stakes of dialectics) in the foreword to *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*. 'Mais à travers les moments, les configurations, les effets de cette loi [de la contamination], la «contamination» originaire de l'origine reçoit alors un nom philosophique auquel j'ai dû renoncer: la *dialectique*, une «dialectique originaire». Le mot revient avec insistance, page après page.... [Q]uelque années plus tard, alors même que dans l'Introduction à *L'origine de la géométrie* (1962) et dans *La voix et le phénomène* (1967) je poursuivais la lecture ainsi engagé, le mot «dialectique» ait fini soit par disparaître totalement, soit même par désigner *ce sans quoi* ou à *l'écart de quoi* il fallait penser la *différance*, le supplément d'origine et la trace....' (Derrida 1990, vii). It should be clear that there is a sense in which I am uncertain about the stability of the opposition of *différance* (for example) to dialectic.
- <sup>93</sup> 'Il y aura toujours un risque, certes, à faire travailler, voire à laisser circuler les vieux noms: celui d'une installation, voire d'une régression dans le système déconstruit ou en cours de déconstruction. Et nier ce risque, ce serait déjà le confirmer: tenir le signifiant—ici le nom—pour une circonstance conventionnelle du concept et pour une concession sans effet spécifique. Ce serait affirmer l'autonomie du sens, la pureté idéale d'une histoire théorique et abstraite du concept. Inversement, prétendre se débarrasser immédiatement des marques antérieures et passer, par décret, d'un geste simple, dans le dehors des oppositions classiques, c'est, outre le risque d'une interminable 'théologie négative,' oublier que ces oppositions ne constituaient pas un système *donné*, une sorte de table anhistorique et foncièrement homogène, mais un espace dissymétrique et hiérarchisant, traversé par des forces et travaillé dans sa clôture par le dehors qu'il refoule: expulse et, ce qui revient au même, intériorise comme un de *ses* moments. C'est pourquoi la déconstruction comporte une phase

indispensable de *renversement*. En rester au renversement, c'est opérer, certes, dans l'immanence du système à détruire. Mais s'en tenir, pour aller *plus loin*, être plus radical ou plus audacieux, à une attitude d'indifférence neutralisante à l'égard des oppositions classiques, ce serait laisser libre cours aux forces qui dominant effectivement et historiquement le champ. Ce serait, faute de s'emparer des moyens d'y *intervenir*, confirmer l'équilibre établi.

'Ces deux opérations doivent donc être conduites dans une sorte de *simul* déconcertant, dans un mouvement d'ensemble, mouvement cohérent, certes, mais divisé, différencié et stratifié. L'écart entre les deux opérations doit rester ouvert, se laisser sans cesse marquer et remarquer. C'est assez dire l'hétérogénéité nécessaire de chaque texte participant à cette opération et l'impossibilité de résumer l'écart en un seul point, voire sous un seul nom. Les valeurs de responsabilité ou d'individualité ne peuvent plus dominer ici: c'est le premier effet de la dissémination' (Derrida 1972a, 11-12).

- <sup>94</sup> 'Close reading' is the province of the American literary deconstructors against whose hermetic practice Nealon aims the sharp point of his polemic. Perhaps the movement by Nealon and Gasché towards a more philosophical and politically tuned deconstruction is, in a certain fashion, an overly hasty exit from the cul-de-sac of close reading. The close reader's struggle for the breath of meaning naturally repels those allergic to asphyxiation.
- <sup>95</sup> *Simul* is a Latin adverb meaning 'at once,' 'together,' 'at the same time.'
- <sup>96</sup> For example: 'I think everything I did [from the beginning] was directly or indirectly connected with political questions, and I could show this in a very precise manner' (Derrida 1997b).
- <sup>97</sup> This quotation from de Man's *Allegories of Reading*, quoted by Nealon (1271), is from the passage quoted in Culler (80) that Culler is paraphrasing when Nealon quotes Culler (1269). Nealon does not make this clear. In de Man, it is not 'texts' that 'compel us to choose,' but 'exhortative performatives' within Rousseau's *Profession de foi*. The matter of self-canceling opposites in de Man is, unfortunately, not dealt with thoroughly in Nealon. De Man is not oblivious to this issue. For example, from the opening paragraph of 'The Rhetoric of Blindness,' where de Man is reflecting on his earlier readings of Lukács, Blanchot, Poulet, and others: 'It is necessary, in each case, to read beyond some of the more categorical assertions and balance them against other much more tentative utterances that seem to come close, at times, to being contradictory to these assertions. The contradictions, however, never cancel each other out, nor do they enter into the synthesizing dynamics of a dialectic' (de Man 1983, 102).
- <sup>98</sup> This is the jargon of impossibility: 'reading's impossibility... allows reading to be set in motion.' There is, at the same time, obstruction and facilitation, conditions of possibility and conditions of impossibility. In the jargon of impossibility, the violence and obstructive force of impossibility, which rends the scheme of things, is annulled in a reversion, but it is important to realize that it is perhaps not possible to avoid this jargonization—which is only language's most basic prerogative after all. On the jargon of impossibility, see note 6. Compare Nealon's remarks with Richard Beardsworth in *Derrida and the Political*, where Beardsworth, while discussing the question of the 'we,' writes, 'The only community of 'we' that is possible is the impossibility of 'we,' and this impossibility makes possible. This is the "promise of democracy"' (Beardsworth 1996, 146). If impossibility *functions in effect in precisely the same way as possibility*, then what is the impossibility in impossibility?
- <sup>99</sup> The nature of this ideal is well illustrated in Simon Critchley's reading of Derrida's 'At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am' ('En ce moment...') in his essay 'Bois'—Derrida's Final Word on Levinas. 'Bois' is the last word of Derrida's essay. 'Bois' is not directed from a position of height to an anonymous multitude,' writes Critchley, 'it is not the



impersonal "Buvons!" or "Buvez!" which, in a spirit of exclamation and camaraderie, commands the others to join in a toast or in a symposium.... To utter the imperative "bois" is to give to the other, to let down one's pitcher and offer drink to the other.... To utter the final word—"bois"—is to nourish the hunger of the other and is akin to the tearing of bread from my own mouth. I interrupt my ego through fasting and breaking the other's fast' (Critchley 1991, 163). The important distinction Critchley makes here needs to be considered not only in the context of Levinasian ethics but also (ironically perhaps) in the context of Nietzsche's critique of Christian morality.

<sup>100</sup> In the context of a careful reading of Levinas, Derrida reflects on this question, as though cautious perhaps about what it might mean to 'analyze' Levinas in a certain non-hagiographical way in a volume entitled *Adieu—to Emmanuel Levinas*. 'The... hiatus... can give its place to a subtle, difficult, but necessary analytical dissociation in the structure of arguments and the placement of statements. For example, in the discourse of Levinas. Dare I say that I never forgo, and, I believe, in the admiring fidelity and respect that I owe Emmanuel Levinas, must never forgo, the right to this analysis, indeed, to the discussion of some proposition or other in a text that cannot be homogeneous because it knows how to interrupt itself?... Isn't this discussion necessary precisely there where it is a question of responsibility before the other...?' (Derrida 1997a, 203; Derrida 1999a, 118). Derrida then speaks of 'this duty to analyze [*ce devoir d'analyser*]' (118/204).

<sup>101</sup> For example, see Derrida, 'Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism,' in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*: 'I absolutely refuse a discourse that would assign me a single code, a single language game, a single context, a single situation; and I claim this right not simply out of caprice or because it is to my taste, but for ethical and political reasons' (Mouffe 1996, 81).

<sup>102</sup> 'A critique of what I do is indeed impossible,' says Derrida in the course of an interview with Florian Rötzer (Rötzer 1995, 55).

<sup>103</sup> It seems unlikely that there can be such a thing as an 'alterior resource.' Yet there is often this implication: that we can *draw on* other resources. For example, some therapeutic modalities understand the unconscious as such a 'resource.' The question is one of the relation to the other and to otherness, which is simultaneously active and passive, resistant and acquiescent.

<sup>104</sup> It could well be argued that it is precisely with regard to alterity that the matter of *will* is problematized. There is no willing here. But there *is*: there is a pressure into the future whose object is, at once and serially, same and other, the *same* object and an object other than the object of willing.

<sup>105</sup> There is a wild fluctuation between (deconstruction) the one and (deconstruction) the other which produces endless confusion.

## 2

## Deconstruction is a Thing

It cannot be said, even today, that it is clear what is the nature of deconstruction. There are those, for example, who understand deconstruction as reducible to a set of axioms in the manner of a philosophical doctrine. Here, some might say, coarseness of sensibility is matched with a delicate concern for order and concision. Alternatively, there are those who assert that there is no concept of deconstruction, and this, at least in part, because deconstruction as such does not really exist. Amongst these finer temperaments, it seems, the less concrete being that can be attributed to a thing, the more in fact it is. Here, the thin air of the *via negativa* provides a deeper inspiration. Adherents and opponents of deconstruction can of course argue for either position, but often enough the alignment is as follows: the deconstructor defends deconstruction by claiming that it does not exist (here the paradox serves in a loose way as an inverted validation); the antagonist, on the other hand, argues that deconstruction is reducible—whether by fair means or foul—to a finite set of axioms, which then opens the way for the critic of deconstruction towards the systematic refutation of its basic principles and presuppositions.

This pair of clearly opposed positions presents another useful point of entry into the *question* of deconstruction, posed here, in PART ONE, in its quidditative form: What is deconstruction? This pair of opposing claims about deconstruction can be characterized, rather schematically, as follows:

(1) Deconstruction is a theory, or a method of reading literary and philosophical texts, or a philosophical doctrine or movement; deconstruction is *something* about which it is possible to make (accurate) predications; deconstruction can be defined as a doctrine and subjected to critique.

(2) Deconstruction is not a theory, or a method of reading literary and philosophical texts, or a philosophical doctrine or movement; there are no (appropriate or accurate)

predications of deconstruction; deconstruction escapes conceptual circumscription; deconstruction should be preserved from reductive definitions; it repels the work of identification; deconstruction is irreducible to a set of rules, a program or project, and so on.

The opposition is set out here in the classical form of dialectical confrontation. In his *Deconstruction•Derrida*, Julian Wolfreys argues, in effect, for (2), which—when it follows rather than precedes (1)—would reclaim deconstruction from the process of domestication, institutionalization and technicization (largely, Wolfreys claims, an American phenomenon), which leads to (1).<sup>1</sup> The schematic opposition of (1) and (2) emerges boldly, if not always consistently, when Wolfreys sets out, in a gesture that recalls the debates of the 1980s, to ‘challenge the idea of a method, theory, school, analytical practice of “so-called ‘deconstruction’ ” ’ (Wolfreys 1998, 2).<sup>2</sup>

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Wolfreys’ first target is the idea of a *school* of deconstructors, wherein an assortment of different theorists are collected under the banner of deconstruction. Since deconstruction is not a theory or doctrine, since it is not *something* clearly identifiable, how, he wonders, can it provide the conceptual determinations of such a collection of theorists, forming a school? To be a school, deconstruction would require a mode of identity determining what is held in common by its members. What is ‘ignored in such a gesture,’ writes Wolfreys, ‘is the singularity of Derrida’s work, the idiomatic quality of his, or Miller’s, or de Man’s writing. This is a singularity,’ he continues, ‘which marks and is marked by the difference between the writing of these men, or the difference between, say, Derrida and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, Derrida and Peggy Kamuf, Nicholas Royle, or Geoffrey Bennington...’ (Wolfreys 1998, 8). Here Wolfreys emphasizes the word ‘singularity,’ which is, in effect—though Wolfreys does not explore this logic—that peculiar characteristic which both gathers and differentiates the critics and theorists he names.

With the assistance of Derrida, Wolfreys formalizes his reservations regarding the identification of a community of deconstructors. ‘Derrida has commented on the question of singularity, relationship and difference,’ writes Wolfreys, ‘with respect to

his work and that of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’ (8). He then quotes from the passage in ‘Desistance’ (‘Désistance’) where Derrida clarifies the relationship:

What I share with Lacoue-Labarthe, we also share, though differently, with Jean-Luc Nancy [writes Derrida]. But I hasten immediately to reiterate that despite so many common paths and so much work done in common, between the two of them and between the three of us, the work [*l’expérience*] of each remains, in its singular proximity, absolutely different; and this, despite its fatal impurity, is the secret of the idiom.... The most urgent thing would be to break with the family atmosphere [*les airs de famille*], to avoid genealogical temptations, projections, assimilations, or identifications. (Derrida 1987d, 602-3; Derrida 1989a, 6-7)

Wolfreys takes up the theme again after the quotation:

Any definition of ‘deconstruction’ as a method or school is one which relies on the ‘family atmosphere’ for the possibility of suppressing and denying difference and singularity, and as part of its identificatory, assimilatory project. It is precisely such gestures that Derrida’s work mediates against, and against which he cautions us above. The singularity of any text, whether ‘theoretical,’ ‘philosophical’ or ‘literary’ (such terms are problematic in that they make assumptions about family while ignoring difference), must always be respected. Any act of reading, which is also, always a response to the textual other, must aim to respect and respond to that singularity and difference. This is to respond ethically to a text, not imposing upon it some ready-made identity, some family likeness, which domesticates and calms down its play. Those who insist on deconstruction as a method of analysis are already imposing an identity on a heterogeneous range of texts and signatures. (8-9)

There are many issues that Wolfreys raises here, but let us wait for a moment or two before subjecting them to closer scrutiny.

Perhaps the original instance of the inappropriate appropriation of different theorists to the idea of deconstruction is with the promulgation of the idea of a *Yale School* of deconstruction, which is the founding myth of a community or coterie of deconstructors Wolfreys would like to debunk at the outset. The idea of a Yale School, says Wolfreys, is merely a result of oversimplification and compartmentalization, obliterating the heterogeneity in the critical writings of Bloom, Hartman, Miller and de Man for the sake of a glib historical characterization or generalization.

In this way, Wolfreys makes his first steps towards distinguishing certain usages of deconstruction—for example, to name and reduce the critical practice of different theorists working at Yale University—from *another* deconstruction, one whose tendency is ever to elude or escape definition and reduction. This disappropriating

maneuver echoes various interventions made by Derrida on a number of occasions with regard to the appropriation and philosophical mobilization of certain terms associated with deconstruction (and certainly the term 'deconstruction' in particular).<sup>3</sup> However, in making this familiar and straightforward point, the historiographic and taxonomic issues Wolfreys broaches (partly inadvertently perhaps), but does not develop, are complex and interesting enough to warrant some critical elaboration. Certainly, it is not unreasonable to attribute the idea of a Yale School of deconstruction to an overly hasty inclination towards the conflation of differences and singularities and to an identification of, or with, deconstruction. These factors are significant and ought to be taken into account, but what is perhaps more interesting is not to reject the idea of a Yale school on these grounds, but to consider the conditions for the appearance of the idea.

There is always a story to be told, a past that asks and aches for a telling, and this story both demands and supplies characters and characterizations, things and events, emphases and omissions. What happened at Yale in the late 1960s and 1970s was, perhaps, an inopportune and contingent or a fortuitous and predestined coincidence of theoretical radicalisms, *radical* in part precisely because they were linked by an impulse towards theory (that is, towards the extroversion of theory) and an engagement with philosophy.<sup>4</sup> This coincidence of critics who were critical *theorists* at Yale was instituted and commemorated in a publication entitled *Deconstruction and Criticism*, whose title was already an overstatement of its contributors' doctrinal fraternity. But nonetheless, something was formed there, between the covers of the book and in other places. Imaginary or otherwise—and who is fit to judge this critical distinction?—there was some *thing*, and it is *only as such* that its thinghood might be subsequently contested or revised or challenged.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of a Yale School becomes then part of the fabric of a history. Woven there by reiteration, by convenience, by condensation, by exclusion, by the unlikely miracle of instantiation, by acceding, for better or worse, to 'genealogical temptations, projections, assimilations,... [and] identifications' (Derrida 1987d, 602-03; Derrida 1989a, 7), it becomes one of the *things* which by a peculiar logic enter, and emerge from, history, or from a history. It is *always possible* to argue that there never was such a thing as a Yale School, that it was a convenient fiction. Nonetheless, somehow, there was the idea and its apparent referent, the School *itself*—if there ever was such a thing.<sup>6</sup> Is it

deconstruction that opens this idea, this thing, the School itself, to this qualification: 'if there ever was such a thing'? Clearly not, for this is the province of any revisionist historian, who asks characteristically, 'Was there ever really such a thing? Or was it merely a myth that settled over time into the complacency of fact and needs debunking?' Perhaps, nonetheless, it is deconstruction that *sustains* this qualification—sustains the spectrality of the thing. Deconstruction sustains this qualification and brings it into the present, applying it in particular to itself: *deconstruction—if there is such a thing*. It might be in this regard that something decisive can be asserted about the difference or different difference of deconstruction, but we shall have to wait and see.<sup>7</sup>

With the assistance of retrospection, and with a view to correcting the inclination to unification which drives the idea that there was, at Yale, a school for deconstruction, we might suggest a fairly uncontroversial corrective like the following one: the term 'deconstruction' is more appropriate as a description for the critical practice of de Man and Miller than for Bloom and Hartman. Of course, Bloom and Hartman have explicitly taken their distance from the school with which they were too hastily associated. And even within the deconstructive manifesto itself, Geoffrey Hartman's preface has the task of announcing what critical characteristics conjoin the contributors and how they are already divided: 'Derrida, de Man, and Miller are certainly bona-fide deconstructors, merciless and consequent, though each enjoys his own style of disclosing again and again the "abysm" of words. But Bloom and Hartman are barely deconstructionists. They even write against it on occasion' (Bloom 1979, ix). So the division within the school, such that it never was a school, was there from the beginning, from the moment and in the text of the school's very constitution as such.

What can be done then with the idea of a Yale School? Is it only a matter of *how quickly* we slide from the school to its dissolution in singularity? What chance has history at all in this volatile terrain? Singularity itself (if there is such a thing) is difficult and opaque, resistant and irreducible—it is, in fact, a pure resistance—but the *history* which necessitates the reduction of singularities, which compresses and conflates, it must find a sweeping curve through the fine debris of stars and tell a story there, amongst them, a sweet concatenation or a cruel line dogged by misfortune.<sup>8</sup> The historian must have the courage to publicize her interpretations, despite their intrinsic debility once constrained by elucidation. The story, which seeks to hold a world, or at

least to charm it into being, works best in the absence of alternatives. There, strengthened by internal rhyme and consequence, by the *exclusion of attention*, the yarn is so well-spun it pulls the wool over the most clear-eyed among us; even the inveterate skeptic, always ready to find a hole, is seduced into an uncharacteristic receptivity. Yet, even so, in time, its thread weakens, its grasp of an impending destiny diminishes; its taut conjunction of sufficient reasons is loosened; it is unable to hold out the rest and is overwhelmed.

In 1983, in his introduction to the collection entitled *The Yale Critics*, the critic Wallace Martin says of de Man and the others that they 'can be lumped together because regardless of how they differ, they represent what we (as critics, scholars, humanists, teachers, and perhaps citizens) should be against' (Martin 1983, xv). The 'we' in Martin's sentence is ironic (or double, or multiple): it is the communal first person plural of those subscribing as members of the critical community to the orthodoxy, you and I and Martin too, the indignant ones; it is a 'we' which contains Martin but from which he takes his distance in applying himself to the past of history. Martin then notes that the resistance to de Man and his colleagues at Yale is not a unique phenomenon but marks the moment of the emergence, the irruption, of each new or revisionary critical ideology within the context of established practices. That what is being resisted is called 'deconstruction' is not the ground of resistance, according at least to Martin's historical formalization (Martin 1983, xv-xvi). Deconstruction is simply the new kid on the block who stimulates the reflex of resistance and rejection, and in so doing (falsely) unites both proponents of the new and its antagonists too. Is there not some slight truth in this?

Thinking in these historical or historiographical (or quasi-historiographical) ways, two directions (which are not always discrete) are available to us:

- (1) We can gather similarities and samenesses together and name the class within which they are gathered. This, as I said, is always a contentious operation, prone to obstruction by way of counter-example. This gathering may serve many strategic ends, as, for example, in the case described by Martin.
- (2) We can break down classifications, determining their internal heterogeneities, and move towards what is sometimes called 'singularity,' towards a characterization of the object not under the heading of a class but as that which is unassimilable to the generality of the class.

Wolfeys argues against the idea of a school of deconstruction, at Yale or elsewhere, and in favor of the heterogeneous practices of the critics crudely 'lumped together' as deconstructors. However—and this is a characteristic of his analysis—this decisive and discrepant *heterogeneity* is the province of, is reserved for, deconstruction and deconstructors. This is their privilege, *as deconstructors*. And, surely, Wolfeys could not so readily name them (Bennington, Royle, Kamuf, *et al.*, and Wolfeys too of course), and certainly *uncontentiously*, unless they had not already, in a sense, been gathered as a group, however loose in its constitution, and been gathered *by him* and at the same time *in the common name of their singularity*.

This is the paradox which drives Wolfeys' argument at this point, though he does not perhaps make it explicit: it is the singularity of the deconstructor who is not a deconstructor which permits her to be gathered as recognizably a member of a class or group, however loosely constituted, which is identified with deconstruction only inasmuch as deconstruction demands and responds to singularity—a singularity (a singular deconstruction) which deconstructs the concept of deconstruction, and, indeed, which deconstructs the concept of concept (and so on). Wolfeys lays himself down in the heart of this paradox and speaks it for us, who can hear it all the better, it would seem, for its sleep-talking. Not *too* awake—as the analyst, ever alert, would say—it speaks clearly, for it does not resist, or is at least less resisted. Something is exposed which would otherwise have remained concealed.

But is deconstruction necessarily a case apart? Or is it *equally* a case apart? The different difference of deconstruction may reside here. Can deconstruction, can deconstructors, whether sleeping and less inhibited, or wide awake and vigilant, whether blind or insightful, inhabit this paradox? Perhaps, on account of their training, they are more at home there. Yet there would seem no justification for applying a classificatory apparatus to *other* things—to hermeneutics and hermeneuts, to phenomenology and phenomenologists, for example—but not to deconstruction or to deconstructors. There is no compelling reason for deconstruction to be more or less a pure resistance to the taxonomical inclination than anything else. It is not clear what is the source of this resistance, this pure resistance, coming from within or without, a resistance which is at the same time an infinite permeability. Is it the pure resistance and infinite permeability of the *word*? It is in this respect that deconstruction is, perhaps, *the singular example*, a

singular example amongst countless others. It is a word and it is the word of words, *deconstruction*—which is a word, no more nor less, *just a word*, and just like *any word*, it is *the Word* and *the exemplary word*: it is the word itself.<sup>9</sup>

Is it incumbent upon us then, as followers of Wolfreys, *not* to gather the deconstructors under this heading? In practice or in theory, it is always possible, utilizing various criteria, to make connections between critics and call them deconstructors, to link them according to interests, preoccupations, influences, idiom, lexicon, friendships, alliances, filiations, and strategies of argumentation. It is at least equally possible to do this with deconstructors as with others. (What directive would prohibit this activity? What would be this singular resistance?) Wolfreys himself has already done this in any case in order *then* to announce the dispersal of the collective and supervention of the (transcendent-immanent) value of singularity. It is singularity at whose precipice he teeters, but whose vertiginous vista he does not appear to see. Singularity, if there is such a thing, is an absolute obstacle, but for Wolfreys it paves the way to the thing which is not a thing. It must be said, however, it is not *certain* that he does not see it, the night of singularity, for what would be the singular sign of a seeing or a non-seeing? He does not see what obstructs the view when the light of the world is extinguished by singularity. Wolfreys sees only with the clarity of belonging to what nobody (else) can have: deconstruction, singularity. He sees with his heart on his sleeve and not concealed in his breast pocket where it belongs. Can he not see, can he not be seen all the more clearly for this? How are the *seeing* and the *being seen* to be organized and articulated? Though clearly we must approach Wolfreys *in his singularity*, there is some question about his visibility. Where is the deconstructor, if he is such a thing?

It is equally possible to talk about deconstruction in lexical terms. There is a set of words associated with Derrida's texts and hence with deconstruction: presence, logocentrism, dissemination, *différance*, aporia, hymen, pharmakon, trace, proper name, countersignature, inscription, specter, *khôra*, democracy-to-come, and so on. Similarly, there are preoccupations characteristic of critics and philosophers working under the influence of deconstruction. These form motifs in critical texts. Wolfreys himself rehearses one of these when he spends some time reflecting on the nature and status of the introduction in his introduction.<sup>10</sup> This is a classically deconstructive gesture, reproducing the discourse of impossible beginnings, of inside and outside, of limits and

so on. Even as this discourse is unavoidable, even as it responds to an implacable necessity, even as it is faithful to the tribulations of the thing itself, even as the problem of introduction (for example) never finds but always falls short of its final formulation, even so this theme becomes a stubbornly familiar item in the deconstructor's repertoire. Attention has been drawn to these things, a sensitivity has been cultivated, and a conditioned reflex, a habit or path of thought, has been formed. In a characteristic way, what solidifies here in repetitions and rehearsals adheres to the word 'deconstruction.'

Nonetheless, deconstruction is to be differentiated by the vigor of its resistance to this movement. It is not clear though, with deconstruction, and as a function of the different difference of deconstruction, how we determine that we are closer to the ideal of pure observation in which the 'singularity of the object' might appear. It is always possible that we are equi-distant—indeed, *radically* equi-distant—from this ideal or from its realization in fact, and this despite the equally radical non-homogeneity of those instances of distance which might come to be equated.

The one who uses the vocabulary of deconstruction and mobilizes some of its motifs, who mimics the style of the master, who produces the kind of arguments and discursive pirouettes associated with deconstruction—such a one, is, by these acts, a deconstructor. A genuine deconstructor? Perhaps such a one has mastered the *mechanics* of deconstruction (if there is such a thing), but he has not necessarily discovered its *spirit*. It is no simple task to discern the spirit of deconstruction within its professors. How can this delicate operation be performed? There is no method (or mechanics) of deconstruction, it is said, and this clears the way for the spirit, which moves mysteriously. What is there to be recognized? What is the sign? The one who argues that there is no such thing as deconstruction and that nor are there deconstructors is on the right track. By this denial, he is all the more true to deconstruction, all the more a true deconstructor for advocating its unavailability as such, which is deconstruction's distinctive sophistication.<sup>11</sup> Or, alternatively, he may be merely the mouthpiece for a received wisdom which does not, itself, *think* (whatever *that* might be).

There *must be* signs of thinking, of a thinking which is not mere automatic mouthing or the output of a method or mechanics. How can we tell where there is *thinking*? How can we tell where there is genuine invention? There is, then, a thought which is singular, which *thinks*, and this thought somehow has tuned itself more than the others to the



exigency in thinking. This impetus can be discerned, surely. It can be registered. There is an *evaluative* mechanism which discerns the presence of thinking.

Wolfeys reminds us that Derrida says that deconstruction is *what happens or comes to pass* (55). If deconstruction is, as Derrida says, *what happens*, then to be true to deconstruction is to be true to what happens: this impossible approach to things themselves, to what happens, is truth itself, classically. But deconstruction is the *approach* towards what happens *and* what happens; deconstruction is, in a sense, what does not happen *in* what happens, for the happening can be nothing less than the arrival of the thing itself. Deconstruction divides here, along with truth. The different difference of deconstruction resides here, with what happens. What happens *cannot but* happen, even if its happening does not happen—that is, *cannot be determined as happening or having happened*. In the 'what happens' of deconstruction, where is the distinctive distinction? *There is a distinction*, but it is indistinguishable in its distinctiveness. For example: *deconstruction is a word*.

Perhaps the 'de-' in deconstruction tends to the singularity, tends to the *affirmation* of the singularity precisely as a pure resistance (for example, a resistance to the reduction in construction). Can deconstruction possess its pure resistance as its distinguishing feature? This appears problematic. Can it have its pure resistance, as what it is, and still say *yes* to what happens—that is, *abandon all resistance*? Or are these two, resistance and abandonment, in some sense, the same? They are absolutely irreconcilable and they divide experience along its central axis. They cannot be extricated. This is the territory of deconstruction.

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There is a clear case, for Wolfeys, wherein deconstruction relinquished its singular destiny, abandoned its resistance to appropriation, and acquiesced to institutionalization and technicization—and that is within the American academy. In this environment, deconstruction lost its alterity and became a thing. It congealed. It succumbed. It became a variant of New Criticism. To this extent, the myth of the Yale School was symptomatic of a capture by the institution. The pathway for deconstruction into the American literary institution was too easy. The American deconstructors succumbed to

the idea, explicit or implicit, of a method of deconstruction. The method had at its center the figure of Derrida, who *is*, in a sense, deconstruction, its earthly messenger.

Yet the Yale School example complicates this transmission. It is not so clear that for the four Yale theorists, Derrida is the absolute reference point. They are each, in their way, 'strong' theorists, 'strong' critics, to use the agonistic terminology Bloom applies to poets under the influence. Hence there must be a distinction between the fallen deconstruction and the fallen deconstructors Wolfeys detects in the domestication of American deconstruction, and those singular deconstructors, some American, Wolfeys reserves for approbation. It ought to be possible, according to Wolfeys' argument, to distinguish those more demonstrably *apprenticed* to Derrida (and hence, perhaps, to deconstruction, though this entailment requires clarification) from those thinking and writing, in a sense, more independently (whatever it is that signals this independence). But it would be hard to say then which ones are getting it right. There are those for whom deconstruction is one influence amongst others, though perhaps a prominent one, and those for whom Derrida, by way of filiation, is the law. In its corrupted American instance, deconstruction succumbs to the tyrannical transmission of method, wherein *thinking* is reduced to mechanical fidelity to the method, but in other places and other cases, deconstructors are notable for their singularity of thought. Yet this singularity is at the same time a greater fidelity to deconstruction and hence a more responsible apprenticeship. Though these are not easy discriminations, it ought to be possible to make them—at least in theory.

The urgency for the apprentice (let us call him that for the time being) is to interpret the law concealed in the words of the law-giver in order to know what it is. That is: *there is the law*, but what it is requires clarification. There are those who cannot help but seek to extract from the master's many words, to assemble from the many clues, the rules of engagement: judgments of right and wrong, good and bad, directives and evaluations, imperatives, prescriptions and proscriptions. They cannot help but seek a *method* too, for what is method but the answer to *how it is done*. Method is its condition of possibility. To acquire the method is to claim the secret. The exact details of method are the province of the master.

There is an ambivalence here, however: sometimes it is preferable not to know how it is done, even then to *deny* that there is a method, as if for there to be such a method

would be altogether too much demystification: *the machine in the ghost*. To deny that there is a method, to deny that there is a secret, is to keep the secret safe.

Method has an intrinsic relationship with secrecy. The method itself may be a closely guarded secret. Where the method is laid out, by numbers, purporting to expose every detail of the practice, as when a chef transcribes the recipe which holds the secret to her culinary creation, there is always *something essential to the method* which is omitted from or which cannot quite be exposed in the formulation of the method. The dish refuses to be accurately reproduced *just from the method*. Something essential to the method of the dish is not articulated in the recipe, however detailed. There is an ingredient of the method which escapes methodization. Some special touch is left out. The *spirit* of the dish is lost in the transcription. After all, however comprehensive, the method is a mere mechanical abstraction.

Is it that there is no method of deconstruction? Characteristically, the deconstructor says, 'Method, if there is such a thing....' But driven by circumstance and strategy, the deconstructor sometimes strengthens opposition to methodization and asserts more bluntly that *there is no method of deconstruction*. This is Wolfreys' assertion. But what does this mean? It means that deconstruction is not the product of a program, project, calculation, or set of calculations. Deconstruction is not something an apprentice can acquire by the transmission of method in the scene of instruction. Deconstruction is not reducible to a set of moves, or to a structure or pattern which can be abstracted from a series of deconstructions, and which would then determine its essence or essential characteristics. *There is no method of deconstruction* means that there is no set of rules that prescribes how a deconstruction is to be performed and which therefore (pre)determines the outcome. Method is a strategy of duplication and homogenization with the aim of producing or reproducing the same.

It is not clear that deconstruction would be recognizable without a method. How, in the absence of essential features common to all deconstructions, is deconstruction recognizable? What is the difference or different difference of deconstruction which then differentiates and identifies each deconstruction *as deconstruction* and not something else (critique, for instance)? Perhaps it is the *different* difference of deconstruction that it not be recognizable according to an intersection or collusion of

predicates—that it tend, constitutively, towards something else. Deconstruction *resists*. But clearly this is already the paradox.

Though without the same resources, Wolfreys accompanies Derrida on the path to a defamiliarization of deconstruction, cleansing it of its sedimentation. *There is no method of deconstruction*. Deconstruction cannot or ought not to be 'technicized,' says Wolfreys (35). The rejection of the idea of a method of deconstruction functions within a strategy of disappropriation. There is a deconstruction of deconstruction. Deconstruction is detached or partially dislodged from its institutional accretions, where over time it has settled with a new complacency into thinghood within a system of calculations, transmissions, translations and adjudications of things. These sediments and accretions, to which the notion of a method of deconstruction adheres, are intrinsic to a process of constitution. They say that *deconstruction is in time*. It is constituted there. This strategic desedimentation is a liberation of deconstruction from the plethora of predications which would identify it.

The articulation of the method performs an interesting service. At a preliminary point, the method is identified with the master. The master and the method are one. Those apprenticed to the method will be apprenticed to the master. The master guarantees the method. At this stage, the method does not exist without the master. It is his secret. But the formulation of the method detaches the practice from its sovereign practitioner or practitioners. This is an ambiguous detachment. On the one hand, it is a gesture towards universalization and democratization. The method is raised from the contingency of history and the locality of the master into the form of a universal transmissibility. But on the other hand, the formulation of the method simply withdraws the practice from the control of its prime promulgator.

Deconstruction has entered the world, though whence it came, and what it is, is not entirely clear. It will be appropriated, and has been. It always already has been. One of its characteristic moments will be to leave residues from repetitions, to produce repetitions, structurally and stylistically, and to lead to the formulation of many methods, as the image and images of these repetitions, each subordinate to the *idea of a method*. That is, *that there is a method, that there is a way of deconstruction*. It has such a destiny at least. Can it be resisted? Such a resistance, dogged and persistent, would be the different difference of deconstruction, setting it apart from the others. It is the others,

then, which abandon resistance and surrender to the transcendental idea of a method—which is irresistible.

Though gestures of disappropriation seem to want to maintain the difficulty and integrity of a non- or only quasi-conceptual deconstruction, at the same time these gestures maintain another propriety and property. Wolfreys, for his part, makes this clear. His stratagems of disappropriation are repeated and form a pattern or structure: the disappropriation of deconstruction always takes place in the name of the father of deconstruction; it is accompanied invariably by his authorization and his blessing. Wolfreys returns the thing which is not a thing to the one who proclaims its law and its non-thingness. It is a gift. *Here it is, for you, it is yours, as you have said, and, here, I have returned it to you.*

Wolfreys will possess deconstruction. He formulates its seven commandments, derived from Hillis Miller, and lays them out each with a bullet (Wolfreys 1998, 14).<sup>12</sup> No one can possess deconstruction. There is no such thing as deconstruction. This non-thingness of deconstruction, which belongs to Wolfreys, he shares with the father of deconstruction, unto whose care it is rendered. Wolfreys has it to himself, and has the father's blessing too. At the same time, he recognizes an ('impossible') community of singular theorists formed in the image of the deconstruction which he elaborates in his book. They share in it through him. It is in this way that the strategy of a disappropriation of deconstruction—which may also be a strategy of the detachment of deconstruction from negative theology—tends, in a way no longer governed by the initiating strategy, towards a negative theology of deconstruction—invariably the limit of a radical disappropriation. Without doubt, there is a divine method at work here.

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It is clear that we need to be careful about the question of method. We should not be too hasty to malign the notion of method. Method is the theory of a practice. Method is a logic. In this sense, method points towards the condition of possibility. Method is a condition of possibility—of production—that appears, as a precondition, with the realization or the product: *something* has been produced; therefore there was a way in which it was produced; the way it was produced was its method of production. Method

is another term in the representational system of determination and reference.

Deconstruction refers us to its method as though to *what it is*, as though to what *makes it* what it is. The method of deconstruction makes it what it is. The statement that *there is no method of deconstruction* cannot undo the referential exigency by which deconstruction is referred to its method.

There is a difference that remains difficult to establish: the difference between *there is no method* and *there is no method of deconstruction*. Deconstruction deconstructs the transcendental moment of method. What is this difference then? The statement that *there is no method*—which supports the ethics of undecidability, wherein responsibility cannot be surrendered to method—has a partner, which states bluntly that *there is no meta-language*. There is no meta-language because there is no clear way of distinguishing the two orders, language and meta-language, such that one might govern the other. At the same time, though, language always refers to (its) meta-language according to the logic of the referential exigency: *there is only meta-language*.

Where is the method? The method is abstracted from an instance or a series or set of instances. It is an interpretation or formalization. Method is transcendental and quasi-transcendental.<sup>13</sup> It *reads* and *reads into*. The method emerges, like an ideology, as the law of the object. Deconstruction often recognizes the moment of the method: it recognizes how a method is functioning in a theoretical text, introducing its regular and singular distortion. Insofar as the reading of the object is dictated by the method, the reading is a *misreading* of the object, indifferent to its singularity. It is method that obscures the singularity of the object. It is true: *the method is the way something is executed*.

It is not immediately clear how this execution of the method can be exceeded.

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The question Wolfreys pursues is: 'Is there some *thing* called deconstruction?' (25). In his pursuit of the question of deconstruction's thingness, Wolfreys examines a number of introductory accounts of deconstruction, hoping to correct them if they mistakenly substantivize deconstruction. 'The making of deconstruction into some *thing*,' says Wolfreys, 'is usually the first part of an all too common critical gesture of definition for

the purpose of attack' (43). The de-thinging of deconstruction is a strategy in the context of its institutionalization, and it follows Derrida's lead: 'Derrida has insisted on a number of occasions that there is no such thing as deconstruction, that it is not formalizable...' (49).

'The question of deconstruction,' says Wolfreys, 'is a question of questioning the structuring of the parameters within which argumentation, critical thinking, analysis, interpretation all take place' (Wolfreys 1998, 44). But this 'question of questioning the structuring of the parameters' is not a method. This is made quite clear: it is a *questioning*. Furthermore, 'Deconstruction cannot be practised because there is not an aspect of Derrida's work which, when translated, can be turned into a theory which then can, in turn, be put into practice as a method of reading, *pace* Eagleton [*et al.*]...' (47).

Despite the density of its inquisition, deconstruction remains elusive. '[T]he "deconstructive,"' says Wolfreys, 'is that which escapes and exceeds the programme and which questions the very idea of the programme.... The necessity of reading, perhaps as that which the singularity of any text can teach us,' he continues, 'is the very idea of a resistance to a programme, to programmaticity in general; deconstruction might then be said to be that resistance which affirms the textual' (51). This notion of *resistance* is essential, as we have seen. It is linked in a complex way to singularity. But Wolfreys is a little hasty in this perilous terrain. Deconstruction 'provoke[s] singular readings' (53), he says. It pursues '[t]he idea of the singular reading...' (54). There is, however, an intrinsic tension between the singular reading and the textual (in general), the same tension that inhabits the idea of the *singular reading*, which is already quite paradoxical. It is not possible to mobilize the idea of the singular reading against method because this idea already participates in the same identificatory and universalizing movement as method. The idea of the singular reading is either abstracted from singular readings or it is their program. Thus Wolfreys teaches us that *there are no singular readings*. The singular reading to come is an ideal. It is not clear what imperative leads us to adopt this ideal. The singularity is a *pure* resistance. It is unreadable.

The prominence of the word 'singularity' is symptomatic of a problem for Wolfreys, and not just for him. Too much has already been invested in the word 'deconstruction.' The drama of radical differentiation by which Wolfreys would preserve the word

'deconstruction' from appropriation constructs an identity for deconstruction even as he moves deliberately in the other direction. The structure of his maneuver, which separates deconstruction from the others, is that of an identificatory differentiation. Is there any other kind? What is requisite is to determine the *different* difference of deconstruction.

As though conceding the persistent and malevolent coincidence of identification and differentiation, and abandoning the pursuit of the different difference of deconstruction, Wolfreys derives from Hillis Miller a set of deconstructive commandments, which he sets out boldly in bulleted form:

- deconstruction is not the same every time; each reading differs from the ones already gone and those to follow
- the work of one critic is not like that of another; therefore there can be no deconstructive method, much less a school of deconstruction; de Man reads towards generalization, Derrida reads the singular and idiomatic
- deconstruction transforms the text by imitating its every move, its every contour, doing so in such a fashion that, through the closeness of the reading, the alogical is unveiled
- deconstruction does not do anything; it only performs what is already done by and in the text being read; it does not take things apart, it is not an operation, it only reveals how things are put together
- what is performed is the absence of any ground, origin or centre, an absence which is not imposed by deconstructive reading but which is revealed as at the heart of the text through good reading
- one can never say what deconstruction is because deconstruction does not allow for such statements
- all conceptual, abstract or universal terms are self-contradicting because they have elements within their conceptualization which make their final meaning or value undecidable (Wolfreys 1998, 14)

It is unimaginable that Wolfreys could comprehend these formulations, laid out in this fashion, as *not* identificatory. Yet it does appear that Wolfreys comprehends these formulations in this way. They are anti-identificatory, he implies. What kind of (radical) disjunction of form and content, of theory and practice, of description and performance, makes this comprehension possible?<sup>14</sup> There would seem to be a transference factor at work, perhaps, or a force of law, or a logic of apprenticeship, or a resistance, but its mechanism is not transparent.



What distinguishes the effect of command or mastery or control over the play of (self-)contradiction and paradox in, say, Derrida, from the (apparently) *symptomatic* version Wolfreys presents for us here with remarkable candor and acuity? The distinction we borrowed from de Man in Chapter One was that between a *deliberate* and a *passive* knowledge. But it is not clear how to make this distinction within the emergent field of a *general symptomaticity*, for example, or *general deconstructibility*, which is the place in which the different difference of *deconstruction*, real or ideal, is equally an effect of the other.

There is, nonetheless, an interesting result from the strategy of a disappropriation, desedimentation and demethodization of deconstruction. Where does this strategy lead? Where does the movement of differentiation and de-differentiation which we pursue, with Wolfreys, terminate? For Wolfreys, it leads, without doubt, towards *deconstruction*. He does not make this explicit. He does not express this in the form of deliberate knowledge, but, even so, the trajectory is clear. The strategy leads towards the word. This radical disappropriation is a reduction—and an expansion—of deconstruction towards the *word*—that is, towards the word 'deconstruction.' At this limit, accommodated and dispossessed, *deconstruction is a word*. It is singular and anonymous in a world of words.<sup>15</sup>

Wolfreys quotes Derrida from 'Letter to a Japanese Friend': 'The word "deconstruction", like all other words...' (Derrida 1987d, 392; Derrida 1991b, 275; Wolfreys 1998, 52). Though often he shows signs of a deep reticence and reluctance in this regard, it is Derrida's task to make of the word 'deconstruction' an *exemplary word*. It is an example of the word, of the Word. It is the word of words. It is just a word. It is the master word or wordless word which makes possible all words. It is dispensable and indispensable. It is a mere word. What is deconstruction? What *thing* is deconstruction? This is the theme of Chapter Three: *Deconstruction is a word*.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Note that, implicitly, there may be a (2) before (1), and perhaps an oscillation of (1) and (2), a cyclical or simultaneous theorizing and detheorizing of deconstruction.

<sup>2</sup> Wolfreys quotes the phrase 'so-called "deconstruction"' from Hillis Miller.

<sup>3</sup> In this regard, see 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' ('Lettre à un ami japonais') (Derrida 1987d; Derrida 1991b), but also many interviews. At the same time, Derrida points to the impossibility of appropriation, and to its inevitability: there will always be (gestures of)

appropriation; there will never be *appropriation as such* (as the closure of the circumscriptive or incorporative movement announced in the term 'appropriation').

<sup>4</sup> See Hartman's remarks in the preface to *Deconstruction and Criticism* (Bloom 1979, viii-ix).

<sup>5</sup> With a different emphasis, it could well be possible to say something about the *principle of selection* (deliberate or otherwise) that produced *Deconstruction and Criticism*, and hence determined the patriarchs of the Yale School as de Man, Miller, Bloom and Hartman. Thus we can imagine or propose other Yale Schools, ones less confined by the shape and composition of this quadripartition. These alternative groupings, these different inclusions, exclusions and principles of selection—would they still be the Yale School or would they be something else? In his Afterword to *The Yale Critics*, Jonathan Arac notes, 'If the history of the Yale Critics has been the history of a misunderstanding, it has nonetheless occurred' (Arac 1983, 197). This is the limit called 'fact.' But this *having occurred*, much like the thinghood of the Yale School, must still continue to traverse the field of an infinite tenuousness on the path to its historical substantiation.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Johnson describes the myth of a Yale School without collapsing its 'fictional identity' with 'historical reality': 'The impact of places like Harvard, Yale, Duke, and so on is based on a fictional identity which corresponds only loosely to the facts and the actual curriculum, since it represses internal struggles and differences. Nevertheless, belief in that fictional identity gives it a certain historical reality through its effects' (Johnson 1994, 77).

<sup>7</sup> Towards the end of *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, Derrida reflects on the phrase 'if there is such a thing' (which has become such a signal qualification) in the context of what he discerns as the characteristic relation to a certain tenuousness of things in Nancy. 'Le geste déconstructeur de Nancy,' writes Derrida, 's'inscrit donc souvent dans la forme de «il n'y a pas "le"» ou «il n'y a pas "la"»... On en perçoit bien la nécessité. Mais Nancy sait lui-même qu'il lui faut ruser, transiger, négocier avec elle. Elle risquerait de le priver de toute détermination conceptuelle et à la limite de tout discours—ou de livrer celui-ci à l'empirisme le plus irresponsable.... L'article défini ou définissant est déjà engagé et requis par le discours qui le conteste. C'est avec cette limite et dans cette transaction que s'explique Nancy, en ce corps à corps de la pensée. Et la déconstruction aussi. Non, *les* déconstructions, car il n'y a surtout pas, non plus, «la» déconstruction. Écrivant cela, je m'aperçois que le syntagme qui s'est imposé à moi ces dernières années (ou décennies), et alors même que j'insistais sur la multiplicité des déconstructions, ce n'est pas «il n'y a pas "le"» ou «il n'y a pas "la"», mais «s'il y en a» (le pur et l'inconditionnel sous tant et tant de formes: l'événement, l'invention, le don, le pardon, le témoignage, l'hospitalité, etc., «s'il y en a»). Chaque fois il fallait faire signe vers le possible (la condition de possibilité) *comme* vers l'impossible même. Et le «s'il y en a» ne dit pas «il n'y en a pas» mais il n'y a là rien qui puisse donner lieu à une preuve, à un savoir, à une détermination constative ou théorique, à un jugement, surtout pas à un jugement déterminant. C'est une autre manière de décliner le «il n'y a pas "le"». Ce n'est pas la même, justement, et voilà deux gestes «déconstructifs» irréductiblement différents' (Derrida 2000, 323-24). These are important remarks, but it is not possible to follow them up at this stage other than to suggest a couple of queries.

(1) In *The Trespass of the Sign*, Kevin Hart suggests that 'we should be wary of using the singular..., for it is by no means self-evident that "deconstruction" is univocal' (Hart 1989, 107). Have we been wary enough in this regard? What if the question of the different difference of deconstruction were to become a question of the difference between deconstructions, and between deconstructors (if there are such things)? Would not the original question be undone? This would be a natural progression, and, in a sense, it cannot but be always borne in mind, inasmuch as we are mindful of the Aporia of the One and the Many. But, precisely because of this aporia, it is not clear that the issue resolves as a one-way movement from deconstruction towards deconstructions, in what has become a classically



postmodern pluralization (knowledge to knowledges, etc.). The moment of the presumption of the singular tends towards multiplication, as though towards an adequation. However, the question of deconstruction (in its unity or in its singularity) persists within deconstructions, just as the irreducibility of 'deux gestes «déconstructifs»' is at the same time an ever-reducibility. Derrida makes this clear in the remarks that follow the passage quoted above: 'Ce n'est pas la même, justement, et voilà deux gestes «déconstructifs» irréductiblement différents. Il reste que cette multiplicité s'annonce «déconstructive». Il faut rendre compte de cette analogie ou de cette affinité, dire encore la déconstruction au singulier pour dire au pluriel, au «singulier-pluriel»...' (324). Keeping the two inclinations (towards a pluralization, towards the singular) in mind, as we must, it is not clear what moral, if any, can be drawn from this lesson in discriminating deconstruction(s).

(2) There is no doubting the necessity of the 's'il y en a,' which signals 'vers le possible (la condition de possibilité) comme vers l'impossible même.' What kind of adequating movement is this? There is what happens and there is the adequation to what happens, and there is an enormous, unbearable tension here, between possibility and impossibility. Does the 's'il y en a' bridge this divide with a sign? Does the 's'il y en a' achieve the impossible? If not, it is unclear what the 's'il y en a,' while remaining an indispensable addition, then contributes. If the 's'il y en a' is already harbored, in a sense, in the thing, in the *peut-être* of and which is the thing, if every thing already pronounces its 's'il y en a' in silent accompaniment, what does the 's'il y en a' itself expose or manifest? It is hard to say, but surely something is brought out. But what *more* can the 's'il y en a' say than what is already said in the thing, quivering on the cusp as it is? The 's'il y en a' is double in any case, at once a brusque dismissal of the ontological dilemma (if there is such a thing), and an anguish before the necessity that it be (there *must be* such a thing!). Maybe the 's'il y en a' brings out the doubt in being. It makes its obeisance before the god *Peut-Être*, whose rule is a peculiar one. However, this persistent and prolific qualification ('s'il y en a'), which always threatens to intervene at every level and at every moment, like an insatiable hesitation, is at the same time of course a failure of nerve, if you like. It is the falling away from things. It is *their* falling away. The *peut-être* creeps in like an insidious weakness of the spirit, an inability to materialize. To write in the brute impossibility of assertion is to do so without the luxury of 's'il y en a,' which is, in its own way, a retreat from the risk and the surprise and even the responsibility of writing. To make a *statement* is already to risk everything. It is here perhaps that deconstruction and psychoanalysis, for example, part ways. In the clinic, the analysand comes to say 'I' in the heart of its impossibility, a terrible endurance or fraudfulness, without any deliverance or redemption by way of the 's'il y en a.' This rough road leads back of course towards a different resolution—towards the virtues associated with the normative expressions 'failure of nerve,' 'weakness,' 'luxury,' 'retreat,' 'endurance,' 'resolution,' and so on, which begin to form a picture. Do these virtues resist the 's'il y en a' or do they scorn it? Decisions and directions like these mark out a path on which one can almost distinguish the signs of the different difference of deconstruction, inscribed there in their singularity.

<sup>8</sup> It is not clear that there can be a 'reduction of singularities,' or a compression and conflation of singularities. The singularity is, in itself, irreducible and inaccessible, inexhaustible and impossible. The reduction of singularity only transpires without *any effect upon* or *any communication with* singularities understood in this way. Or, perhaps, the singularity is (re)constituted in the inevitable movement of (for example, conceptual) reduction *at every level*. There is, then, of course, the singularity of *each and every* reduction itself.

<sup>9</sup> This is the theme of Chapter Three, 'Deconstruction is a Word.'

<sup>10</sup> 'The first chapter....' says Wolfreys, 'aims to situate itself as another introduction, and to complicate the idea of the introduction by supplementing this introduction....' A little later: 'From a certain "Derridean" perspective, the problem of "introducing" Derrida or

deconstruction is troubled by the very idea of an "introduction." ' (Wolfreys 1998, 2, 5). Wolfreys follows these remarks with a consideration of the status of the introduction. Interestingly, Wolfreys' book belongs to a series ('Transitions') which he edits for St. Martin's Press and whose task is broadly 'introductory': 'The readings offered in these books,' says Wolfreys in the General Editor's Preface, 'seek... to demonstrate certain possibilities in critical thinking to the student reader' (Wolfreys 1998, x). It is not clear then whether Wolfreys' book, as a work destined for the 'student reader,' is to be read according to different criteria from a work aimed at those at the cutting edge of a mature scholarly debate. Do these general prefatory remarks change how we read Wolfreys' book?

The problematic place of the introduction or preface, with its classical Derridean instance in the opening section of *Dissemination* (*La dissémination*) called 'Hors Livre' (Derrida 1972a), is summarized by Sarah Kofman in 'Un philosophe «unheimlich», in *Lectures de Derrida*. 'Si la préface n'est pas relevable dans le procès de la vérité,' writes Kofman, 'c'est qu'elle est sans lieu propre, échappant aux catégories dialectiques; parce que n'étant ni au dedans ni au dehors du livre, inscrite en deux lieux à la fois, hybride, la préface-biface est en même temps postface: l'anticipation et la récapitulation se rejoignent circulairement' (Kofman 1984, 97).

<sup>11</sup> Recall that Derrida insists in a number of places that deconstruction is not a negative theology. See, for example, 'Différance': 'This unnameable is not an ineffable being which no name could approach: God, for example' (Derrida 1972b, 28; Derrida 1982, 26).

<sup>12</sup> I quote Wolfreys' deconstructive axioms below.

<sup>13</sup> On the (quasi-)notion of the 'quasi-transcendental,' see, for example (and with reference also to Gasché's employment of the term), Derrida, 'Comme si c'était possible, «within such limits»' (Derrida 1998a, 510).

<sup>14</sup> Alternatively: What kind of (radical) *conjunction* of form and content, of theory and practice, of description and performance, would harmonize a formulation with what it formulates?

<sup>15</sup> This path that leads away from methodization towards the word, as though towards a materiality, has not yet left method behind. There is a method in the word. It reads thus, like a recipe: take the fourth letter of the English alphabet and place it at the beginning; take the fifth letter and place it after the fourth letter; take the third letter of the alphabet and place it after the previous letter; and so on. The spelling of the word, whereby it can be recognized, is removed from contingency and individual aberration by formalization in a method, which is the method of ('de)construction(').

## Deconstruction is a Word

There is a question that guides my inquiry in PART ONE and, although it is already Chapter Three, it is not clear that it has been answered satisfactorily. If we close our eyes tightly, it may be that we can hear it again, echoing gently in this blank space:

—What is deconstruction?, asks the question.

Keeping our eyes tightly shut like the best of readers, let us keep a quiet ear for a reply to the guiding question, for no doubt it will come, and perhaps with only the slightest of invocations:

—What is deconstruction?, asks the question.

—*Deconstruction is a word*, comes the reply, without hesitation.

The response is sure and unequivocal. There are those who will be convinced just by the clarity and forcefulness of such an assertion, delivered with complete calm and assurance—and these ones willing to believe will not necessarily be only the foolish ones. 'This statement carries some conviction,' its hearers might well say, and, indeed, we can be certain that the conviction is looking to transmit itself from the one to the others. But whence came this response? From what region? What lips have shaped it? From whose thought has it issued? Who is the respondent? Is it someone whose judgment we can trust? Can we trust a response offered with barely a sign of thinking? Can we lend it our conviction? It is with some regret that we accede to the fact that the reply which arrived so fortuitously, which came to us like a gift, must be interrogated.

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Though we have heard the reply come through with clarity, there is at least one among us who is the voice of caution. He reflects a current of opinion, somewhat muddled in recent times, which argues the following: beyond the place where rhetorical contrivance holds the gullible under its spell, and beyond the idiosyncrasy and fallibility of individual or collective belief, is the domain of truth—*truth is beyond belief*, for not everything that is said or thought is in fact the case. Surely the very least that can be requested of an answer to the guiding question is that it aspire to be a true one. So, naturally, and only in order to make explicit what already lies implicit in the answer given without hesitation to the guiding question, a supplementary question is posed:

—Is it *true* that deconstruction is a word?

If the short word rendered here in italics is given its full weight, then a measured response to the question becomes far more difficult to formulate. The peculiar measure called 'truth' has shown some resistance to the philosopher's rusty scalpel: under close and protracted scrutiny, it has been at best tantalizingly enigmatic and at worst thoroughly ill-disposed towards theorization—so much so that theories of truth are now often called 'deflationary' and would consign a hollow or punctured truth to the margins of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Truth is no longer a wheel that can take us very far, claim the deflationists.

It is true that difficulty of explication sometimes results in the demotion of a problem: the problem of truth, for instance, is now considered not a deep or interesting but a superficial and trivial one. There could be some justification for following this evasive course, avoiding a detour into the murky terrain of truth theories by taking the value of the word 'truth' here as largely emphatic: the prefatory 'Is it true that...?' asks merely for (at least) a gesture of justification; that a bare assertion be decked for show in the translucent garb of reason. But it ought to be understood that such an expedient strategy could easily miss what is interesting about the way the notion of truth both prompts and repels analysis, for the question of truth is in all likelihood the one that opens the interrogation.

Provisionally then, and allowing a number of questionable elements to inhabit the response parenthetically (these will be taken up as we proceed), let us say this much:

—Clearly it is true (or at least tautological) that (the word) ('')deconstruction('') belongs in the class of things which are words.

This configures the problem less elegantly and with more overt complication than the reply we heard while listening, the reply we overheard, the reply offered without hesitation, which stated simply that *deconstruction is a word*. The complications that insist in this new formulation will take some time to be extracted. Nonetheless, despite the attendant clutter, the patent self-evidence of the original assertion does remain, if in an attenuated form. We could well build on it and make the claim that it is indeed *only as a word* that deconstruction can appear in such an inquiry at all, where it is the object of the guiding question, 'What is deconstruction?'

Of course, there may be an alternative and more favorable circumstance for the pursuit of such an investigation: suppose a group of fellow inquirers were gathered together in the same room rather than communicating indirectly by way of printed signs on the page, and suppose the occasion was a presentation entitled 'What is Deconstruction?' Would this situation not permit the presentation of deconstruction other than as the mere inscription of the word? Yet, despite the presentational advantages which such a situation offers, it would be difficult to display a specimen of a deconstruction, prostrate upon the table, so that it could readily be examined, or even indicated ostensively. Deconstruction is not that kind of thing, nor is it alone in presenting this difficulty. No doubt, nonetheless, in such a presentation the word would feature prominently. Its presence would galvanize the discussion and give it coherence. It would probably find itself inscribed boldly on a whiteboard, naked and visible to every clear-sighted person present.

If it is *only* as a word that deconstruction can appear, here or elsewhere, on the page or in the collective presence of a gathering of fellow inquirers, then perhaps there is no deconstruction where the word does not appear. This seems however an unlikely proposition. Clearly there may still be deconstruction where the *word* does not appear. Hence these two contrapuntal claims must be kept in mind:

1. It is only as a word that deconstruction can appear.

2. There may be deconstruction where the word does not appear.

Perhaps a deconstruction might be *performed* in conjunction with the word, as a surgeon demonstrates an appendectomy to a group of medical students. Deconstruction would be, in this case, a procedure or operation.<sup>2</sup> This seems quite reasonable. Where the word deconstruction does not appear, nonetheless a deconstruction may be operating or being performed. To become familiar with the occasions when such a performance is made explicit, by strict correlation with the word, would be a sufficient prerequisite to recognize deconstruction in other cases, even in the absence of any overt indication that such is the name of what goes on here. Where the *signs* of deconstruction are present, then could it be identified.

Of course, these signs could be feigned. What is observable could be a pseudo-deconstruction, exhibiting the traits of the operation, some of its characteristic elements, but only to support the pretense. At this point some further criterion is required. Though the guiding question demands that we summon deconstruction *itself*, or at the very least that we invoke its spirit, some care must be exercised that what answers the call is not a false representative.

There is another problem too: some deconstructors teach a doctrine that there is *already* deconstruction taking place or operating in the text subject to deconstruction. This was the assertion made by Paul de Man when reading Derrida's reading of Rousseau's logocentrism in *Of Grammatology*.<sup>3</sup> And sometimes this kind of observation is extended without limit to include all texts: deconstruction is always already here. In such a circumstance, deconstruction could well be as ubiquitous as words themselves. It may, in some curious and spectral way, inhabit every word we speak. Hence it will be difficult to separate a deconstruction from everything else, since everything will, in a sense, be already in the process of deconstructing or self-deconstructing.

Yet these thoughts are something of a distraction from the simplicity of the original reply, which affirmed without hesitation that *deconstruction is a word*. So let us allow for the moment that the performance of deconstruction significant at this very early stage is simply one of its most primitive and benign instances: the mere utterance of the word, which may be spoken flippantly and in passing or slowly and with gravity. For example, on the one hand:

—Deconstruction

Or, again, and alternatively:

—Deconstruction

Hearing it again in this way, in all its simplicity, and attending to its nature (as we have been reminded to), there is greater confidence in affirming that, *yes*, deconstruction is certainly a word. Perhaps even *first and foremost* a word.

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But the 'first and foremost' raises a query. The 'What is...?' (or quidditative) question does not usually rest with one predicate or a single identification. It gathers attributes in the manifold of a concept. It is not clear that what deconstruction *is* is reducible to its wordness. Does the response, 'Deconstruction is a word,' respond to the *essence* of the question? Is this response adequate to what the question asks? Does this response satisfy the question?

Were the answer to these questions in the affirmative, then we would have to consider, at the same time, many—indeed, infinitely many—analogous instances. Given that we have yet to perform an analysis and deploy a mechanism that would restrict the admissibility of such a ubiquitous predication, and given, as a consequence, the experimental latitude that has been permitted at this preliminary stage, a response of the kind 'x is a word' could function generically (that is, universally) with regard to the quidditative question. To offer one of any number of examples:

—What is Man?

—Man is a word.

According to this logic, the category of *word* would then be a very broad and inclusive one. It could well subsume most of the others, with the exception perhaps of the category of *thing*. It would be co-extensive with the category of *thing*—such that, of anything at all it is possible to assert that *it is a thing*.

Yet we would be hard pressed to persuade anybody that the reply, 'Man is a word,' is either particularly satisfying or very illuminating. Aristotle's response at least has the virtue of giving us something more substantial to work with:

—What is Man?

—Man is a rational animal, responds Aristotle.

Relating the quidditative question to the question of essence, we might be tempted to say:

—It is the *essence* of Man that he is a rational animal.

That he is a rational animal is Man's essential attribute. Without possession of it, he would not be what he is.

To complicate things a little more, let us take another example (while still refraining from deciding the issue by way of introducing a typographical or other mechanism):

—What is and?

—And is a word.

For some reason, this seems more natural. It seems more natural to say, 'And is a word,' than to say, 'Man is a word' (though it also seems that we are more in need of some helpful typographical or grammatical intervention to prevent confusion with regard to the sentential function of the word). This has something to do with the expectations of reference. But it is not clear that the word *and* is *more* a word than the word *Man*, just because it seems at home performing the conjunctive function in a sentence and is thus confined, in a sense, to the word-world (whose boundaries are at issue in any case).

At this stage, there is a natural next step in the quidditative inquisition:

—What *kind* of word is and?

—And is a conjunction.

This gives us a useful hint and a familiar approach to the quidditative question: where the answer to such a question is kept as brief as possible, it tends to refer the object to its

immediate classification or kind. There is the subsumption of an object by a hierarchical taxonomic apparatus. For example:

—What is a terrier?

—A terrier is a (kind of) dog.

A terrier is a member of the class of things called 'dogs.'

The longer answer characterizes the terrier within its class. A terrier is a kind of dog which is small relative to larger breeds, with beady eyes, etc. Here we offer attributes which specify the distinctive aspects of the member of the class within its class. So the 'What is...?' question may locate the object within a classificatory domain which contains it and it may specify the object within its class by way of attributes which distinguish it from other class members, while it still shares the attributes which determine it as a member of the class.

Both the brief and the longer response refer terriers to the classification of dog. Knowledge of the terrier becomes thus contingent upon a familiarity with dogs. Hence the familiar epistemological regression:

—If a terrier is a dog, what is a dog?

—A dog is an animal.

The longer response says that a dog is an animal with certain attributes, which are then the identifying features of the genus. It does not matter at this stage whether the classificatory ontology is Platonist or nominalist—that is, whether it understands its categories as real and eternal or as conventional and adaptable.

It may be possible to insert a few stages between dog and animal, their number depending on the refinement of the taxonomy. One might say, 'A dog is a quadruped,' or, 'A dog is a quadruped mammal.' Reference to the zoological system of classification would provide this reply, 'A dog is a member of the genus *Canis*,' which is not in the end all that helpful: it is merely a technical way of saying that a dog belongs to the family of dogs.

The epistemological regression moves steadily towards a primitive element. The following is a contracted version: a dog is an *animal*; an animal is a *living thing*; a living



thing is a *thing*. Though the organization of the intermediate stages is subject to the vicissitudes of a classificatory system, the terminus is quite determined. Gathering each class within its encompassing class, it is not long until the most general of designations is reached: thing. It is the same terminus starting from any point or with any thing.

Is *everything* a thing? Oddly enough (despite the tautology which would answer the question even as it is posed), this is and has been a genuine question in philosophy—perhaps one of its most enduring conundrums. Sometimes it has even been suggested that some things are not things: that is, some things which turn out not to be things are not things because they do not exist. Something which does not exist is not a thing, it has been argued, because it is an illusion, a phantom or a fiction. At least, it is not a real thing. If something is a thing, then it exists and it is. Hence there is a natural coalescence between *thing* and *being*. The question that opened the paragraph can be rephrased in terms of the quidditative question. 'Is everything a thing?', asks, 'What *is*?' The tautology is preserved here: 'What *is*?', asks, 'What *thing* is?', and 'What (thing) is a *thing*?'

An earlier illustration might throw some light on the matter at this point: Is a conjunction a thing as well as a kind of word? It seems clear enough that all kinds of words are things also. There is something called a conjunction, useful for linking nouns and clauses in sentence construction. An example of a conjunction is the word *and*. The word *and* is patently a thing. I suppose we could say that conjunctions are a *class* of word. Classes are what some philosophers would call *abstract objects*. In Anglo-American philosophy of language, there is some hesitation about the status of abstract objects, which are considered a nuisance because their proliferation cannot readily be constrained. After all, how does one determine whether or not an abstract object really exists? In this kind of philosophy, ontologies are made bigger or smaller much as one might review the contents of a suitcase. The aim is economy, and minimal ontologies are understood to reflect a more disciplined way of thinking. The leaner the ontology, the less metaphysical baggage, as it were. With an eye to the virtue of austerity, it may well be (and has been) argued that *there are no such things* as classes. But then perhaps this entails the assertion that there are no such things as conjunctions. Hence the word *and*, which is a conjunction, is not a thing.

*Meanings* are another kind of abstract object that have occasionally been classified as excess baggage. For example, a word may not be understood simply as the immediate contiguity of several letters of the alphabet, printed on the page and visibly a thing; it may be understood as the unity of a sensible and an intelligible element. The intelligible element is sometimes called the *meaning*. There has been some dispute about the existential status of meanings. If there are no such objects as meanings, if they should prove to be illusory, or at least dispensable, then it is not immediately clear that words, construed in a certain conventional way, are things. A word might be under these circumstances a peculiar coincidence of a thing with a nothing.

There is clearly some dependence upon the criteria applied with respect to thinghood, determining what things, entities or objects are admitted as things, entities or objects.<sup>4</sup> Gottlob Frege, for example, was greatly disturbed by the propensity of language to *create* objects as the necessary designations of proper names, where such a result was far from what the logician intended. In 'Sources of Knowledge of Mathematics and the Mathematical Natural Sciences,' collected in *Posthumous Writings (Nachgelassene Schriften)*, Frege formulates the problem with characteristic clarity:

The... expression, 'the extension of the concept *star*,' serves... to illustrate, in yet another way, that fatal tendency of language to form apparent proper names: 'the concept *star*' is, of itself, one such. The definite article creates the impression that this phrase is meant to designate an object, or, what amounts to the same thing, that 'the concept *star*' is a proper name [i.e., according to Frege's usage, singular term], whereas 'concept *star*' is surely a designation of a concept and thus could not be more different from a proper name. The difficulties which this idiosyncrasy of language entangles us in are incalculable. (Frege 1969, 243; Frege 1979, 270)

Here the distinction Frege requires is between *concept* and *object*. Concepts in Frege's system are not and should not be objects, and vice versa. They belong to different realms. Frege needs this distinction to be reflected in linguistic practice. However the regrettable tendency of language is to refer to concepts as if they were objects. Naming, in the act of so doing, itself seems to confer upon that which is named a certain objecthood. This is a highly problematic result: that the instance of the name coincides with the instance of the object.

The frequently cited examples are of objects which are mythical or non-existent ones, like Pegasus the flying horse. This is different from, but is also a variation of, the

Fregean dilemma. Pegasus is a mythical creature. Pegasus does not and did not really exist. But, as far as language is concerned, there is nothing categorical in the reference to Pegasus that determines his non-existence. There is nothing in the name Pegasus to indicate that there can be no reference to Pegasus, since the referent does not exist and never has existed. To speak of Pegasus is to speak of him as if he existed or had existed. It is to call him up from the depths as though he existed. The criteria for thinghood and a crisis in their application are here a function of the *doctrine of realism*.<sup>5</sup> But the basic representational problem is not restricted to the *doctrine of realism*; that is, to put it another way: *there is always a realism at work, which is the absolute difference of existence.*

Let us say, as a gesture towards a solution, that the name Pegasus refers to a *concept* which accrued some predicates in ancient mythology. The name Pegasus does not need to refer to a thing that exists or existed in the world but to the concept of such a thing, though there is and was no such thing, except in a myth. The difficulty then is that the representational mechanism has in this case abandoned reference to the real world for the conceptual realm. Without reference to a contrived and inscrutable *two-tiered* representational structure (the referential and the fictive-referential), there is no means to account either for the obvious relationship of Pegasus to flesh-and-blood horses or for distinguishing the ontological status of Pegasus, a mythological entity, from, say, Homer or Aristotle, who existed. The difference of existence is effaced in this maneuver, and yet this difference is always at work, even in the kind of textualism we considered in Section 1.3 of Chapter One.

Frege required a distinction between concept and object, but discovered that the distinction was lost in the reference to concepts—the concept *star*, for example, which is, in its very designation, an object *and* a concept. Here the frontier between domains is violated, and the concept crosses over.

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*Deconstruction* is a word. This was the response to the quidditative question which came to us, as it were, offered without hesitation, and which set in train this sequence of events, these consequences. Deconstruction is a *word*. Is deconstruction a word which

refers to something called deconstruction? Is deconstruction (the name of) a thing? And if it is a thing, can it be a word also? Being a thing, perhaps deconstruction would not then be *first and foremost* a word. But the proposition here, surely, is that *it is the difference or different difference of deconstruction to be a word*, and a word *first and foremost*. It is a peculiar kind of difference because there are so many words and so many things which are words.

Certainly it appears that words are things, though it is not possible to make this claim without issuing a few reservations, as we have seen. But let us grant for the moment that a word is a kind of thing. It belongs to the class of thing called words. All words are things. But words also stand for things, for other things, and this duplicity provides some potential for confusion. When a word is *in the act* of standing for something else—what is this self-sacrificial act?—it is not clear whether that word is then still a thing, a word-thing, or just some peculiar kind of proxy or transitional or intermediate or pseudo-entity, effaced in its word-thingness in order to conjure or invoke the thing *to which* it refers—but which, in the act of referring to it, the word *is*. That is: In the act of referring to what it refers to, the word *is* what it *represents*. Or: In the act of referring to what it refers to, there is at the very least an integral *moment* when the word *is* what it *represents*. The word surrenders its thinghood as word, its density and opacity as thing, and confers the gift of existence upon that which it refers to, that to which it defers.

'What is deconstruction?' was the opening question. 'Deconstruction is a word,' was the response, offered without hesitation. Earlier, we charted a regressive movement of classification: a terrier is a dog, a dog is a quadruped, etc. If deconstruction is a word, what is a word? A word is *a thing which refers to other things*. In the earlier regression, all classifications led to the most inclusive of classifications: thing. Hence a thing which refers to other things is a (kind of) thing. Recall also, however, that according to the logic of *deconstruction is a word*, it was posited that this predicate might apply universally, such that everything is a word: *thing is a word* too. Yet this was not necessarily a supervention of words upon things, or of things upon words, but a co-extensiveness of these predicates.

Were we to accept the answer to the guiding question with which we began, that *deconstruction is a word*, then for this to teach us something concrete about deconstruction we would have to ask not only what kind of word is deconstruction, but,

'What is a word?' This is not merely a matter of following the classificatory and epistemological regression. It is a fundamental question. The quidditative question has a special cogency when asked of words. It asks, 'What *kind of thing* is a word?' And, 'What kind of thing is a word when it is *not a thing*?,' or, 'What kind of thing is a word when it is not *the* thing to which it refers?,' or, 'What kind of thing is a word when it is a thing which refers to other things?'<sup>6</sup>

The quidditative question, 'What is...?,' when asked of anything, gravitates as we have seen towards its verbal version according to the model of 'deconstruction is a word': 'What is Man?,' for example. 'Man is a word.' 'What is love?' 'Love is a word.' And hence, 'What is a word?' 'A word is a thing (which refers to other things).'

Equally there is the following. The quidditative question, 'What is...?,' when asked of anything, gravitates, as we have seen, towards its primitive version according to the model of 'Everything is a thing': 'What is Man?,' for example. 'Man is a thing.'<sup>7</sup> 'What is love?' 'Love is a thing.' And hence, 'What is a thing?' 'Thing is a word.'<sup>8</sup>

It is not immediately clear how to lay out this complicated relation of word and thing. Word and thing: entwined equally by a peculiar mutual ubiquity.

*Yes, deconstruction is a word.*

Word and thing: never do they not coincide in their difference and distinction.

*Yes, absolutely, deconstruction is a thing.*

Word and thing: how could this extrication and intrication be organized?

Word and thing: how to order this inextrication? how to rule it?

The difference between word and thing is traversed by the difference of existence, which affirms that, *yes, absolutely, it was there*. Does deconstruction speak to us regarding this singular difference of existence? It is hard to imagine how it could speak of anything else. Perhaps deconstruction is *the* word that refers to the passage from word to thing. But if so, let there be one who can show us this passage, for at the same time that deconstruction shines its light down the dark corridor of representation, it brings its own darkness. There is no such safe passage, says deconstruction, which stands in and represents the way.

The peculiarly compelling claim that first and foremost *deconstruction is a word* draws its power from the intense scrutiny that deconstruction brings to the relationship of word and thing, of representative and represented. Deconstruction makes its home

there, at the nexus of word and thing, where they differ and coalesce. It is expelled from that place, compelled by the outward force of an emanation. Even so, let us accede to temptation and claim the following: deconstruction is and represents the *difference* between *the* representation and *what* is represented; deconstruction is and represents the *difference* between the *word* and the *thing* to which the word refers; deconstruction is and represents the *difference* between the word *deconstruction* and *what* the word *deconstruction* refers to; deconstruction is and represents the *difference* between *what deconstruction is* and *what it represents*.

Thus it seems that what deconstruction is is an interstitial thing, a difference in effect. The different difference of deconstruction is that it is *the* difference integral to representation (represented here as a sequence of differences). Such a difference is a different thing altogether. It arrives at the junction, which is equally a point of differentiation and point of coalescence. Is there such a differentiation? Is there such a coalescence? This is not immediately clear, but nonetheless there is one word amongst others which name it which names it, and that word is deconstruction. Deconstruction is a word which arrives at the junction, equally a point of differentiation and point of coalescence. This is perhaps the difference of deconstruction which sets it apart, a difference which it shares equally with other words, where they are conjoined by their singular anonymity.

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Of *différance*, for example (another singularly important term in the deconstructive lexicon<sup>9</sup>), Derrida says, provocatively, in 'Différance,' that it is *neither* a word *nor* a concept (Derrida 1972b, 7; Derrida 1982, 7).<sup>10</sup> Here Derrida seems to seek to separate the character of his neologism *différance* from the *metaphysics* of words and concepts.<sup>11</sup> A certain metaphysics and completion is built into the notions of word and concept. The metaphysics of words says in effect: *there are words*; they are the unity of the phonic or graphical element and a meaning or meanings; the material element is the vehicle for the meaning which we communicate and comprehend; words can pick out objects in the world; words are there for us in the memory like tools in a toolbox and they can be put to many uses. The metaphysics of concepts says: *there are concepts*, occupying a mental

or transcendental space; they are coherent and distinct wholes within which attributes or properties or predicates are ordered and organized according to what the concept is a concept of; they can be analyzed, catalogued, refined and mobilized.

Let us take another common example which demonstrates the intrinsic sense of closure or completion in the concept. When Paul de Man says that a text is 'unreadable,' he understands this unreadability in the context of the double sense of reading: that to have *read* a text is to have comprehended, incorporated, exhausted it as the essential supplement to the ocular movement and involuntary mouthing of basic literacy, chewing its way across the page like a computer program designed for optical character recognition. The possibility of reading is already announced in the presumptuous assertion of having read a text. There is a prior metaphysics of reading. What has been read has thus been *read*, as if this were possible. Reading for de Man, however, was the entry into the difficulty of reading, and the more intensively that reading itself was sought the more difficult it became to pronounce the text as having been read—and therefore exhausted of meaning.<sup>12</sup>

If the query with which we began some time ago had been, 'What is *différance*?,' and had the answer come, in a fashion analogous to the previous responses, '*Différance* is a word,' then this response would have had to answer to Derrida's text which bears the title '*Différance*,' and which would with considerable authority beg to differ with such a hasty reply. We would have had to think again, as it were. *Différance* is not a word. *Différance* is neither word nor concept, says Derrida.

There is an obvious explanation for this assertion. If *différance* is not a word, then it is because, before the substitution of the *a* for the *e*, there was no such word. *Différance* is not a word because it has not been granted wordhood. This is a characteristic it shares with all neologisms, although, for each neologism, the encounter with its not (yet) being a word is of course entirely singular.

*Différance* is neither word nor concept. This is the classical instance of the different difference of deconstruction. The different difference of deconstruction is precisely *différance*. Safely can we put to one side all the conceptual or quasi-conceptual elaborations, all the words, non-words, concatenations of words and non- or quasi-words that fill the space between the title of the essay '*Différance*' and its last full stop. Just as with the title of Michael Fischer's book, it is sufficient to remain simply with the

title of Derrida's famous essay and leave its contents almost untouched. The different difference of deconstruction dwells in this singular alteration, like a 'gross spelling mistake' (Derrida 1972b, 3; Derrida 1982, 3), by means of which the word *différance* is modified, adapted, distorted, brutalized, violated, transgressed, lacerated, damaged, invigorated, disfigured, ennobled, sublated, revitalized, transfigured, deconstructed, blessed, destroyed and transformed. Something has changed there. The *a* appears then like the angel of doom. It disturbs the whole. Its alteration is irreparable. It is not clear whether it irrupts from within or is imposed from without. The *a* arrives fresh and new in a moment of singular purity. The *a* is a new beginning. It dictates the new terms. The *e* is concealed, encrypted, overwhelmed, overwritten, repressed, obliterated, annulled and annihilated, put to sleep or to death, pressed into latency, driven into the layered depths of palimpsest, reborn in a new disguise.

There is a new order and *différance* embodies the difference of difference and rules in the name of the different difference of deconstruction—a difference that, even now, cannot be heard. Strategically, it is the indifference to audition, the indifference of *différance* in the voice that makes its difference different, defying the difference of the voice and the logos: *neither a word nor a concept*. *Différance* resists. *Différance* is the rebel without a cause. *Différance* is the difference which escapes, which has always escaped, which carries the imperative of emancipation, rebellion and resistance, and which is captured for deconstruction in the mute and futile triumph of the *a* over the *e*.

If, first and foremost, *deconstruction is a word*, then *the* word deconstruction is *différance*. Deconstruction is a word and the word is *différance*. What is *différance*? *Différance* is neither a word nor a concept, says Derrida. *Différance* is the resistance of the letter, and it is this characteristic which signals the different difference of deconstruction—a difference that it shares equally with the others. What is *différance*? *Différance* is, to repeat, the insistence of the letter.

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Despite all these significant developments, there is a basic problem with the response to the quidditative question, offered without hesitation, that *deconstruction is a word*, and no doubt it has been noticed—and no doubt with some impatience too. According to a

familiar protocol (which some call a 'rule of grammar'<sup>13</sup>), what ought in fact to be said is this:

—'Deconstruction' is a word.

Or:

—'*Différance*' is not a word.<sup>14</sup>

This protocol (or convention) of quotation marks is applied to assist in the making of good sense, for a simple mechanism is required for marking in language the distinction between the word and that (object) which it represents or that task which it performs—and in this case the mechanism is quotation. But we will not elaborate this rule just now, for that matter is the subject of Chapter Four, entitled 'Logic of the Word.' Without quibbling at this point over logical grammar, let us accept that the application of the convention introduces greater clarity into a discourse about words and things.

Why has this protocol not already been introduced, if it provides invaluable assistance? Because it has been necessary to avoid prejudging the outcome of the inquiry. With the application of the protocol, the answer to the question 'What is deconstruction?' would already have come to depend in part upon a certain pre-existence, apriority, or antecedence of the answer, which, though coming after the question, would nonetheless have anticipated and determined how the question itself is posed, in much the same way as the terms of reference oftentimes dictate the results of a judicial inquiry. It may be the case that we have to know (something of) what we are talking about before answering the quidditative question, perhaps before framing the question. As every pollster knows, the question is answered (in part) by the wording of the question. Thus the very first question becomes that hard old chestnut: *How to compose the question?* Were this question to be taken too seriously, then we could not even arrive at the first question, but would disappear towards the neutrality ideally preceding any question which desires to be an unlimited opening towards an as yet unknown destination.

If what deconstruction *is*—essentially, even primitively—is a *word*, then according to the protocol the question might be reformulated thus:

—What is 'deconstruction'?

Or, perhaps more to the point:

—What does the word 'deconstruction' mean?

These two are not at all the same, for they point to the opposite ends of the representational process.

'What is "deconstruction"?' asks what (kind of) thing (the word) 'deconstruction' is, and the answer is already given here both in parenthesis and by the presence of quotation marks. If the quotation marks are not scare quotes, and if their presence is determined by an application of the rule that marks the distinction between use and mention, then the response is clear: 'deconstruction' is a word. We could then be more specific: 'deconstruction' is a fourteen letter word, an English word, a word with four syllables, and so on. These are properties *of the word*: of the wordness, materiality, literality of the word.

The second question asks what, being a word, the word 'deconstruction' *means*. If a word is the unity of a sensible and an intelligible element, which can then be distinguished as aspects of the word, then the second question deals with the intelligible component. There are many who would think that it is this question that relates more closely and that returns us to the intent of the opening query, 'What is deconstruction?' This query asks, in effect, 'What does the word "deconstruction" mean?'

There is a clear modulation of the question. An *ontological* question is rephrased as or reduced to a *semantic* one—given the assumption that the question 'What is deconstruction?' is ontological. But if it can indeed legitimately be rephrased as a semantic question, then it is no longer clear that it was, in its earlier version, ontological. Is such a transition possible or permissible? At this point, then, we encounter a certain difference which is called, with reference to Heidegger, the 'ontological difference': the difference between being (or Being) and beings.<sup>15</sup> 'What is deconstruction?' is an ontological question which asks, in effect, 'What is—the being of—deconstruction?' This sustains the tension of the ontico-ontological difference, though the question of the being of deconstruction tends to become a matter of the *difference* of deconstruction, its being what it is and not something else, such that the *specific* being of deconstruction



can be identified: deconstruction is such-and-such a being and not the rest. This identifies the being of deconstruction in its difference from other beings, and does not determine the being it shares as a being with other beings. The rephrasing of the question as a semantic one effectively dispenses with the aporia of the difference between the ontological with the ontic, and perhaps the implication of the ontological question, which queries the status of deconstruction as a differentiated being amongst beings and participating equally in being in general, is erased. It is a matter of what is carried over and what is lost in the transitions between the questions 'What is?' (that is, 'What has being?'), 'What is *deconstruction*?', and 'What is the *meaning* of the word "deconstruction"?'.

It is not immediately clear how to delimit the respective domains of ontology and semantics. They would appear to be completely independent domains, but in fact they may be thoroughly entwined. Responses to the questions, 'What is deconstruction?' ('What is—the *being of*—deconstruction?') and 'What does the word "deconstruction" mean?' may be co-extensive. The meaning of a word will have a bearing upon the object that the word represents or the function that it performs, though this does not necessarily mean that the meaning of the word *affects* the object that the word represents. The object that a word represents or the function that it performs will have a bearing upon its meaning, though this does not necessarily mean that the meaning of the word is derived from the object that it represents according to, say, the logic of empiricism. How do we order this relationship? Much is at stake here, but it is wise to be cautious about a reduction in either direction—towards the priority of metaphysical ontology (which invariably has a recognizably Platonic, theological or conventional derivation), or towards the priority of philosophy of language and semantics. What must be sustained, at least for the moment, is the *difficulty* of the relation of word and (that) object (which the word represents)—and this despite the evident *facility* of the relation. Ontology and semantics must do their work in the light of this facility and in the shadow of this difficulty.

Nonetheless, these concerns are insufficient reason to retreat from the significant advance that has been made in the inquiry. It should be clear that we are retracing the movement whereby philosophy of language enters the field of philosophical contention and tries to bring the question sharply into focus for the first time. The application of the

rule marking the difference between use and mention has permitted a rephrasing of the question 'What is deconstruction?' and has prohibited the enigmatic response to it, offered without hesitation or reflection, that *deconstruction is a word*. The quidditative query now tends in a clear direction: towards the *meaning* of the word 'deconstruction.' Let us hope that deconstruction itself can be found there.

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As far as it is possible to ascertain, given its brevity, the intent of the guiding and quidditative question, 'What is deconstruction?', is to find out something (essential) about deconstruction. There are some difficulties for the response to this question, offered without hesitation, that *deconstruction is a word*. It is, in the first instance, grammatically or logically erroneous. Moreover, simply to assert that there is a word 'deconstruction' is quite insufficient. This predication fails to distinguish deconstruction in a very helpful way from, say, phenomenology, or from hermeneutics or onto-theology, or, for that matter, from cosmology and physics and biochemistry, or from cats and dogs and bats and beetles—for all of which there are words too, as has been demonstrated here indisputably.

There is something of interest here though. Each of these things *is a word*; or, preferably, each of these *things* has a word that refers to it.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, naturally, each word ('phenomenology,' 'physics,' 'cat'...) is quite clearly a *different* word. They are not the same word, though each of them is the same where wordness is the criterion of sameness. They are each words; they are each the same *kind* of thing. Does their being different words mean that they have different meanings and designate different objects? Not *necessarily*, but, yes, most often. Yet, somehow, when we say the word 'word,' when we talk about words, when attention is given to the word in general, they are all included.

This is all fairly straightforward. However, there is a possibility we cannot ignore, given its historical persistence. It must be said that this possibility is somewhat of a daunting one. It is a possibility for which nothing can quite prepare us, though it lies at the root of things. There is only *one* word, says this possibility; there is only *really* one word; there is only, *ultimately* and *in the end*, one word. Such a word is the master word

and the word of words, the mother and best of all words and of all possible words. It is the Word, first and last, in the beginning ('*En arche en ho logos*') and in the end. Perhaps it is a word of which it is said that it is *neither this nor that*; of which it is said, as it was said of *différance*, that it is neither a word nor a concept (and it is not certain that there can be a wordless concept in any case). This seems at first an implausible conjecture and certainly a less than edifying one. Nonetheless, it imposes itself. It develops a decisive impetus. It demands to be considered: that there is only *really* one word and that that one word is, in fact, despite what appears to be concrete evidence to be contrary, the word 'deconstruction.'

This totalizing tendency of deconstruction cannot be restrained even by the most carefully deployed reservations. There is a first hint of this expansiveness when we consider what deconstruction is. There is a first hint when we consider *what the word 'deconstruction' means*.

Deconstruction, while being a word (and hence bounded by quotation marks thus: 'deconstruction'), is also something or some things other than a word. It is a philosophy, or a philosophical method, or an approach to texts, or a kind of reading; it is simply *what Derrida does*; it is a state of mind, a mode of consciousness, a mystical practice, an elevated state which approaches divinity obliquely, a pure transcendence or pure affirmation; it is a thinking of being, of metaphysics, a thinking of systems; it is a philosophical or theological movement, an institution, a theoretical model, a symptom of postmodernity or poststructuralism, a no-saying or pure negativity, an ethics, a psychotic rigor, a demonic ritual, a sacrifice of reason and common sense in the name of Dionysian rapture, a sign of the times; it is pure love; it is Paul de Man, free association, a collection of verbal tricks and gimmicks, a neo-Kantian method, a set of moves in a game, a nouveau Hegelianism, a neo-Marxism, a resistance, a pure nihilism, permanent revolution, justice itself, a deviant variety of psychoanalytic therapy, the vanguard of a culture of repudiation, a privileging of alterity, the essence of metaphysics, a virus, a big yes to life, a left Heideggerianism, a rigorous empiricism of the soul, a depressive symptom, a dogma, a black hole in the brain, a literary genre, the nemesis of metaphysics, a neo-Nazi conspiracy, a linguistic intrigue; it is what deconstructors do; it is an alien invasion, an obsessive inquisition or inquisitiveness; it is enlightenment, skepticism, true responsibility, idealism, America, a pathological form of self-reflection

or self-consciousness, a moral code, a constant vigilance, an anti-humanism, the end of metaphysics, the path to Hell or the path to another truth—albeit a difficult one.

Deconstruction is, at the very least, that club to which its many practitioners (called deconstructivists or deconstructionists or deconstructors or Derrideans or de Manians) belong. It is their home ground, their native terrain. It is the space of this identification. It is the conduit of a discipleship to Derrida or to de Man or to another second-order deconstructor. Deconstruction is the repository of a belief in the Great Deconstructor, who, despite all evidence and all confessions to the contrary, must be quite undeconstructible.

Deconstruction is ripe to bursting with a surfeit of predicates. It swallows them all and swells. They have all been prohibited but still it grows. Deconstruction is a word, came the response before. Deconstruction is 'what happens,' says Derrida (Derrida 1995d, 17), and the sense is there, both on the surface and beneath, of this ubiquity of deconstruction, coincident and co-extensive with language, text, writing, thought, and so on, in a field whose boundaries are not clear.

Does a distinction need to be made here between what people *have said* deconstruction is and what deconstruction *really is*? Deconstruction would want to deconstruct this distinction between an ontological verity (what deconstruction really is) and a discursive plethora (what people have said or might say deconstruction is), a distinction which installs and authorizes the dominance of the logos. Nonetheless, the seduction of there being an object of pure ontology remains. After all, such an object is properly *alterior*.

This makes all the more curious Derrida's unequivocal statement regarding the status of deconstruction in 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' ('*Lettre à un ami japonais*')

All sentences of the type "deconstruction is X" or "deconstruction is not X" *a priori* miss the point [*manque a priori de pertinence*], which is to say that they are at least false. (Derrida 1987d, 392; Derrida 1991c, 275)

Here is an instruction about reading deconstruction which proscribes both the quest for an ontological verity and the accumulation of a discursive plethora. The structure of this statement mimes the logical style and the forthrightly declarative or didactic tone of analytic philosophers. Ought this not to warn us of an irony, and one which perhaps

pervades the 'Letter'? Let us not be too hasty to read irony here however, for then would we allow the value of a distinctive inclination in Derrida to escape into vacillation. Irony is a foreknowledge of duplicity. To read irony is to make a preemptive interpretation: that the ironist knows. The field of this irony can readily be extended such that the master of irony *always already* knows. (Or at least the *irony itself* knows, or knows the limit of knowing.) When do we make this assumption? Do we have to make this assumption? What is this assumption a function of? If only it were possible to mark the boundaries of such an irony, for this irony signals a knowingness which is not necessarily a knowledge. This of course is what is at issue in the question of the difference or different difference of deconstruction: perhaps there is a special relationship between deconstruction and irony, and it is this special relationship that permits the *practice* of double (or ironical) reading. This special relationship allows deconstruction both to expose the blindness that invariably subverts every appropriation, and to discern the knowledge which is at least latent in every proposition despite the apparent manifestations of ignorance.<sup>17</sup>

But let us not be distracted by an ironical interpretation and attend instead to Derrida's positive inclination when he prohibits predications of deconstruction, because surely it is precisely deconstruction's elusiveness and resistance to definition that makes it subject to multiple and sometimes contradictory predicates or identifications. Derrida performs a peculiar and characteristic maneuver when he refuses to permit the reduction of deconstruction by way of the 'is' or by way of its negation: he seeks to maintain the openness or alterity of a (protean) deconstruction by way of a gesture of closure. Is this a negative theology of deconstruction? The answer here is problematic, for the replies, 'Deconstruction is negative theology/Deconstruction is not negative theology,' have been already foreclosed. If Derrida says, in effect, 'Deconstruction is irreducible to a predicate, set of predicates, or an identification,' he stands firmly on the side of a *resistance*. What is the condition or justification for such a resistance?

Perhaps it is a resistance to the movement towards ontological verity. But is it then a resistance in the name of an ontological *purity*? A resistance purified of the movement towards ontological verity?<sup>18</sup>

It is a resistance of *temperament* perhaps. It is a resisting or resistance that is a function of the irreducibility of temperament. A resistance of temperament is a

resistance on the side of the subject and on the side of his singularity of temperament as inimical to universality and irreducible to philosophical generality.

It is equally possible though that this resistance is a resistance on the side of the *object*, a resistance of the object such that it can be and such that it is. Then would it be a pure resistance, a resistance for the sake of it: hence, a *constitutive* resistance.

A resistance of the subject or a resistance of the object: either way, a constitutive resistance. What is the condition or justification for such a resistance? What drives it?

This resistance rests on nothing. It is not a resistance conditioned by some other imperative. It is not a resistance in the service of some higher goal. It is unconditional. It is a pure resistance because it can do nothing else. It must acquiesce to resistance, or there is nothing. There is nothing and it resists anyway. What more is there to add? It is constitutive of the thing: what is is as a singular resistance.

But if it is a resistance *constitutive* of the object, a membranous resistance, a friction that resists influence, it may then be a resistance directed towards (self-)constitution and to this extent not pure. It is a resistance which maintains the thing, which keeps it from slipping away, from slipping into something else. It is, at the same time then, a resistance to the other and to othering. *This resistance would be itself.*

Accompanying this resistance (however one comes to conceive it) is the persistence and the value of an irreducibility. Indeed, oftentimes this inscrutable resistance appears to resist in the name of irreducibility. This irreducibility is at the same time an integrity. Yet surely the complement or supplement to the irreducibility of deconstruction is that it is, at the same time, *ever reducible* to a predicate, set of predicates, or to an identification. It gives itself up to a plethora of predicates. It acquiesces to an orgy of attributes. Even so, the firm prohibition on reduction and predication for deconstruction recognizes—but, more than recognizes, presses for—an irreducibility: pure resistance. It is perhaps a resistance of deconstruction's infinite permeability. The infinite permeability and the purity of a pure resistance are curiously allied.

The resistance is a resistance to reduction. *Is reduction* the right word?

In Derrida, reduction takes a number of names and forms: reduction as simplification and over-simplification, reduction as identification and predication, reduction as the method of analysis, reduction to a basic unit or units, reduction as hierarchy and hierarchization, as logocentrism, phonocentrism, phallogocentrism, carno-

phallogocentrism,<sup>19</sup> phratrocentrism,<sup>20</sup> or just -centrism, reduction as origin and beginning, reduction as the elimination of singularity. Where might this resistance to reduction function more patently than with regard to deconstruction itself? The more intensive the resistance, the more forceful is the constitution, the more violent is the gesture of closure and the more exigent the imperative to 'make room for the Other.' Whose imperative? Deconstruction *resists* it. It *resists*. It affirms resistance. It acquiesces to pure resistance, as to the arrival of a self-destituting and self-instituting revolution. It proscribes the question, 'What is deconstruction?', in which it would be, in order all the more to be, and to be eternally.<sup>21</sup>

But the response to the quidditative question, offered without hesitation, that *deconstruction is a word*, says that deconstruction lives and dies with the others in its difference, which it shares equally with them. In its *different* difference, in *différance*, where it would be and be absolutely, inscribed there in the most opaque material implication (the *overwriting* of the *a*), the call of deconstruction is as quiet and insidious as the call which lures the subject towards speech: make a cut, it beckons, and see what difference it makes—*see what difference is made there*, where the *a* overwhelms the *e*. Is there a hearing that can hear and hearken and adhere to this difference? This is the point where the guiding question—What is deconstruction?—makes its intervention. Does deconstruction make any difference?, the question asks. *Deconstruction is a word*, comes the reply, without hesitation.<sup>22</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Donald Davidson says of a theory of truth that it 'is deflationary if it declares that truth is a concept that is easily shown to be dispensable.... Deflationists,' he continues, 'consider that... the concept of truth is not metaphysically deep, and so does not require appeal to such notions as correspondence to reality, coherence, or success of one sort or another in coping' (Honderich 1995, 182).

<sup>2</sup> In 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' ('Lettre à un ami japonais') Derrida makes it clear that 'deconstruction is not... an *act* or an *operation*' (Derrida 1987d, 391; Derrida 1991c, 273).

<sup>3</sup> See de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau' (de Man 1983, 102-142).

<sup>4</sup> In the discussion that follows I do not make any systematic distinction between the use of the terms thing, entity and object. The field of things is effectively co-extensive with the field of objects, and so on.

<sup>5</sup> It is the usefulness of philosophy of language with a realist temperament that it suggests the peculiarity of the literary, if only as a function of a certain, stubborn literal-mindedness not so readily exceeded by the literarily sophisticated. For example, in *The Oxford Companion to*

*Philosophy*, under 'Fictional Names': 'If Austen's Mr. Wickham did not exist, how can it be true—as it seems to be—that he eloped with Lydia Bennet? These puzzles have often prompted one or two responses: either fictional characters do somehow exist (but *where*? e.g. does Sherlock Holmes really live in *London*?) Or typical sentences employing fictional names are to be analyzed differently from superficially similar sentences employing non-fictional names' (Honderich 1995, 280). This problem has long been a source of genuine consternation in analytic philosophy of language.

<sup>6</sup> There are of course things—things which are *not* words—which refer to other things.

<sup>7</sup> For example: 'Man is a concept'; 'A concept is an abstract object'; 'An object is a thing.'

<sup>8</sup> The complication here is not dispelled or reduced by the use of articles, though clearly they are of critical importance in the assertion of the difference of existence. 'Dog is a word,' works well enough according to the model of 'deconstruction is a word.' But 'A dog is a word' is more difficult, where 'A dog is a thing' is not problematic. The difficulty is more than one of grouping and numeration: e.g., 'A dog is/are two words.' 'The dog is a word' presents a related problem, though it is not necessarily a question of the referential specificity entailed by the definite article. 'Fido is a word' works according to the model of 'deconstruction is a word.' It is to be regretted that there is no opportunity fully to develop the issue of articles here.

<sup>9</sup> In the third appendix to 'Le coup de D. e(s)t Judas,' Lucette Finas gathers a small retinue of Derridean terms—though rather than calling them 'terms' in a lexicon she calls them, following Derrida, *indécidables*. The term 'term' has an Aristotelian derivation, meaning terminus. A term would bring the concept to its (en)closure, in effect. Nonetheless, Finas makes 'une tentative de définition' for the *indécidables*, amongst whose number is *différance*: 'La différence fait jouer ensemble l'opération de différer (retarder, temporiser) et celle de distinguer, dissocier. Cette opération qui n'est ni active ni passive intervient non seulement dans le domaine du signe (signifiant ou signifié) mais dans le champ sans bordure du gramme ou de la trace. L'espace (devenir-temps de l'espace ou devenir-espace du temps) met en scène et pervertit, à l'instar de toute opposition, l'opposition philosophique de l'espace et du temps. Différence sans opposition produisant une dispersion sans limite' (Finas 1973, 321). If undecidables are not incompatible with definition (or if such an incompatibility must frequently be overlooked for pragmatic or pedagogical reasons), then what makes these words (*trace*, *gramme*, *supplément*, *pharmakon*, *hymen*, *dissémination*, *marque*) *distinctively* undecidable? What makes them *more* undecidable than others? What constitutes their singular-collective resistance to decision? There are definitions, even of them, and the definitions no doubt will hemorrhage and lose at least some of the definitiveness they may once have possessed. Nonetheless, the different difference of deconstruction adheres to the *distinctively* liminal (or hymenal, if you like) character of the Derridean undecidables. Perhaps these words have a moment prior to sedimentation when their undecidability presses suddenly at the limit—out of the blue, as it were—in which case their undecidability would surely perish with the moment—that is, it would not be reproducible, representable, repeatable. An undecidable is clearly singular, but these *undécidables* are without doubt repeatable.

On the question of how these *indécidables* might be gathered together without falling 'sous l'unité d'un genre commun,' see Karel Thein, 'La décision de l'analogie: remarque sur Derrida, lecteur de Platon' (Thein 1998, 378), where Thein takes Derrida's comment in *Positions* regarding *indécidables* as a starting point. '[I]t has been necessary,' says Derrida, 'to... set to work... certain marks... that by analogy (I underline) I have called undecidables....' (Derrida 1972c, 58; Derrida 1981b, 42-3).

<sup>10</sup> In 'Toward an Ethic of Discussion,' while concerned with the concept of iterability, Derrida describes *différance* as 'an aconceptual concept or another kind of concept, heterogeneous to



the philosophical concept of the concept, a "concept" that marks both the possibility and the limit of all idealization and hence all conceptualization' (Derrida 1988a, 118).

<sup>11</sup> There is also a separation from any *negative* metaphysics. This theme is addressed at length in 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials' ('Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations'). In the distinction between deconstruction and negative theology, the question of the different difference of deconstruction is always at work. 'I thought I had to forbid myself to write in the register of "negative theology," because I was aware of this movement toward hyperessentiality, beyond Being,' writes Derrida. 'What *différance*, the *trace*, and so on "mean"—which hence *does not mean anything*—is "before" the concept, the name, the word, "something" that would be nothing, that no longer arises from Being [*qui ne relèverait plus de l'être*], from presence or from the presence of the present, nor even from absence, and even less from some hyperessentiality. Yet the onto-theological reappropriation always remains possible—and doubtless *inevitable* insofar as one speaks, precisely, in the element of logic and of onto-theological grammar. One can always say: hyperessentiality is precisely that, a supreme Being who remains incommensurate to the being of all that is, which is nothing, neither present nor absent, and so on. If the movement of this reappropriation appears in fact irrepressible, its ultimate failure is no less necessary. But I concede that this question remains at the heart of a thinking of *différance* or of the writing of writing. It remains a question, and this is why I return to it again [*j'y reviens encore*]' (Derrida 1987b, 79; Derrida 1987d, 542).

<sup>12</sup> De Man discusses the notion of reading in many places. For example, see 'Hypogram and Inscription' (de Man 1986, 35f.). On the notion of the impossibility of reading in de Man, see Hillis Miller, ' "Reading" Part of a Paragraph in *Allegories of Reading*' (Miller 1989, 168-69).

<sup>13</sup> See Wesley Salmon, *Logic* (Salmon 1984, 141).

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that there is a small error in the way these statements were introduced: it is not possible, of course, to say, ' "Deconstruction" is a word.' Or, at least, the quotation marks cannot be pronounced. Like the *a* in *différance*, the difference made by the quotation marks is inaudible. The quotation marks make and mark a difference, but the difference cannot be heard. What is this difference?

<sup>15</sup> See *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1962, 31), *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger 1957, 11). In 'Being and Time and The Basic Problems of Phenomenology,' Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann describes the 'ontological difference between being and beings.' 'Fundamental ontology is the philosophical science of being as such,' writes von Herrmann, 'and not simply the philosophical science of beings as beings. But being as such is nevertheless being of beings. However, itself not a being, being is in its core different from beings' (von Herrmann 1993, 130).

<sup>16</sup> This organization of priorities is not so straightforward: it is not clear, for example, that there was hermeneutics before there was the word 'hermeneutics'—an old conundrum.

<sup>17</sup> Marion Hobson suggests a reading of Derridean irony in a section of *Derrida: Opening Lines* entitled 'The doubling of irony' (Hobson 1998, 85-88). She distinguishes Derridean irony (in a specific instance) from 'Schlegel's "transcendental buffoonery"' and from the irony of Kierkegaard's Socrates, which tends towards an 'ironic totality' (86). Hobson represents this distinction concretely: 'This ironic movement [in Derrida] is not a change of level [i.e., a transcendental gesture], but of current, as it were, like an electronic switching mechanism. There is,' says Hobson, 'what Derrida calls... "un effet de flottaison indéfinie entre deux possibles"....' These 'ironic effects....' she adds, 'derive from syntactic units joining together in unstable ways' (86). Hobson is not concerned of course to *resist* an overly hasty dissipation into the double and duplicitous landscape of irony in pursuit of something more secure and

tendentious, and quite rightly, because it is hard to imagine a *rigorous* reading that could resist this dissipation (if this is the right word) or destabilization, which is (at least) always possible. Irony is always already a kind of invisible alteration, and what is most difficult perhaps is to determine *whether it is really there and who or what put it there*. There is an irony, isn't there? Irony tends to double and redouble the bluffs. If irony is in a sense already a fact of language, of a double and doubling language, how do we recognize what is *added*, as a secret acknowledgment and foreknowledge of duplicity, by the one who is an ironist? Even as a fact of language, or of experience, irony is strongly linked to a subject who ironizes. Irony has a *facial expression*, if you like, as visible on the face of *La Gioconda* as on the face of the Deconstructor. There are signs of irony, signs by which it is recognizable. If there is a secret irony of language, or of destiny, then somehow it can be brought out from behind the scenes and placed on stage, though it is not certain how this takes place. There is always the risk of an irony which we do not see, and then we are its unwitting victim. Isn't this the way with irony, that it double-crosses us? The master ironist must find an irony ironic enough to circumscribe all of this: that is, to double everything, even the double-crosses. Such an irony, it must be said, might be so flat as to be indiscernible. The irony in Hobson's text is a play between *entre* and *entre* in *La dissémination*, an irony which, she says, is 'not just described' by Derrida, 'but enacted' (86). This is the key question for the relation of the different difference of deconstruction to irony, which is clearly an essential relation: what is it not *just* to describe but to *enact* an irony? Here is a consummation in which description (representation, secondariness) is supplemented by performance (primacy, singularity, anti-representational immediacy). The irony is 'enacted by Derrida,' says Hobson. This is a significant moment for the different difference of deconstruction, which opens an irony. The ironist's irony is an opening towards the other. The irony acknowledges the inevitable opening towards the other. The irony contains the doubling of language (double reading is therefore ironic reading). The irony is enacted by the ironist. The ironist who ironizes displays the signs of irony, maybe just a glimmer in the eye—but how has such a one learned to know?

<sup>18</sup> This is a complicated distinction. It appears clearly in the impulse to distinguish deconstruction from negative theology. There is a passage from 'Différance' which illustrates this well. '[T]he detours, locutions, and syntax in which I will often have to take recourse,' says Derrida, 'will resemble those of negative theology, occasionally even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology. Already we have had to delineate *that différence is not*, does not exist, is not a present-being (*on*) in any form; and we will be led to delineate also everything *that it is not*, that is, *everything*; and consequently that it has neither existence nor essence. It derives from no category of being, whether present or absent. And yet those aspects of *différance* which are thereby delineated are not theological, not even in the order of the most negative of negative theologies, which are always concerned with disengaging a superessentiality beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastening to recall that God is refused the predicate of existence, only in order to acknowledge his superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being. Such a development is not in question here, and this will be confirmed progressively. *Différance* is not only irreducible to any ontological or theological—ontotheological—reappropriation, but as the very opening of the space in which ontotheology—philosophy—produces its system and its history, it includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return' (Derrida 1972b, 6; Derrida 1982, 6). Derrida's remarks to the contrary only emphasize all the more strongly that the work Derrida does here, in this early, interventive, and evangelical text, is *in the service of* the absolute superessentiality of *différance*. The irreducibility of *différance* is a superessentiality, and the ever-reducibility of *différance* is its reducibility to (amongst other things) a superessentiality. The difference from negative theology cannot be an unequivocal difference with regard to superessentiality. The unequivocal determination of



the difference from negative theology is clearly strategic in this early and foundational text. Derrida takes up the question of the difference between deconstruction and negative theology at greater length in 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials' ('Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations') (Derrida 1987b; Derrida 1987d), and (though with less explicit attention to their difference as such) in 'Sauf le nom,' collected in *On the Name* (Derrida 1995b), in particular page 80, or pages 103-4 in *Sauf le nom* (Derrida 1993e). On the question of this important distinction, see also: Jacques Colleony, 'Déconstruction, théologie négative et archi-éthique (Derrida, Levinas, Heidegger),' where Colleony seeks to trace what he calls an 'évolution' in the relationship between deconstruction and negative theology (Colleony 1994); Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, which is an extended and meticulous elaboration of the relation between deconstruction and negative theology. '[W]e do not need a third theology,' writes Hart, 'one neither positive nor negative—a theology of paradox—for negative theology, properly understood, is that theology: a discourse which works at once inside and outside onto-theology, submitting its images of God to deconstruction. My position is not that deconstruction is a form of negative theology but that negative theology is a form of deconstruction' (Hart 1989, 186).

<sup>19</sup> Derrida, *Points* (Derrida 1992d, 294; Derrida 1995c, 280-81).

<sup>20</sup> Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* (Derrida 1994c, 309; Derrida 1997c, 278). There is of course no limit to the multiplication of -centrism. A -centrism is a reduction simply as a function of focus or obsession or preoccupation or interest, as well as of domination or hegemony. For example, in 'Du droit à l'argumentation,' Gianni Vattimo speaks of 'l'ontocentrisme,' a term he uses to identify a tendency which is shared by deconstruction and others 'de tomber victime [du] mythe de l'objectivité' (Vattimo 1994, 370-71). This tendency is manifest precisely when the ontocentrist contests an objectivism; that is, as long as objectivism is an issue, ontocentrism persists, according to Vattimo.

<sup>21</sup> This is the 'supersensibility' that Derrida attributes to negative theology and from which he would distinguish deconstruction. See note 18.

<sup>22</sup> The reply to the quidditative question which states that *deconstruction is a word* makes a natural terminus. The problem of *singularity*, which preoccupied us in Chapter Two, is concentrated here, and it can hardly be exceeded. At the same time, nonetheless, it is precisely this issue of language and singularity which perhaps marks an opening towards the poetic, where words are, in a peculiar sense, in their element. The significance of the relationship between the poetic and the absolutely singular is addressed by Hent de Vries, for example, in 'Le Schibboleth de l'éthique: Derrida avec Celan' (de Vries 1992). The terminal-inaugural moment of 'deconstruction is a word,' which in a sense condenses or reduces or annihilates or crystallizes the story (or history) of deconstruction, also has an interesting analogue in Derrida's reading of Ponge in *Signsponge* (*Signéponge*): 'The annulling of this singular story [of the sponge-towel, or of deconstruction according to my analogy], its reduction to the inarticulate simplicity of a name or a thing, is all the more impossible in that the story itself insists forever upon the space [*infiniment à la mesure*] of its untellable [*inénarrable*] impossibility: and does so not only for the reasons just defined (exchange without exchange of the name with every language and with every thing, I insist on every language, not only French, Latin, or Greek...) but also because this story remains a story without event in the traditional sense of the word, the story of language and writing as the inscription of the thing itself as other..., the paradigm of the thing itself as other thing, the other inaccessible thing, the impossible subject' (Derrida 1984, 102-3). The story of deconstruction, which answers to the quidditative question, is annulled by the mute response, 'deconstruction is a word,' except that this is also where the story begins, where it insists, where it enters or becomes the 'space of its untellable impossibility.' My analogy compounds the difficulty however, for the substitution of (the singular word, the singular story of)

*deconstruction* for *sponge-towel* is strictly and readily impossible, as in the following instance: 'One should have, in any case,' says Ponge in *Oral Essay* [*Tentative Orale*], 'the fewest possible preconceived ideas. It is best of all to take up impossible subjects, which are also the nearest subjects: deconstruction.... On subjects of this sort, no preconceived ideas, none that are clearly stated....' (Quoted in Derrida 1984, 94). Here the word *deconstruction* overwrites *sponge-towel*—which has already overwritten *la serviette-éponge*—with a violence of incongruity that belies their easy mutual substitutivity. The difficulty is to discern, at a certain limit where gradations and comparatives are less available, what makes for a better or more appropriate or more perfect substitution-translation. What principle might work here? In 'On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy,' Derrida says, 'one must translate and one must not translate [*il faut traduire et il faut ne pas traduire*]' (Derrida 1983, 10; Derrida 1993c, 117), and it is immediately clear how true and brutal and inhospitable is this imperative.

## II WORDS AND THINGS

*Whatever the poverty of our knowledge in this respect, it is certain that the question of the sign is itself more or less—or in any event something other—than a sign of the times.*

*But this deconstruction is in some way the operation or rather the very experience that this text, it seems to me, first does itself, by itself, on itself. What does this mean? Is it possible? What remains, then, of such an event? Of its auto-hetero-deconstruction?*

—Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup>

THE ASSERTION IN CHAPTER TWO, in response to the quidditative question, that *deconstruction is a thing*, and the claim in Chapter Three that *deconstruction is a word*, open towards a complex problematic of words and things, a problematic in which deconstruction has always been implicated. In Chapter One, it was a matter of the deconstructive event with regard to the mechanism of reference. Deconstruction *intervened* there, in the field of reference, in the space between words and things. It was not *neutral*. This space has long been the disputed site of an intervention, an interruption, even a disruption or dislocation, by deconstruction. The referential mechanism was seduced from the shelter of its latency and exposed (though it was not clear that deconstruction was the sole agent of this exposure). There was a statement which came to be identified with this moment: 'There is nothing,' said Derrida, 'outside of the text' ('il n'y a pas de hors-texte') (Derrida 1976, 158). Whatever the translative and semantic complications and equivocations here, the simplicity of the English translation carries the polemical power and interruptive force of the statement, which is endowed with a fatal truth. But, subsequently, Derrida was pressed by circumstance to deny that deconstruction denies reference. Reference, argued Derrida, is that which points towards the other side. The denial of reference would then be the abdication of responsibility towards the other and the closure of the circuit of an idealism from which alterity is systematically excluded. Such a strategy does not belong to deconstruction, says Derrida.

What *really* happened, back then, in the field of reference, where deconstruction intervened, if it intervened? The difficulty of this question was addressed in a provisional and preliminary way in Chapter One. In PART TWO, the question takes its present form: What really happens, *here and now*, in the action of the referential mechanism?

There is a commonplace philosophical distinction between 'use' and 'mention' which seeks to establish with clarity, or at least to regulate, what happens in the field of reference, where words refer to things. In *Logic*, Wesley Salmon makes the rule about the appropriate use of quotation marks derived from this distinction the consequence of a 'principle': 'the principle that to *mention* an object we must *use* a name that is distinct

from the object being mentioned' (Salmon 1984, 141). This is what reference does: it uses a word to mention (refer to) an object. John Searle mobilizes this rule, borrowed from the legislative program of analytic philosophy, against deconstruction. However, in Chapter Four, 'Logic of the Word,' it becomes apparent that the rule has the effect of drawing attention to a zone of tribulation in the philosophy of language in which appears what I call the 'aporia of representation.' Perhaps, here, in this zone, there are, it seems, real consequences of deconstruction for the difference, and the relation, between words and things. Chapters Four and Five press further into this space between words and things, where they differ and coalesce, in pursuit of a formalization of this space and a clarification of its relation to the different difference of deconstruction.

## 4

## Logic of the Word

In 'Literary Theory and Its Discontents,' the philosopher John Searle provides literary theorists with sound instruction in the philosophy of language. As we saw in PART ONE, Rodolphe Gasché pursued a project with a similar intent: to remind literary theorists of their inadequacy, and sometimes ignorance, with regard to the philosophy that informs, or should inform, their theoretical work. Though Searle and Gasché have very different philosophical filiations, and though it is unlikely, in the event of an exchange between them, that they would be in any way well-disposed towards one another, their didactic tone with regard to the practitioners of literary theory for whose amateur and ill-informed productions they seek to provide a sober corrective is the same.<sup>1</sup>

In his paper, Searle argues that literary theorists lack either familiarity with or understanding of the work of twentieth-century anglophone philosophers of language, whose project has traveled some distance towards clarifying many fundamental questions regarding language. In the absence of this familiarity, literary theorists regularly produce and propagate confusions about language which undermine the worth of their theoretical work. Searle lays out the basic principles which, unless comprehensively refuted by careful argumentation and replaced by superior alternatives, ought to guide literary theorists in their explorations: the principle of the Background of interpretation; the distinction between types and tokens; the distinction between sentences and utterances; the distinction between use and mention; the principle of compositionality; the distinction between sentence meaning and speaker meaning; and the distinction between ontology and epistemology.

Searle performs a significant service for literary theory to bring these fundamental matters to its attention in a clear and systematic fashion. All these distinctions require careful scrutiny. They ought not to be hastily dismissed, passed over, or collapsed. And it may well be necessary to employ a basic *pragmatism* which permits these distinctions

to have loose or vague boundaries while, at the same time, they retain their essential utility, as Searle insists from the outset. However, he is less helpful when he represents the work of anglophone philosophers of language as monolithic and unified, for this assumption is much harder to demonstrate. Philosophy of language is a field divided and redivided amongst practitioners with divergent and sometimes violently opposed doctrinal positions. Implicit in Searle's case for a deference of literary theory to principles formulated in modern philosophy of language is the idea of a realized *consensus* of analytic doctrine which is, as yet, an ideal: a consensus-to-come. The field of analytic philosophy of language includes many philosophers who rarely or never interact with one another because their basic positions are irreconcilable. Though there may be some 'in principle' agreement about the importance of some of the distinctions Searle makes, the formulation of these distinctions varies markedly between philosophers with different philosophical allegiances. In many cases, it is not clear that a distinction which is constituted in one set of terms is in fact the *same* distinction constituted in an alternative framework.

The first principle Searle expounds is that of the 'Background' of interpretation, which is a kind of loose principle of contextuality. He presents this principle as one subject to general agreement amongst his peers, but it is, in fact, his own invention. This principle of 'Background,' in its particular Searlean formalization, is not in general use within his tradition. It appears in its capitalized form in Searle, but not in other places. Searle lets us understand, by implication, that he speaks with the full support of a philosophical movement, but it is not clear that he is necessarily a representative instance of it. In the same way in which *criticism* of analytic philosophy in general needs to bear in mind its heterogeneous constitution, any advocacy of the principles of philosophy of language needs also to move more prudently when making broad claims of mutual agreement amongst its practitioners, for this is not the case. Though consensus is a very powerful ideal for analytic philosophy, fierce disputation is as common as in other places.

Searle makes some related assumptions in his use of the term 'pre-Wittgensteinian,' which he employs on a number of occasions to characterize those, including Derrida, who have not encountered the Wittgensteinian epiphany. The status of Wittgenstein in the analytic tradition, however, is unclear and ambivalent, divided in particular between

the more formally oriented philosophers of language, and ordinary language philosophers, between the schools once associated with Cambridge and Oxford respectively.<sup>2</sup> It is not clear that there would be agreement amongst anglophone philosophers about what Searle's assertion of a philosophical rupture coincident with the advent of a univocal Wittgensteinism means. What seems on the contrary constantly in question in the analytic tradition is what are the consequences of Wittgenstein's philosophy, which is itself not a unified thing.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the critical *force* of Searle's instruction of literary theorists in the principles of analytic philosophy of language *depends upon* their ignorance of that tradition: that is, were literary theorists more familiar with the complexities of analytic philosophy of language, they would immediately recognize Searle's account of its 'principles' as an over-simplification whose practical utility is questionable; were literary theorists more engaged with the complexities of analytic philosophy of language, they would not discover straightforward solutions to puzzles and difficulties, but a *whole new set* of intractable difficulties infinitely elaborated in the filigree of a painstaking scholasticism. It is only because Searle speaks *across the divide* from one discourse to another that he can assume a position guaranteed by the principles of an ostensibly homogeneous community.

Nonetheless, at the level of over-simplification, some 'in principle' consensus about the distinctions Searle proposes might well obtain, provided that the agreement remained in the spirit of a *vagueness* regarding distinctions that Searle rightly places at the center of the conceptual methodology of contemporary anglophone philosophy.<sup>4</sup> The distinction of *use* and *mention* is an important example in this respect. No doubt, there would be few philosophers who would feel the need bluntly to refute this distinction, which is clearly exigent, but there remains, to this day, no canonical formulation of the *logic* of the distinction. Most certainly the distinction can be asserted, but it has yet to be *argued*. It is clearly not sufficient in philosophy that principles 'commonly accepted in logic, linguistics, and the philosophy of language' (Searle 1994, 637) be understood as requisite for any thinking about language simply on account of being 'commonly accepted'—that is, on account of being *conventional*. Yet, unfortunately, this is what Searle proposes. With regard to the distinction between use and mention, he does not offer more than the standard description:



If, for example, I say "Berkeley is in California," I use the word "Berkeley" to refer to a city. If I say "'Berkeley' has eight letters," I am mentioning the word "Berkeley" and talking about it. (Searle 1994, 644)

Distinguishing words (the word 'Berkeley,' for example, or the word 'spinach') from the things they refer to (the thing referred to by the word 'Berkeley,' which is a city; the leafy green matter referred to by the word 'spinach') is a very straightforward operation, even in the absence of the quotation marks which signal that the words 'Berkeley' and 'spinach' are being *mentioned* as words and not *used* to refer to Berkeley and to spinach respectively. Even the most committed textualist would have to marshal more than his considerable philosophical resources could supply in order to find the campus of the University of California in the word 'Berkeley.' Even the most single-minded textualist would struggle to extract the necessary bodily nutrients from the word 'spinach.' The slenderly endowed textualist is surely one for whom a steady diet of words has been insufficient to stave off a severe case of cerebral undernutrition.

It is plain that those who reject post-structural pan-textualism as the new idealism, those with their feet planted firmly on *terra firma*, are quite right. We live every day the simple fact of a word 'spinach' and the green stuff that has this name. But, unfortunately, this does not mean that the Man-cannot-live-on-words-alone argument is not a slight one—*philosophically*. Here philosophy is necessarily less sophisticated (or at least, more pig-headed) than the average three year-old. And here is the difficulty for those who would wed the logic of word and object with a certain modest and commonsensical realism, for perhaps *this* logic, followed scrupulously, does not lead in the right direction. Perhaps, indeed, it tends to go in another direction entirely.

It is not only analytic philosophers like John Searle who often apply the simple rule marking the distinction between use and mention, whose application is in the service of discursive clarity. It is in common and everyday use. The rule determines the occasions when a word (or group of words) ought really to be sheltered in quotation marks, to protect it from misunderstanding. Some philosophers call it a rule (or a principle) of *grammar*, as if, by this alignment, they could locate the rule in the very fabric of linguistic structure itself. The rule reflects a distinction, a distinction marked in the application of the rule by the absence or presence of quotation marks, a distinction between what is called the 'use' of a word and what is called the 'mention' of a word.

This rule is, then, the classical site of a deconstruction. In an important sense, we could say that the rule has always been the classical site of a deconstruction-to-come. It has the status of conventional wisdom and has not been adequately elaborated. It has not been well thought through. It purports to function in the interests of logical clarity, but, at the same time, it obscures difficulties in the formulation of a philosophy of language. Though it is hard to imagine that there is no awareness of these difficulties, the task that would address them has not been performed. There is a gap then, a caesura, a hiatus in the rule. Symptomatically, Searle too has invoked the rule, and in the context of a debate with deconstruction, but he has not demonstrated its logic. The task which presents itself as the classical occasion of a deconstruction is, simply, to investigate the logic of the rule marking the distinction of use and mention.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter then, we take Searle's exhortation with regard to distinguishing use and mention at face value. We seek to *formalize* their distinction. In the course of this analysis, what is emphasized is the distinction and the relationship of *word* and *object*, which follows the emphasis of the rule. This is not the whole story about the uses of words. However, whatever technical intricacies and detours might be introduced into an analytic of language, there is no avoiding the fundamentally *representational* or *referential* character of language. All attempts to retell this story nonrepresentationally or by displacing or eliminating the problem of meaning (Wittgenstein's concept of *use* in particular) cannot but do so by means of a host of representational assumptions. It is precisely these assumptions that would be exposed in a deconstruction.

Pursuing this deconstructive process, the analysis of a less than transparent rule is soon exceeded: by way of an interrogation of the rule, we begin, thanks to Searle's instigation, to discern something quite essential about how language works. The investigation of the rule opens upon the aporia of representation. This is straightforward enough. But what will have to be determined is the singular part of the *deconstructive difference* in bringing this opening into the open.

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The rule in question is not inconsequential, for it bears on matters more important than merely those of scholarly decorum: it would distinguish between two 'states' of the

word, and distinguish these for the purpose of clarity in the determination of a further, critical, distinction—the distinction, *within discourse in general*, of word and object.<sup>6</sup> Though this distinction, in its commonsensical dimension, might seem unproblematic and uncontroversial, it has an essential logical value in determining the character of the referential mechanism. Where word and object are not decisively distinguished, where the idea of something and that thing are mixed up, where signifier and signified are confused, then many processes of judgment and identification are made considerably more difficult. What is the reference point here? It is not just a certain realism that is invested in this distinction. This distinction would set out the terms and termini for the *referential relation in general*. When a word *refers*, what does it refer to? When a word represents something, how does it represent what it represents? An essential stability is, or would be, provided by the adjudication of this distinction: word/object. And here we must be careful from the outset not to underestimate its importance: the distinction of word and object is *essential*. Why? This will become apparent in what follows.

It is difficult to express the situation clearly. In the opening sentence of this section, I described the distinction as one between 'two "states" of the word.' Are they 'states' of the word? In one state, the word, say 'table,' refers, naturally enough, to its referent, the table, or perhaps to the class of objects named by the word 'table.' The word 'table' is, then, in this case, not a word *in its wordness*, it is not a word *as a word*—though it is a word—it is that which designates the object, that *means* by which the object is designated.<sup>7</sup> It represents the object. The wordness (or verbalism) of the word—that is, its *being a word*, its *being an object which is a word*—is subjugated to its designatory, or representative function with regard to the object. Indeed, this is its distinctive aptitude. The word is not, itself, as such, a word—though it is a word—but, in an important sense that we will have to scrutinize at some length, *it is what it represents*—in this instance, a (or *the*) table.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, there are times when the word is meant to have the properties of its wordness, of its being itself an object, an object which is a word. In this state or mode of being, the word is the word in its wordness. How can this be made clear discursively? How do we indicate that the word is the word *as word*? The convention is that we use quotation marks. Hence we do not speak of the word table, but of the word 'table.' Applying the quotation marks, it can safely be asserted that, while a table might

have four legs, 'table' has five letters. The risk of confusion is eliminated by the intervention of the quotation marks.

Though the problem and the potential confusion which require this maneuver are relatively clear, the logic of the distinction is not clear. There are systematic ambiguities in the way the distinction has already been formulated, and, as a consequence, the matter must be examined more closely in order to ascertain how, systematically, to disambiguate them—or, at least, to ascertain how to determine the range and character of these ambiguities. The two following accounts of the rule which marks the distinction between use and mention will provide assistance in framing the question about representation that the distinction poses:

(a) The following sentence is nonsense: Table has five letters. It is ungrammatical, for it confuses use and mention of a word; it violates the general principle that to *mention* an object we must *use* a name that is distinct from the object being mentioned. The fact that we are talking about a word is no license to confuse the object being discussed with the words used in the discussion.<sup>9</sup>

(b) If I remark that the (German) word 'Gott' has four letters, then I am mentioning the word and not using it. So what is being talked about is not God but, strictly, a four-letter word. Where a word is mentioned it is a word in a particular language; if the sentence in which such a mention occurs is translated, that word is left as it was. But the use of a word, the task to which it is put, must be the same for all its synonyms, both in the same and other languages.<sup>10</sup>

Just as in Searle's version of the rule, there is in both of the preceding accounts a simplicity and straightforwardness of exposition. But, perhaps there is something cursory, something too hasty also about these formulations. Moreover, the abutment of these two accounts of the same rule appears to produce an anomaly that will have to be unraveled. They seem to be in agreement, but how far does this agreement extend? A closer reading must attend to the conceptual coherence of each exposition and to the coherence between the two expositions. Such an examination ought to lead towards a new appreciation of the problem the rule exposes.

## I

Let us look in detail at what the logician Wesley Salmon says in the first quotation:

The following sentence is nonsense: Table has five letters. It is ungrammatical, for it confuses use and mention of a word; it violates the general principle that to *mention* an object we must *use* a name that is distinct from the object being mentioned.

Salmon refers, firstly, to the confusion of the 'use and mention of a word.' In the next clause, as synonymous with (the use of) a 'word,' he introduces the word 'name.' Here a word is a name. *Names* are used to mention objects. But the name is *not* the object. The name is different from the object. The name is not the object *itself*. The object *itself* is the *real* or extra-linguistic object, in and as its essential self-identity: the object is itself, and does not derive its being (that is, its being what it is) from any relation other than its relation to itself.<sup>11</sup>

This distinction (use and mention) Salmon calls a *principle* (in fact, by implication, a principle of grammar): 'that to mention an object we must use a name that is distinct from the object being mentioned.' In fact what he determines as a principle of grammar is clearly also, perhaps, a principle of realism.

What is mentioned? An object. And we use a name (a word) to mention an object. And we use a name which is distinct from the object being mentioned. What is the object mentioned in *this* case (in the sentence, 'we use a name to mention an object')? It is the object object. That is, the word 'object' is used to refer to objects, in fact to refer to objects *in general*. What then is mentioned by the name 'object'? We use the name (or word) 'object' to mention what? An object? Yes: *we use the name (word) 'object' to mention an object*.

What is the status of the second instance of the word 'object' in this last sentence? Not qualified by quotation marks, it is a case of the use of a name to mention an object: the object object.

However, since the second occurrence of 'object' in this last sentence is a name, a name used to mention 'objects' in general (inverted commas have crept in here as the word 'object' becomes subject to a distinct equivocation), it remains unclear *what it is* that is mentioned—that is, it becomes unclear how the object mentioned is distinct from the name.

Would it make things clearer if the object in question, the one mentioned, were present? We could point at it and say..., and say what? What object is it? We have been talking about an object *in general*, and the word 'object' has been used to mention it. However, such an object cannot, of course, be present as such—except inasmuch as *every* object is an *example* of it. But an object in general *itself*? It must be said at this point that it is not possible to defer to the presence of an object in order to find a solution to this initial difficulty.

To reiterate: we use a word to mention an object. We use the word 'object' to mention..., to mention what? To mention an object. Again: we use the word 'object' to mention an object. And we have used the word 'object' to mention an object in this last sentence. What is it about this sequence that seems unsatisfactory? There is a small hint here about the fate of the object.

On the other hand, to approach this matter from the other side, we might grant the object its instance and its objectivity as a starting point. Thus, if the second occurrence of the word 'object,' which is a *use* of the word 'object,' *is* to mention an object, then what becomes of (the nameness of) the name in this use of the *name*? What is the name in the mentioning of the object? What constitutes its peculiar *transparency* with regard to the object it instances? The object is represented, and, in a critical sense, *more than represented* in and by the (or its) name.

Let us rephrase Salmon's principle in terms that render very precisely the ambiguity which begins to be discerned in his account of the rule marking the distinction of use and mention:

To mention the object is to identify the object with the name.

(At least) two senses of 'identify... with' operate here side by side:

1. the name is the medium, means, vehicle, or agency by which the object is identified, like a name-tag on a stray dog.
2. mentioning is the moment of the identification of name and object. In the *mentioning*, the name *is* the object.<sup>12</sup> The nameness of the name is effaced, forgotten, elided—subordinated, it seems, to the object it names.

So, is this simply what it means to *use* a name? It is, in a sense, *used up* in being used, without residue, so that nothing of the 'wordness' of the name remains, only a

pure representativity. Is the using already a mentioning? Perhaps the notion of 'use' is a little misleading, obscuring with its apparent simplicity the complexity of the relation of name (i.e., word) and object. For it seems that a name is not such a simple tool, like a spade used to dig a hole.

Without the *necessary and essential identification* of name and object—in which the use of the word *is* a mention of the object, and in which the name, *as name*, is, perhaps, forgotten—there could be no talk of objects. Without this identification, there would be no objects at all (and no *names* also, since here we use the word 'name' to mention the *object* name). The fundamental difference between name and object named must then be obscured for the object to be mentioned at all. Without this curious retraction of (the *nameness* of) the name in favor of the object, how could the object have become what it is—how could it ever come into its own? Would it not always lie concealed beneath the sheer opacity of a name whose *nameness* (perhaps, that is, whose *materiality*) cannot be forgotten? Would it not always lie concealed beneath the sheer opacity of a name whose *nameness* cannot be seen through? Such a predicament is unthinkable.<sup>13</sup>

But what is this *nameness* of the name? Its *nameness* is precisely its quality of being the *object* name—that is, its quality of being the kind of object which a name is. The *nameness* of the name is, already, and disconcertingly, a kind of *objectness*: the (peculiar) *objectness* of the name.

There is some complication then. Not only does the name become the object, and no longer a name, in doing the work of naming, but the object fails *not* to be *always* (and always already) named. That is, each time we approach the object, as though towards a kind of terminus, we do not disclose the object *itself*, but merely and ubiquitously the name used to mention it. The name 'object,' or the name 'thing,' are two prominent examples. It is not clear what it is, not only as terminus, but as origin, that might ever have come to be named.<sup>14</sup> With only names, then, and, apparently, deprived of objects themselves, we discover that the *nameness* of the name, its essence, is nothing less than its (particular) *objectness*. The object returns—having, perhaps, never been far off—as the essence of the name.

Names point to objects, and objects lead back to names. Names and objects—which are, respectively, according to the analytical transformation we have outlined, *objects* and *names*—appear to present, at the same time and equally, an impenetrability and a

transparency: the impenetrability of the object and the transparency of the name; the transparency of the object and the impenetrability of the name.

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Let us hear Salmon's words again:

The following sentence is nonsense: Table has five letters. It is ungrammatical, for it confuses use and mention of a word; it violates the general principle that to *mention* an object we must *use* a name that is distinct from the object being mentioned. The fact that we are talking about a word is no license to confuse the object being discussed with the words used in the discussion.

Salmon's argument fails to clarify an important part of the rule which marks the distinction between use and mention: How do we make the transition from use and mention of a *word* to use of a *name* and mention of an *object*?<sup>15</sup> That is, also, how do we make the transition from (use and mention of a) 'word,' to (use of a) 'name' and (mention of an) 'object'? In the pursuit of his explication, Salmon links the instance of mention with objects. Because of this, he does not, in the end, distinguish adequately between the use and mention of a *word*. Oddly, given his intention to give an account of an essential logico-grammatical rule, it remains *implicit* which case requires quotation marks.

Salmon says, 'It [a certain sentence] is ungrammatical, for it confuses *use and mention of a word*' (my emphasis). He immediately goes on to point out, 'that to *mention* an object we must *use* a name that is distinct from the object being mentioned.'

It is now quite clear why Salmon shifts from the use of a *word* to mention an object, to the use of a *name* to mention an object. Firstly, and less significantly, the word 'name' suggests a kind of natural transitivity: it is a name *of* something. This relation to a 'something,' to an object, is implicit in the use of the word (or name) 'name.'<sup>16</sup> Secondly, the use of the word 'name' is part of a rhetorical stratagem in Salmon's analysis by means of which the words 'object' and 'name' displace the word 'word.' Why this crude stratagem? What confusion would it conceal?

We use a word to mention an object. What happens when the object in question is a word? It is a case of the mention of a word. Salmon does not pursue the logic of his

definition to its conclusion: to mention a *word* is for the word to have the status of the *object which it is* (not the object which it *represents*, except inasmuch as it represents what it is). What kind of object is it? The word is a word. 'Word' is the name of the (kind of) object that words do not generally name (except in the case of the word 'word' or the word 'name'), though it is what they are.

What is *used* to mention a word? Of course a word is used to mention a word. Is this right? Are we still *using* the word when its task is no longer so clearly representational? Is not the word simply there, as itself, and in its wordness? Of course we cannot not *use* the word, even if only to mention itself.

But when we use a word to mention a word, is it the same word in each case? Is the word used the one mentioned? Surely, yes. And surely this is the whole point of the quotation marks that Salmon omits to mention. The difficulty is, however, that if it is the same word at each 'stage,' then the word is, simultaneously, *word* and *object*. This 'violates the general principle that to *mention* an object we must *use* a name [i.e., a word] that is distinct from the object being mentioned.'

Whether it is to evade this dilemma that Salmon produces the displacements of vocabulary detailed here or whether it is simply carelessness is unclear. In either case, his account eludes a range of complications that follow merely from attention to the logic of the distinction of use and mention, word and object—that is, from attention to the logic of representation.

Salmon's final sentence compounds this confusion: 'The fact that we are talking about a word is no license to confuse the object being discussed with the word used in the discussion.' Here the phrase 'talking about a word' must be the same as 'mentioning a word,' and the 'object being discussed' must be the same as the 'object being mentioned,' but this is not made explicit. Why not? Because the notion of the distinction of use and mention necessitates it. His sentence might be recast in this way: 'The fact that we are *mentioning* a word is no license to confuse *the object being mentioned* with *the word used in the mentioning*.' This lack of clarity, masked by some unremarked terminological substitutions, traverses Salmon's account. More than this: it is essential to the course of his brief formulation of the rule.

This is a demanding analysis and it requires patient amplification. In the instance of the *mention of a word*, the word is an object. It is objects that are mentioned, and words

that are used to mention them. To mention a word, in this instance, is to mention an object. Hence, in the case of mention, which is the *mention of a word*: word = object. When a word is used to name an object (another object), it does *not* require quotation marks. When a word is mentioned as an object, it does. It is as an object that the word is placed in quotation marks, though it is precisely the function of the quotation marks to distinguish word and object by determining the word as a word and not an object.

Despite the shortcomings of Salmon's brief exposition, we may be confident that there are ways to put this analysis on the right track. For example: though the word is an object, and, being mentioned, is explicitly so, it is not necessarily the same object that it would mention were it to be *used*.

The confusion is, however, more pronounced and less tractable when the word in question—which surely it already is—is the word 'word.' The case of the word 'word' is not a marginal instance. The word 'word' refers to objects that are words. 'Word' is an object, the object word. When (the word) 'word' is used to refer to objects that are words, we use (the word) 'word,' except without quotation marks: 'word.' Though the quotation marks appear here, they merely quote the absence of quotation marks about (the word) 'word,' for *this* instance of (the word) 'word' is without them.

Such a curious vorticality can be put quite simply: to refer to the word as a word (which is to mention it, the word 'word') is to refer to it as an object (the word is its own referent), for the word *itself* is an object and a word: word = object.

Thus the two possibilities stand side by side: (1) word = object; (2) 'word' = object. The word—the word 'word'—either refers to objects that are words or *is* the objectness of the word: the word as an object. The objectness of the word is at the same time the wordness of the word: its being a word, having *x* letters, and so on.<sup>17</sup>

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Despite its brevity, Salmon's account makes clear its metaphysical commitment. In passage (a), the distinction belongs to a realism, and also to a representational dualism: we *mention* an object by the *use* of a name (a word). This realism, which is not necessarily historically specific, resides in the dualism of name, or word, and object<sup>18</sup>; it is the simple and tangible reality of objects that are quite distinct from the names we



give them, the names we use to mention them. These are non- or extra-linguistic objects, external objects, as it were, objects whose fundamental and inviolable reality—and their burden of reality is linked to their essential externality—has nothing, or at least little, to do with language or thought. They are what is called 'mind-independent'—or 'language-independent'—objects. Salmon's exposition marks this independence: 'to mention an object we must use a name that is distinct from the object being mentioned.'

These objects are self-identical: that is—and this is not an easy thing to express—they are *there*, beyond us, in space, *for themselves*. They do not require the presence of thinking beings. Or, more precisely: they do not require the presence of thinking beings *in order to be*. These objects persist independently of any human relation to them. That they might not do so, that they might, in some odd way, and in the absence of a thinking being, *evanesce*, is the Berkeleyan consequence against which the realist's fundamental instincts rebel.<sup>19</sup>

In giving a brief outline of the realist's doctrine, some care is required. It is necessary to avoid caricature. Realism makes a simple, persistent appeal: it seeks to account without undue complication for the commonsense, quotidian relationship with things, and it seeks to situate contemporary empiricism, as the basis of scientific method, in a plausible, secular onto-epistemological framework.<sup>20</sup> But, at the same time, the realist, like the believer, has an ambivalent relationship to the object. The realist invests in the absolute reality of external objects what the devout worshipper invests in the deity.<sup>21</sup> The object is a higher power. It is the power and the measure of truth. Because the object is *there*, independent of any human consciousness, it is *other* than human, other than what is, or even what can be, thought. It is an *alterior* object. The realist, often treated as congenitally naive, nonetheless reveals with remarkable clarity a dimension of necessity in thought: reference tends towards identification of the other. In the face of this necessity, realism is unavoidable. In the face of this necessity, naivety is all but inescapable.

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Salmon's account of the rule marking the distinction of use and mention has the appearance of coherence. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals the means by which his

account seeks to elude some intractable difficulties. These difficulties arise from the task which is implicit in the formulation of such a rule: it must give an account of the fundamental mechanism of language—that is, of representation. Seeking to clarify the character and limits of the representativity of words, the rule of use and mention endeavors to bring into focus an area of persistent blurring in linguistic analysis.

The inadequacies of Salmon's account are produced, not by its brevity, but by factors not necessarily remediable at greater length—by profound difficulties accompanying the thinking of representation. There is a doctrine called 'realism' which would provide a passage through these difficulties. But the solution encounters a problem of articulation. A kind of necessity compels the displacements that compromise Salmon's exposition. The task has been not only to expose the deficiencies in Salmon's articulation of the rule, but to approach an understanding of what obstructs the formulation of a logic of representation.

In his account of the rule of use and mention, Salmon appears to turn away from the demands imposed by the task of thinking the distinction of use and mention as a logic of the representational mechanism. Instead, there is the pedagogic satisfaction of a lucidity from which all hesitation has been expunged. It is unfortunate that such an easy route to establishing the rule should take place in the name of clarity and logic. But even here, in its manifest inadequacies, Salmon's brief account, subjected to scrutiny, directs us towards the latent complexities of its subject.

## II

The second passage which gives an account of the rule which marks the difference between use and mention, passage (b), shifts the emphasis considerably:

If I remark that the (German) word 'Gott' has four letters, then I am mentioning the word and not using it. So what is being talked about is not God but, strictly, a four-letter word. Where a word is mentioned it is a word in a particular language; if the sentence in which such a mention occurs is translated, that word is left as it was. But the use of a word, the task to which it is put, must be the same for all its synonyms, both in the same and other languages.

This account does not appear to determine the use and mention of a word via the distinction of word and object. Indeed, Flew formulates the distinction without using—or mentioning—the word 'object' at all.

From the beginning, Flew's example—the sentence, 'the word "Gott" has four letters'—would assist in distinguishing the mention *of a word* from its use. This is the task Salmon purported to perform but from which he was deflected. Salmon shifted from his proposed focus—use and mention *of a word*—to the use of a word to mention an object. The matter was, in the end, never satisfactorily clarified.<sup>22</sup>

Flew begins:

If I remark that the (German) word 'Gott' has four letters, then I am mentioning the word and not using it. So what is being talked about is not God but, strictly, a four-letter word.

The sentence in question is:

The word 'Gott' has four letters.

As Salmon made explicit—though Flew does not—the rationale for the rule which applies quotation marks comes from the nonsensicality of this situation:

Gott has four letters.

In the practice prior to the application of the rule's quotational mechanism, the necessary clarification is provided like this:

The word Gott has four letters.

The introduction of quotation marks obviates the necessity of qualifying the word in question with the words 'the word....' To write 'the word "Gott"' or to simply write 'Gott' is to say the same thing. For example:

'Gott' has four letters.

The word 'Gott' has four letters.

These two sentences are (effectively) the same. That is, they say the same thing. In the idiom Flew will develop, we could say that they perform the same task. Both mention the word—they do not, as Flew tells us, mention God. What about God? Is He mentioned?

[W]hat is being talked about is not God but, strictly, a four-letter word.

That is to say, what answers to the 'what' of the question 'What is being talked about?' is not God. Note that 'being talked about' substitutes, as it did for Salmon, for 'being mentioned': what is *being mentioned* is not God but, strictly, a four-letter word. The word 'Gott' is mentioned, not God. What is the status of the ('')God('') who is *not* being talked about? Is He the object? The referent? It is unclear, at least as yet, even though His distinction from (the word) 'Gott' is decisive.

Since Flew has not expanded on God's status, then the distinction, which for Salmon was between word and object, is here between the word and God, between the word 'Gott' and God, or 'Gott'/God—or, perhaps, more directly, and more essentially, 'God'/God. Is this an adequate opposition? Can we yet relate Salmon's and Flew's discriminations? Perhaps, at this stage, the distinction itself must remain tenuous until the matter of the status of a disquotational God is clarified.

At the risk of repetition, let us hear Flew's first sentence again, for it will be necessary to move back and forth across his brief expository text in order to elaborate what remains condensed in its brevity:

If I remark that the (German) word 'Gott' has four letters, then I am mentioning the word and not using it.

Flew says he is 'mentioning *the word* and not using it.' What word is mentioned? The word 'Gott.' What word is not used? The word 'Gott.' However, at the same time, a degree of *generality* adheres, and is crucial to Flew's use of 'the word' and of the 'it' that substitutes for it, inasmuch as the emphasis falls on 'the word.' The sentence can be expanded a little so that less of it remains inexplicit:

If I remark that the (German) word 'Gott' has four letters, then I am mentioning the word ('Gott') and not using the word ('Gott').

'Gott' is the word. 'Gott' is the word 'Gott.' 'Gott' is the *word*, not God. 'Gott' is not God. Or, similarly: 'God' is not God.

A familiar query emerges here immediately: Is it the *same* word that is used and mentioned? Is it the same word that is the 'the word' of the consequent?<sup>23</sup>

Inasmuch as the word is a word and is mentioned, the word is circumscribed by quotation marks. These marks mark the word as a word. In fact, to be precise, it would have to be said that the word 'Gott'—inasmuch as it is a word—consists of four letters and two quotation marks. The quotation marks help to define the word as a word. Does the *word* ever appear without these marks? Following the rule—and the rule responds to a necessity—we are unable to mention the word without them. So, when we use the word 'Gott,' signaling its use by the absence of quotation marks, is it the same word? Is it the same word without these marks? Without these marks, the question arises: Is it a word at all? When we use the word, what is it in its being used?

It does seem that the word 'use' lends an unwarranted or misleading aura of clarity to how the way of words might come to be understood. It oversimplifies, or simply evades, the difficulty of understanding whatever it is that takes place in representation. What precisely this proposed *utility* of words is remains itself unexplained. The question of the use of words remains concealed, somehow, behind *what would be the self-evident explanatory value* of the word 'use.'

But let us leave this problem for the moment and continue.

The mention of a word is its mention *as* a word. And how is its wordness characterized here?

Where a word is mentioned it is a word in a particular language; if the sentence in which such a mention occurs is translated, that word is left as it was.

Its wordness lies in its being 'a word in a particular language.' It is then, it would seem, decisively localized. The mentioning of the word makes it strictly untranslatable. Or, perhaps, on the contrary, the mentioning of the word makes it *completely* translatable, because the word readily translates—that is, crosses—from one language to another without the need for any alteration: 'that word is left as it was.' It can be as easily translated as a full stop or a proper name.

Why is this the case? What enables such a facile (non)translation? If *the word* is mentioned, then in *neither* language does the word mean, or represent, anything (else)—that is, *in neither language is the word used to mention anything (else)*:

So what is being talked about is not God but, strictly, a four-letter word.

Is this right? Perhaps. But how can this be right? For surely *the word must be used*, even if only, in some sense, to mention itself. Is it possible to mention a word without using it? This appears to be the contention. But clearly, mentioning the word, we use it too, since in the very process of mentioning a word we make it quite insusceptible to substitutions: it is arrested between the quotation marks; it translates only as itself; we cannot exchange it for a synonym since, *meaningless*, it has none. It is, in this case, 'Gott' and *only* 'Gott.'

In the sentence, 'the word "Gott" has four letters,' the word 'Gott' mentions 'Gott' and only 'Gott.' But is it *used* to mention 'Gott'? And if not, what is?

The word 'Gott' does not mention God. But the word 'Gott' does mention a four-letter word:

So what is being talked about [i.e., being mentioned] is not God but, strictly, a four-letter word.

The word 'Gott' is used to mention something. It is used to mention a four-letter word. Is this then what the word 'Gott' means?

If something is mentioned, then what mentions it, presumably a word, represents (stands for) it. In this sense, the word 'Gott' *represents* a four-letter word. 'Gott' represents a four-letter word.

But 'Gott' *is* a four-letter word.

The word 'Gott' mentions a four-letter word. 'Gott' mentions a four-letter word. What is *used* to make this mention?

Though it is perhaps still unclear at this point what is *not* being talked about—what is the status of the God opposed to the word—the matter of what *is* being talked about ought to be more straightforward. What is being talked about is '*strictly*, a four-letter word.' The '*strictly*' here points to the technical and quotational mechanism by means of which the wordness of the word is foregrounded. However, though 'Gott' is certainly a

four-letter word, it is not *any* four-letter word, and the expression (predicate) '(is) a four-letter word' is not substitutable for it. That is, not *strictly*. What is being talked about is, *strictly*, the four-letter word 'Gott.'

Why is this important? Why is the attributive mechanism of predication unacceptable here? Precisely for the reasons that have been outlined. What is interesting about the *mention* of a word is that the word in question *must be used* in order to mention it—in order to mention itself. The untranslatability—complete translatability—of the mentioned word is also its resistance to substitutions—other than repetitions of the word itself, of course, which exactly reproduce its graphical features.

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How, in fact, then, does the mentioning of a word take place?

We assume that in order to mention a word, *something* must be used. In asserting that the word 'Gott' has four letters, Flew contends, we are mentioning the word and not using it. Can this mean that 'Gott' is simply mentioned, as if there were no mechanism for this mentioning? This is a sleight of hand. The vehicle of a mentioning is, invariably, as Salmon taught us, a word. Can there be a pure mentioning, a mention without a means? Is this what happens when a word is mentioned?

Perhaps there are means, and they are the quotation marks. The mention of a word is distinguished by quotation marks, the mention of God by their absence. Quotation marks are *used* to mention a word. Quotation marks are used to indicate a *case* of the mention of a word. However, not *just* quotation marks. Quotation marks alone ('' or ' ' or ' ') do not mention anything. We need quotation marks *plus* the word itself. How else could the word be *mentioned*? How else could the word be mentioned but *by itself*?

To write the word 'God,' for example, what is it that is written? We write (the word) 'God.' Not 'Gott,' 'Dieu,' 'Lord,' 'Father,' but 'God.' What about God? We leave Him out of the picture. God Himself is not invoked, God is not mentioned, while only His name is mentioned. But haven't we in *this* case ('God is not mentioned...') written *the word 'God'*? Yes, it would seem so. But the word 'God' has been written without quotation marks. Though *without* quotation marks, it is nonetheless the case that we have written the word 'God.'

Perhaps then, there is this possibility: every time a word is used, that word, though without quotation marks, carries with it a pair of these marks, quasi-covertly, or as if in parentheses:

(\*)God(\*)

It would not always be clear whether or not there were, around a word, a pair of quotation marks, silently identifying the wordness of the word even while it is being used.

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Hierarchization could bring some clarity to the question of the use of quotation marks to mark the distinction of use and mention. The matter might be mastered in the following way:

Writing the word 'God,' we mention the *word*, the word 'God.'

*That is:*

We use the word 'God' to mention the word 'God.'

More accurately:

We use the word 'Gott' *plus quotation marks* to mention the word 'God.'

Assuming that the 'plus quotation marks' is *in addition* to the quotation marks that *already* appear to enclose the word 'God'—which is not a *necessary* assumption, since the 'plus quotation marks' may be a way of merely pointing to the quotation marks that are already there—then we simply add the quotation marks to 'God':

We use ''God'' to mention the word 'God.'

This can be continued:

We use ''God'' to mention the word ''God''.

We use ""God"" to mention the word "God".

This establishes the structure of a metalinguistic progression.

But it is not entirely clear what it means to write "God", merely doubling the quotation marks, before arriving at more extended examples like ""God"". The number of quotation marks seems to measure the distance from God.

Given the possibility of such a hierarchization, there is perhaps a more pressing problem: What ensures the *absence* of quotation marks at the origin of the representational chain? It is not clear how can we be sure that, when we make the distinction,

'God'/God

that we have not begun, inadvertently, somewhere in the middle of the chain, and that the distinction we mark is not, for example,

""God""/""God""

The problem is the same for both these examples. It was represented earlier in this way: (')God('). This representation might be exceeded by the following example:

(')""God""(')

And by another:

(')(')(')God(')(')(')

And so on.

The consequence of a hierarchization is the disruption, or volatilization, of the ordering of levels by means of which its structure, and its efficacy as a structure, is determined. It is understandable then why such emphasis is placed in realist doctrine on the terminus of representation in the real itself, that is, with the reference of the word to the object. It is the extra-linguistic object which organizes the representativity of the linguistic system.

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There are some difficulties clarifying the mechanism marking the distinction of use and mention. It appears to resist being formulated more explicitly. There remains something curious and something unregistrable about the way in which the two following sentences fail adequately to analyze the matter:

If I remark that the (German) word 'Gott' has four letters, then I am mentioning the word and not using it. So what is being talked about is not God but, strictly, a four-letter word.

We are put on the alert immediately by the adverb 'strictly,' whose presence has already been mentioned. Why 'strictly'? The 'strictly' gives us a hint that all is not right here. In order to discover where the problem lies, some clarifications are needed.

The passage requires further amplification and elucidation, interpretation and translation. It does not seem to command the analytical vocabulary it expounds. It does not make the issue clear—though the passage does not itself signal overtly the difficulties that will emerge under closer scrutiny. There is no alerting the reader to the difficulties of the subject. The straightforwardly declarative rhetoric of the passage would itself pass for clarity: it appears to know what it is talking about, and, if its exposition does not receive undue attention, then this coherence will not be exposed as something other than what it is.

There is, however, no abandoning the inquiry. Nor is there an immediate solution which would transform the predominance of interrogatives into a series of clarificatory, assertoric sentences. The structure of the problem has yet to be elucidated adequately. What is clear is that the characterization of use and mention has introduced into the space between them a kind of incommensurability:

(1) The word 'Gott' does not mention God.

Here, improbably, the *word* is unable to mention the object. Perhaps what is required is to qualify this statement in this way:

(2) In the sentence, 'the word "Gott" has four letters,' the word 'Gott' does not mention God.



What occurs in this maneuver of qualification? Can we proceed from here to say that:

- (3) The word 'Gott' is not *used* to mention God?

Or do we need to qualify the last statement in the following way?

- (4) In the sentence, 'the word "Gott" has four letters,' the word 'Gott' is not used to mention God.

What *does* the word 'Gott' mention?

- (5) The word 'Gott' mentions a four-letter word.

Can we proceed from here to say that:

- (6) The word 'Gott' is *used* to mention a four-letter word?

Or do we need to qualify the last statement in the following way?

- (7) In the sentence, 'the word "Gott" has four letters,' the word 'Gott' is used to mention a four-letter word.

It is not clear that we possess the means to resolve these questions, which are posed, if implicitly, in Flew's brief exposition of the rule marking the distinction of use and mention.

Each *unqualified* statement (1, 3, 5, 6), presented in its *generality*, would approach the difficulty, contradiction, or paradox, opened in the labor of representing the representational mechanism—and representing it, here, by the application of the rule marking the distinction of use and mention. Each qualification would place a limitation on this paradoxical effect. But it would achieve this result only by having the problem already *contained* in the maneuver of qualification. In this maneuver, the quoting of the word, which is its mention, is itself quoted.

There is a subtle but persistent ambiguity inherent in the application of the quotational mechanism. Can it be dispelled?

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What is the mention of a word? The mention of the word is a kind of self-mention, making the word opaque to its representativity—except inasmuch as it now represents, or is, itself. What is it? It is what it is. What is it for it to be what it is?

It is a series of *graphic elements* (letters) that remain, once the word is disjoined from what it would stand for. Is the word these graphic elements? It is not yet possible to answer this question because, unfortunately, if the analysis of the rule has determined anything, it is that it is not clear what *precisely* we are referring to when we talk about ('the word'), or ('a word'), or ('word'), or ('words').<sup>24</sup> This is Anthony Flew's irony, for there is a related dilemma when we use the word 'God.' What does the word 'God' refer to? Flew's selection of his exemplary word is both auspicious and inauspicious; its exemplariness both complements and exceeds his intention:

*Kai theos en ho logos*

And the Word was ('God').

There is more than a mere theological intrigue here. It is the case that 'God' is a word. It may be the case that *God is the Word*. But is it the case that God—or ('God')—is *only* a word? What might this mean—to be *only a word*?

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How does Flew understand the *use* of a word?

Where a word is mentioned it is a word in a particular language; if the sentence in which such a mention occurs is translated, that word is left as it was. But the use of a word, the task to which it is put, must be the same for all its synonyms, both in the same and other languages.

The use of a word is 'the task to which it is put.' The reference to a 'task'—which is, in effect, to add emphasis to the notion of *use*—avoids the explicit realism of Salmon's account in (a). The words 'Gott' and 'God' are put to the *same task*. It is not made entirely clear what that task is. Is the task of the words 'God' and 'Gott' to refer to what

both 'God' and 'Gott' refer to, to represent what both 'God' and 'Gott' represent, or is it something else?

What is the *task* of a word? It is an appealing, if obscure, notion. The words 'God' and 'Gott' perform the same task. They do the same thing. The actions of these words in a sentence are the same. A sentence in German that uses 'Gott' puts this word to the same use that a sentence in English puts 'God.' Therefore the words 'Gott' and 'God' can be exchanged, for such a translation *preserves the task* of each word, which is the *same task*. As the same task, both words are referred to this commonality.<sup>25</sup>

Let us recall this (partial) sentence:

[T]he task to which [a word] is put must be the same for all its synonyms.

It does not say that the task *is* the same, but that the task *must be* the same. Why 'must be'? Why prescribe this sameness with an imperative? Why the *necessity* of this sameness? The task to which a word and its synonyms is put must be the *same task* precisely because here, in the sentence under scrutiny, the task, which is the task *of a word*, is already *what each synonym of the word shares in order to be a synonym*. The task must *already* be the same for there to be synonyms as such. It is the *task* to which each synonym is referred as the possibility of synonymy.

The task to which a word is put must be the same for all a word's synonyms. The synonyms are synonyms inasmuch as they are the property of the word. What do the synonyms of a word all mean? They all mean *that word*. Or: they all mean *the same thing* as that word. What is this 'same thing' in this case? It is the *task*. The synonyms, inasmuch as they are synonyms, are referred to this task. The synonyms all *mean* this task. The task is the meaning.

What determines synonymy is the common element which the *different* words refer to—for example, *the word* (which is, here, already, in a sense, the word as the concept common to the synonym-words, that is, as the sense or intension), the object, the referent, or the task. Without this mutual reference point, how could synonymy possibly be established?<sup>26</sup>

[T]he task to which [a word] is put must be the same for all its synonyms.

Does this sentence in fact say any more than the following sentence?

In order that there be synonymy there must be something, let us call it a 'task,' which is the same for all the words called synonyms.

Given then that they are synonyms, then, of course, the task must be the same. But that they *are* synonyms depends on the sameness of the task. The statement is a simple tautology. Its tautologousness reinforces the curious mysticism that comes to attach itself to this word 'task,' just as, earlier, there was a decisive vagueness in Flew's invocation of a God whose status in terms of the representational problematic of use and mention is not clarified.

What is Flew doing with the word 'task' here? The introduction of the word is a rhetorical device that attempts to elude the difficulties that beset one who would give a precise account of the representational problematic—inasmuch as the problematic is, strictly, formulable.<sup>27</sup> When he writes, 'the use of a word, the task to which it is put, must be the same for all its synonyms,' the *necessary redundancy* of the interpolation of the word 'task' is immediately recognizable. 'Task' is the word that invokes the spirit of the Wittgensteinian *mysticism of use*, as though it would put to rest the aporia of representation.<sup>28</sup>

'Task' is meant to reinforce what is already, we imagine, self-evident about the word 'use.' How far does it achieve this, for is not *its* task effectively the same as that of 'use'?

Salmon said that *we use a word to mention an object*. For Flew:

The use of a word is the task to which it is put.

That is:

We use a word to perform a task.

Or:

Using a word, the word performs a task.

Which is as much as to say:

We use a word to do what its used for.

Or:

Using a word, it has a use.

How much progress has been made? The problem has endured a lateral displacement, with 'task' as an explanation of 'use,' or 'use' as an explanation of 'task.' Is this a solution? Though both these words are certainly very useful, it would seem that their efficacy is less than fully accounted for, that their efficacy is, in fact—by way of explanation—a mere gesture towards the inexplicable.

These two terms propose a solution to the representational conundrum. But, is the representational conundrum circumvented? The 'task/use' of a word is another way of pointing to the word's work of representation: there is the word and the *concept* (of the word); there is the word and the *referent* (of the word); there is the word and the *use* (of the word); there is the word and the *task* (of the word).

Here the word represents the task, and the task of the word is what it *does*. What this 'doing' is is unclear. Is it then that the task of the word is, for example, to refer to an object? Or to a concept? This is the kind of proposition that is expressly avoided in (b). What kind of signifying relationship is proposed?

Flew endorses the rule marking the distinction of use and mention, though he does not explicitly expound a formula like this:

We use the word 'God' to mention God.

In Flew's idiom, how could this sentence be translated? Perhaps in this way:

We use the word 'God' to do God.

Does *doing* do the same as *mentioning*? How significant is the difference between these two? What is it to *mention* God? How, on the other hand, is God something *done*? It is not clear whether Flew means to eliminate the need for substantiations in favor of a general kineticism, a logic of process. Clearly, there is too little evidence here, too much that requires amplification, and these questions cannot be answered without some clarification of what is meant by the notion of *task*.

Let us return for a moment to an earlier sentence in Flew's account:

So what is being talked about is not God but, strictly, a four-letter word.

Flew's exposition does not explain or develop this assertion. This sentence presumes as already given what it wants to describe: the rule marking the distinction of use and mention. While skirting the issues that prompted Salmon to locate his account within a realist framework, it makes the same *disquotational* maneuver ('Gott' or 'God' minus inverted commas = God) that represents the mechanism of reference in a realist ontology, but it is not clear that Flew's metaphysical commitment is the same.

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There is some residual mysteriousness in both accounts of the rule about how, precisely, to locate the word. In the *mentioning* of a word, the word (*as a word*) is almost invariably *objectified* as its component elements: letters. These are, in a sense, the *material* of the word.

Certainly, if we wanted to *describe* a word, in order to mention it, perhaps, without simply quoting it, we would have recourse to its letters. We might *talk about* an *x*-letter word with certain letters in a certain order. We could mention the word without using it, without its strict repetition.

However, there is a small anomaly that comes with Flew's initial example:

The word 'Gott' has four letters.

This sentence has a partner, another sentence, whose task is to render it not only inadequate, but *potentially* erroneous:

The word 'Gott' has *three* letters.

To think the coincidence of these two sentences is to approach the problem of representation—which is, here, specifically, the problem *of the letter*—at a vertiginous point. It is to think the difference between two letters, between two 'letters': two letters which are the same, two letters which are different; two 'letters' which are the same, two 'letters' which are different.

One of Searle's principles, derived from Peircean semiotics and promulgated in modern anglophone philosophy of language, offers a clear solution to this ambiguity of the letter. It distinguishes between linguistic *types* and linguistic *tokens*:

If, for example, I write the word "dog" on the blackboard three times, have I written one word or three? Well, I have written one *type* word, but I have written three different *token* instances of that word. That is, the token is a concrete physical particular, but the type is a purely abstract notion. We need this distinction because the identity criteria for types and tokens are quite different. What makes something a case of "the same token" will be different from what makes it "the same type." You might think that this is such an obvious distinction as to be not worth making, but in fact a fair amount of the confusion in literary theory rests on a failure to get that distinction straight. Derrida introduces a notion that he calls "*iterabilité*," the idea that linguistic forms are, in his sense, iterable. But the notion is very ill-defined in his work. He is unable to say clearly what the domain of its application is, that is, what entities exactly are iterable. He speaks of "marks" and "signs," but actual marks and signs, that is actual physical tokens, are precisely not iterable. It is, rather, the *type* of mark that can have different instantiations. This is one way of saying that it is types and not tokens that allow for repeated instances of the same. Derrida lacks a clear answer to the question "What is it that gets iterated?" in part because he seems to be unaware of this distinction. (Searle 1994, 642-3)<sup>29</sup>

In our example, then, the word 'Gott,' there are two token instances of the letter 't' and one type letter, the 'purely abstract notion' of the letter 't'. The ambiguity has been resolved and the sentence, 'The word "Gott" has four letters,' can be rewritten, 'The word "Gott" has four token letters and three type letters.'

However, Searle has reproduced the same kind of regulatory gesture as those made by Salmon and Flew, whereby a rule is established, but its logic is left uninvestigated. It is not sufficient to state that there is a rule *Y*, of which we can give this account, and this rule must be followed without question.

The distinction of type and token provides a criterion of identity, like the distinction of species and individual, or of universal and particular. Two instances are *instances* because they are instances of the *same thing*. There is an inescapable Platonism here. Yet it is imprudent to represent this distinction as logical or argued. It is, in a sense, given. It may be a principle, but only on the ground that principles are given and not derived. Certainly the distinction of type and token is *necessary*. In this sense, *there has to be a law which prescribes the distinction*. But there is, perhaps, also, in the distinction, *aporia*.

Searle says. 'Derrida lacks a clear answer to the question "What is it that gets iterated?"' This is true of Derrida: he does lack an answer to this question, which asks, alternatively, 'What is it that is repeated in repetition?' But this marks the point of a peculiar incommensurability between Searle and Derrida. Searle has already approached the *aporia*, but he cannot see. Derrida has approached it too, if such an approach is possible. Can Derrida see? Is this the difference of deconstruction—that it knows, or that it knows what cannot be known about this place? *What is it that gets iterated?*

In our example, then—the word 'Gott'—there are two token instances of the letter 't' and one type letter, the 'purely abstract notion' of the letter 't'. The two token instances *are* instances because they are instances of the type, in which they are identified. What is the type? It is, in Searle's words, a 'purely abstract notion.' How is this possible however? How can there be such a thing as a 'purely abstract notion.' What is this 'purely abstract notion' in this case? It cannot be *purely* abstract. In this case, there is the 'purely abstract notion' of the letter 't'. There is no other way of saying it. There is no other means of *specification*, and a specification is exigent. Otherwise it is not clear what the purely abstract notion is a notion of. The (iterated) instances of the letter 't' are 'referred,' *as instances*, *as examples*, to the 'purely abstract notion' of the letter 't', but, as here—in the expression 'the "purely abstract notion" of the letter "t"'—there are only ever *instances of the letter*—in a sense, of course, *purely concrete* instances: 't', for example; and again, for instance, the letter 't'. The 'purely abstract notion' can only be specified as the 'purely abstract notion' of the letter 't' in the concrete instance of the letter 't'. The distinction of type and token, and hence of type-letter and token-letter, which divides the notion of a letter into two 'levels,' two 'states,' two 'modes of being' of the letter, is nonetheless already dependent upon and prefigured by the notion of the letter, in which abstract and concrete, type and token are coincident and indistinguishable: *the letter 't'* (in quotation marks), for example.

*There is only ever and can only ever be the absolute coincidence of the type and the token.*

This coincidence is called, in this case, the 'letter.' For there to be a type and a token, as distinct 'states' of the letter, they must be *indistinguishable in the letter*.

There is not only an absolute coincidence, but a disjunction here, an abyss in representation, which the rule of type and token bridges, and must bridge if

representation is to be possible. But the rule of type and token creates the abyss, by dividing the letter from itself, for a type of a particular token is or should never be a token of that type and a token of a type should never be a type of that token. There is not one letter, but two. There is never one letter, but always two: type and token.

Derrida approaches the aporia of representation when he says, simply, and in a foreign tongue, '*iterabilité*.' Searle too approaches the aporia of representation when he says, 'Derrida lacks a clear answer to the question "What is it that gets iterated?" in part because he seems to be unaware of this distinction.'

The question of the different difference of deconstruction asks, following Searle's initiative, 'What might it be to be *aware of the distinction* of type and token?'

In this anomaly, the letter 't' bequeaths its innocence and simplicity to the problems of identity and difference, of unity and multiplicity, of unithood and prerequisite taxonomy, of particular and universal.

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For the logician Wesley Salmon, we *use* a word to *mention* an object. In using a word, mentioning is done. In such a use, the using is already a mentioning. The using is the mentioning. To draw a line between them is to make their (necessary) distinction possible but to eliminate the possibility, the intimacy, of their coincidence, *wherein the word has its efficacy*.

For Flew, we use a word to perform a task. The mentioning is the task. The task is nothing less than the use. Thus we do not proceed beyond an unanalyzed notion of use. The exposition falls upon 'use' as a kind of (unintelligible) principle.

The rule of use and mention offers a particularly fecund point of entry into the representational conundrum. Rather than emerging from a protracted engagement with it in command of an incisive analytical lexicon for the dissection of the linguistic mechanism, and by means of which the moments of word and object in discourse would be clearly distinguished, instead, pursuing this goal without recourse to seductive simplifications, the analysis, evolving, oriented towards a solution, repeatedly finds itself in difficulty. In the course of this struggle, a hole is opened in representation itself, which might be called, in the idiom of deconstruction, an 'aporia.' It is the aporia of

representation. The work which a deconstruction shares with the work of the analytic philosophers adumbrating the rule of use and mention, is to *focus* the terms of the analysis as sharply as possible upon the aporia in representation: that is, in effect, *to represent the aporia clearly*. Searle and his colleagues mark the place where this task of clarification must be executed and call it 'the principle distinguishing use and mention.' Thus, they point the way. Can more be done than this?

Searle's deployment of his principle is made in an essay published in 1994, some time after his protracted engagement with Derrida and with deconstruction. Why is he pursuing the debate at this late stage? His announcement of the rule as a rule is, in a sense, a *consequence* of deconstruction, though the rule antedated his encounter with deconstruction. But the deployment of the rule is, at the same time, overdetermined. It is overdetermined by its relation to the representational mechanism. The principle of the distinction of use and mention is *itself*, before any deconstruction, the limit of representation. It is this limit which Searle approaches again and again, without modification, despite his encounter with deconstruction. This mindless repetition is not merely a symptom of a distinctively Searlean intransigence. It is a symptom of the relation to the representational mechanism, which is ubiquitous. The approach is repeated, but proximity to the thing cannot be measured on a relative scale. It is not certain that there is, in any case, any possible relation to the thing.

The principle of the distinction of use and mention both obscures and represents the aporia of representation. The aporia is disclosed in the principle. It is not immediately clear what part deconstruction plays in this exposure. The deconstruction of the principle of the distinction of use and mention both obscures and represents the aporia of representation. The aporia of representation cannot be seen or represented, except in each and every representation, wherein it subsists. The nature of this subsistence is unclear. How is it brought to light? Deconstruction, like the principle itself, seeks adequately to *represent* the aporia of representation. Deconstruction (as much as the principle) is its representative. *The aporia of representation is equally the aporia of deconstruction*. Here, as in Derrida's reading of Rousseau, according to de Man's reading of Derrida, the deconstructive difference, which is an active difference and intervention, is dependent upon a distinction between the latent and the manifest, the passive and the deliberate. The difference is difficult to read. It is there to be read. The



difference is obscured in the reading. There is a difference, but the difference is both a difference and a non-difference, according to the *temporality of exposure*.

What is *exposed* in deconstruction? No doubt, what deconstruction exposes was, in a sense, already there. It was always already there. It cannot expose what was not already there. It may not be exposing it, but inventing it. Something new appears, or appears to appear. This distinction is difficult to determine. This is the aporia of exposure and invention, where their distinction is radically unclear. And though it is exposed, although it is brought to light, something of what is exposed is not exposed, something remains concealed. Something 'withdraws,' as it is expressed in the Heideggerian idiom. It is precisely *what* is exposed that withdraws. This is a rule too—that the thing withdraws—not unlike the principle of use and mention.

There is undoubtedly a deconstructive difference, and the difference appeared here, in the deconstruction of the principle distinguishing use and mention, and as a consequence of that deconstruction. The rule was the site of a classical deconstruction. Something opened, or was opened. Can this difference be determined? The difference was, perhaps, already there. The opening was already open. Under close examination, however, this difference is difficult to determine. It is not clear what the difference is. It is there, a difference has been made, but what is it? What is its specificity?

The different difference of deconstruction, here, is, perhaps, decisively, *the difference of the word*:

The different difference of deconstruction is the difference *between* the use and the mention of the word ('deconstruction').

Yet there is a more succinct and more precise way of communicating this difference between the use and the mention of the word ('deconstruction'). It takes the form of a response to the guiding question of PART ONE:

—What is deconstruction?, asks the question.

—Deconstruction is a word, comes the reply, without hesitation.

The key then to a determination of the different difference of deconstruction is to be found in a formalization of the logic of the word, which has already been undertaken

here by way of a deconstruction of the rule of use and mention. The deconstructive movement towards the formalization of the logic of the word opens upon the aporia of representation. Is there a special relation between deconstruction and the aporia of representation? This is not yet clear, except inasmuch as the aporia of representation is (equally) the aporia of deconstruction.

## NOTES

### Part Two

<sup>1</sup> Respectively: 'Force and Signification' (Derrida 1978b, 3), 'Force et Signification' (Derrida 1967b, 9); 'Force of Law' (Derrida 1992c, 30), 'Force de loi' (Derrida 1994b, 78). The text Derrida is referring to in the second epigraph is Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* (*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*). In Derrida's French text, which was published after the English version, a few sentences have been added before the passage I have quoted which do not appear in English: 'Mais cette déconstruction ne s'applique pas à un tel texte. Elle ne s'applique d'ailleurs jamais à rien de l'extérieur. Elle est en quelque sorte l'opération ou plutôt l'expérience même que ce texte, me semble-t-il, fait d'abord lui-même, de lui-même, sur lui-même' (Derrida 1994b, 78).

### Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Rodolphe Gasché, 'Deconstruction As Criticism' (Gasché 1994, 22-57).

<sup>2</sup> This is one prominent division amongst many in the analytic community. The substance and durability of this division are marked by two recently published scholarly works which offer accounts of the origin and history of the analytic tradition. What is called 'analytic philosophy' in these two histories is not the same thing. See P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth-Century Analytic Philosophy* (Hacker 1996) and Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytic Philosophy* (Dummett 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Considerable energy has been spent in analytic philosophy both marking the irreconcilable differences and attempting various kinds of reconciliation between the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*. The analytic tradition is itself divided between admirers of the earlier work, admirers of the later work, admirers of both works, and admirers of neither work. Wittgenstein is surely the least helpful example if one seeks to discern in analytic philosophy a common filiation.

<sup>4</sup> 'It is... generally excepted that many, perhaps most, concepts do not have sharp boundaries, and since 1953 we have begun to develop theories to explain why they cannot' (Searle 1994, 638). Searle does not tell us what transpired in 1953. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1958) was first published in 1953 in a dual language edition. Quine's collection of essays entitled *From a Logical Point of View* (Quine 1994), which included the essay 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism,' was also first published in 1953.

<sup>5</sup> There were a few brief references to the rule in Culler's 'On Deconstruction' (Culler 1982, 119-20). Then it played a cameo role in the well-known series of exchanges between Derrida and Searle (Derrida 1988a; Searle 1977). Following these instances, it has been mentioned here and there but not addressed at length or in detail. There is some literature discussing the rule by analytic philosophers, but in most cases they are concerned with technical issues arising from its application. They address the question of the rule marking the distinction of use and mention as a question with sharply circumscribed limits. In 'Quotation and the Use-Mention Distinction,' Paul Saka offers a useful summary of the analytic literature and a

comprehensive bibliography (Saka 1998). Interestingly, the issue of use and mention is often linked in the Anglo-American debate with a problematic of quotation in general, quotation being the natural mechanism for marking the mention of a word. Unfortunately, however, the question of quotation is enormous in itself and it must remain an essential supplement to the present discussion of the rule, which is focused closely on two specific accounts of the rule where the issue of quotation is not foregrounded.

<sup>6</sup> We might already say 'use' (of the word) rather than 'state' (of the word), but we want to keep the term 'use,' for the moment, as the object and not a tool of the analysis. Similarly, we might say 'function,' but, like 'use,' it begs the question. For example, when a word is being mentioned, then perhaps it does *not* function, but *is*.

<sup>7</sup> There is an ambiguity here: the 'wordness' of the word might be, on one hand, its materiality as word (composed of *x* letters, and so on) or, on the other hand, the *wordness* of the word might be its essential characteristic or attribute, that which makes a word what it is, which is its *representativity*; that is, the wordness of the word is its tendency to be something other than what it is—to be what it represents.

<sup>8</sup> The matter of *articles* is problematic, particularly when working with *examples*, and when working for *precision*. There is no space to go into it here. Nonetheless, my analysis suffers in places from opting to put the matter aside.

<sup>9</sup> The passage is from Wesley Salmon, *Logic* (Salmon 1984, 141). I select this and the following passage because both are succinct and broadly representative of the two basic kinds of accounts of the rule. It may be argued that the rule has been better described elsewhere, that these accounts are deficient. To argue this is merely to avoid attending to what is exposed in the analysis of the citations in question.

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Flew (ed.), *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (Flew 1979, 211). Entries in the dictionary are not individually attributed, though a list of contributors appears at the beginning of the book. For convenience then, we will refer to the author of the passage as 'Flew,' who takes responsibility for the volume as a whole.

<sup>11</sup> It remains unclear whether or not identity is *relational*. Clearly, this indecision is part of the problem presented in the notion of identity. See Chapter Six, note 8.

<sup>12</sup> This last sentence is also ambiguous:

(i) In the mentioning the name is the object *named* (for example: the name 'table' = the object table = the table itself).

(ii) In the mentioning the name (*as* an object itself, the object name) is the object.

Compelled to put the matter in this way we encounter the *impatience* of representation with the work of semantic stabilization. The flickering of senses like the moments of a candle-flame calls for the thinking or theorizing of the adjunction of semantics and (cognitive) temporality: we must account for the disappearances of meaning in the temporal etiolation of thinking.

<sup>13</sup> Sometimes, reading, more often when *beginning* to read, it seems unlikely faced with these black shapes that they will let us in, though the words also remind us of the many times that this passage into the interior has taken place. And then, even as this doubt is forming itself, they have yielded and the game has commenced again.

<sup>14</sup> This repeats the Kantian exigency in the first *Critique* wherein knowledge of objects is never knowledge of things themselves but only knowledge of representations. The relationship between the thing and its representation remains obscure in Kant's *Critique*. It is this relationship which is at issue here.

<sup>15</sup> What determines that there is a *failure* of clarification here? Perhaps it depends on the *attention* which the exposition receives. As a formula to be administered and learned by rote, it offers few

problems other than winning assent, and this proceeds easily enough from an authority not necessarily that of argumentative validity itself. As an exposition of a rule prescribed to clear up a set of ambiguities related to quotation it is largely satisfactory, particularly when teamed (as it is in Salmon's text) with some examples. However, closer attention to Salmon's argument produces a series of questions and elisions that subvert the immediate confidence of its assertion and expose the confusion that the exposition is then (and only then) seen to harbor. The exposition is home to a confusion that it is the task of the exposition to dispel. In working to dispel the confusion, the exposition provides for this confusion a new home, or, indeed, a container: *the exposition contains the confusion*.

<sup>16</sup> Note that though all names are words not all words are names.

<sup>17</sup> The equation here is complicated by the word 'object,' which in this instance would designate objects in general. For realism, objects, as the exemplary referents of words, are things self-identical: entities, things in themselves. The use of the word 'object' (here 'mentioned') in this critical role produces a problem not dissimilar to that which we investigated in the use of the word 'word.' Since the word 'object' refers to objects but is not, itself, such extra-linguistic objects (except as a word is an object), what is it that the word 'object' would identify? To understand the word 'object' we must *already* know the difference between word and object, this difference presuming an understanding of the word 'object' (which is not the object itself). To say 'the object itself' is then to try, in a transcendental gesture, to remove this phrase from language. The word 'object' wants to escape language.

<sup>18</sup> The dualism is not only that of object and name, but, analogously, of the world and the conceptual scheme by whose means it is managed.

<sup>19</sup> See for example, Russell's *Problems of Philosophy* (Russell 1967, 11).

<sup>20</sup> Epistemology *implies* ontology and vice versa. Certainly they can be dealt with quasi-independently, but formulations in one will always have consequences for the other. As one of his guiding principles, Searle exhorts us to practice the distinction of ontology and epistemology, but the definitional constraint and contrivance required to do so produces an artificial barrier between the two terms. A radical or enforced distinction of ontology and epistemology is already a consequence of *realist onto-epistemology*, whereby what the object is, what is the *being* of the object, is distinct from how we know what it is, from what are the evidential criteria for knowing something about the object. The distinction of ontology and epistemology in realism, however, does not then permit their communication: in the field of their distinction, there is no possible relation between the object as it is and what we know, or might know, it to be. This is Kant's objection to transcendental realism in the first *Critique* A 369-70 (Kant 1964, 346). The transcendental realist's object is radically inhuman and alterior.

<sup>21</sup> For the worshipper, no doubt, objects are the testimony of divine creation.

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting that Flew chooses the word 'Gott.' In the context of the Salmon-type exposition, which uses the word 'table,' Flew's choice shrewdly rules out the value to the exposition of concrete reference.

<sup>23</sup> Flew's sentence has the antecedent and consequent clauses of a conditional construction.

<sup>24</sup> It is unfortunate not to address the question of *articles* (definite, indefinite, absent), but it would require a lengthy excursion.

<sup>25</sup> This is a (late) Wittgensteinian definition, where it is 'task' ('use') that carries the burden of explication. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, (Wittgenstein 1958, 4-5). The notion of *use* is self-evident and cannot be further explicated.

<sup>26</sup> The Saussurian terms 'signifier' and 'signified' have not been employed in this discussion. Far from providing assistance, they would present a new set of difficulties. Were we to have made use of this vocabulary we would no doubt have had recourse at this point to the notion of a

'transcendental signified.' See, classically, Jacques Derrida, 'Semiology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva' ('Sémiologie et grammatologie: entretien avec Julia Kristeva') in *Positions* (Derrida 1972c, 25-50; Derrida 1981b, 15-36). The exemplary transcendental signified is the one signified by the word 'God.'

<sup>27</sup> It is clear how difficult it is to formulate a basic *problematic* of representation. Nonetheless, the attempt cannot be eschewed. Were the matter readily formulable, the terms of a solution would be at hand, and this appears not to be the case. Thus, sometimes we talk of a representational mechanism, or of a representational problematic, and sometimes of something less amenable—a representational conundrum perhaps. The enigmatic character of the conundrum extends to the question of how to formulate it.

<sup>28</sup> Searle also has an investment in this Wittgensteinism.

<sup>29</sup> Searle continues: 'The distinction between types and tokens, by the way, is a consequence of the fact that language is rule-governed or conventional, because the notion of a rule or of a convention implies the possibility of repeated occurrences of the same phenomenon. The rules of syntax, for example, have the consequence that the same type can be instantiated in different tokens. There are further type-token distinctions within the type-token distinction. Thus, for example, when Hemingway wrote *The Sun Also Rises* he produced a token, which inaugurated a new type, his novel, of which your copy and my copy are two further tokens.'

## 5

## The Appearance of the Aporia of Representation in Kant

There is a short passage from the Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* in which Kant defines his notion of the *analytic judgment*. Kant presents this account with remarkable brevity. It would appear—in marked contrast to synthetic and to synthetic *a priori* judgments—that very little needs to be said about *analytic* judgments, and the whole matter is explained and dispensed with in a few sentences. It is never raised again as an issue worthy of further analysis in the entire course of the work.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly there are times when brevity, as *concision*, is a godsend. It is a welcome opportunity to deal with an issue simply and then move on. Perhaps the object requiring definition, or analysis, is itself, in reality, a simple one, readily susceptible to concise, transparent explication. There is no need to labor such an exposition. Perhaps Kant's brevity indicates the simple clarity and self-evidence of analytic judgments, whose formal properties need little elucidation. Or, on the other hand, perhaps it is the case that Kant, in his haste—for he does not dwell on the subject—passes over a difficulty, a difficulty not so readily dismissed once exposed.

Is there such a difficulty? And if so, what is it? Despite his brevity, Kant does manage, with a concern for precision, to give a significant difficulty in the theory of representation a surprisingly vivid formulation. Can we say, then, that Kant has *eluded* and *concealed* this difficulty, by way of brevity, and, at the same time, in his concision, *formulated* and *exposed* it? Curiously enough, yes, this is exactly right, and it is by this means that Kant, perhaps against his better judgment, allows us to approach something that may be what we seek: a clear instance of the appearance of the aporia of representation, where such an instance is a consequence of deconstruction. This instance, if such it is, appears in the exact place which has preoccupied us hitherto: at

the nexus of word and thing, of the representation and what is represented. If it should prove the case that there is here, in what follows, such an instance, then, attesting to the verisimilitude of this instance, it ought to be possible to ascertain the *difference* of deconstruction as a function of its appearance in—a reading of—Kant's first *Critique*.

The problem is by now a familiar one. The difference of deconstruction, its intervention, depends upon the implication of a distinction between a passive and a deliberate knowledge in Kant. This implication is made here, for example:

Perhaps Kant's brevity indicates the simple clarity and self-evidence of analytic judgments, whose formal properties need little elucidation. Or, on the other hand, perhaps it is the case that Kant, in his *haste*—for he does not dwell on the subject—passes over a difficulty, a difficulty not so readily dismissed once exposed.

The implication is of a work of concealment, perhaps hurriedly performed. The difference of deconstruction is to follow the signs of this work towards what it conceals. The movement is invariably one of transcendence, even where this transcendental destination is explicitly disavowed. In this process, a distinction is drawn, by implication, between Kant and the deconstruction that reads him. The deconstructive difference is an effect of a reading of implications. Is it a passive or a deliberate effect? It is possible that the instance of the appearance of the aporia of representation in Kant is, at the same time, an occasion for the appearance of the aporia of deconstruction. In the aporia of deconstruction, it is no longer clear what is the different difference (that is, the *event*) of deconstruction, or whether it is deconstruction which makes the difference. Perhaps deconstruction tends to an intensification of the aporia of representation, in which the deconstructive difference is both altered and sheltered. Given this *alteration*, in which the deconstructive difference differs, we must account then for the persistence of the word *deconstruction*, in the reading of Kant or elsewhere.

The representational difficulty in question appears in a revision to the first edition of Kant's *Critique*. Or better, the difficulty appears, by way of an excision, as an equivocation in and between the two editions. It appears, in fact, as the *disappearance of the word*: that is, as the disappearance of the word 'word' (the word 'Wort') from a sentence in Kant's brief description of the analytic judgment. In seeking to determine the conditions and the consequences of this extraordinary excision, we are led some

distance into the problematic of representation formulated by Kant, in the *Critique*, with characteristic percipience.

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After an account of the distinction analytic/synthetic as a difference between judgments that are explicative, 'adding nothing through the predicate to the concept of the subject,' and judgments that are ampliative, 'add[ing] to the concept of the subject a predicate that has in no wise been thought in it,' Kant offers an example:

If I say, for instance, 'All bodies are extended,' this is an analytic judgment. For I do not need to go beyond the concept which I connect with 'body' in order to find extension as bound up [*verknüpf*] with it. To meet with this predicate, I have merely to analyse the concept, that is, to become conscious to myself [*mir* added in B] of the manifold [*des Mannigfaltigen*] which I always think in that concept. The judgment is therefore analytic. (B 11)

Here we need to single out the sentence that requires closer scrutiny:

For I do not need to go beyond the concept which I connect with 'body' in order to find extension as bound up with it.

Among the significant elements of this sentence that might command our attention is one in particular, and it is to this element that we are immediately drawn, for it is the pivot of the sentence: (the word) 'body.' Not just 'body,' in fact, but '“body”': there are *already* quotation marks around the word. Why? This requires investigation, for the grammar of Kant's German text does not employ quotation marks to serve whatever kind of discrimination the *translator* has made by their employment here. To clarify what has taken place in the transition between languages, we need to attend more closely to the German texts.

What do we discover? Where the translator has placed quotation marks around the word 'body' is the *scene of an alteration* to the text of the first edition. This alteration points us to a question Kant's precision encounters, and to which it responds by a simple omission:

I do not need to go outside [*aus*] the concept which I connect with the *word* body [*mit dem Wort Körper verbinde*].... (A 7)

I do not need to go beyond [*über*] the concept that I connect with the body [*mit dem Körper verbinde*, perhaps 'with that body'].... (B 11)

Kemp Smith's rendition is a little misleading. While translating for us the second edition, in which the word *Wort* is conspicuously absent, he effectively reverts to the intent of the first edition:

I do not need to go beyond the concept that I connect with 'body' .... (B 11)<sup>2</sup>

Thus Kemp Smith has encountered the difficulty too, which he obscures by a small infelicity. But what has happened here? What difficulty in the formulation of this sentence in the first edition does Kant address by simply omitting in the second edition the word '*Wort*'? Is the difficulty thus resolved? Or does Kant's omission in fact serve to point us towards it?

Both of Kant's variations are troublesome. The translator's quotation marks attempt a solution. Applying the rule distinguishing the 'use' from the 'mention' of a word, Kemp Smith's translation indicates an instance of the mention of a word.<sup>3</sup> To write ' "body" ' (and here I quote the use of quotation marks) is to the same effect as the 'the word body' ('*dem Wort Körper*') of the first edition.

Kemp Smith's stratagem (quotation marks) would have been apposite had Kant revised his text in the other direction: had Kant inserted rather than deleted the word '*Wort*.' Had he inserted (or, as would have been the case, retained) the word '*Wort*,' the quotation marks would have concurred with contemporary usage, but would also have been redundant given the presence of '*Wort*.' To write 'the word body' ('the word "body" ') is to write 'body is a word' (' "body" is a word').

The use of quotation marks to designate an instance of the 'mention' of a word lends emphasis to the idea that there is here a clear distinction. Why is such a rule necessary? The distinction of word and object requires a correlative distinction (use/mention; that is, we use a word to mention an object), formulated as a (quasi-grammatical) rule, whose task is to eliminate any ambiguity, any possible confusion. Certainly there is the necessity, the logical necessity, of a clear distinction between the word and the object, the representation and what is represented.<sup>4</sup>

But we are wary: where a philosopher applies a rule (or a principle), perhaps it is not so much that a proper analysis has justified such an application as that a proper analysis is wanting. The rule may come to obviate and stand in place of an analysis—though, indeed, the rule would be, we imagine, the natural *terminus* of an analysis. That is, the conclusion of an analysis would be (the same as) the formulation of the rule.

In the absence of the mechanism of quotation marks Kant must choose either to designate 'body' as a word by the insertion of '*Wort*,' or, omitting '*Wort*,' leave the body to its corporeal devices—leave the body embodied, leave it in its objectivity.<sup>5</sup> Revising the first edition, he is suddenly presented with this choice. And Kant takes what is an extraordinary step: he recognizes a difficulty, and, responding to it, effectively reversing the terms of the dilemma, he deletes (omits, excises) the word '*Wort*.' Since he deletes '*Wort*,' we must assume that he wanted no longer to indicate that the concept be connected to the (verbalism, or wordness, of the) word 'body.'

Why did Kant delete the word '*Wort*'? Let us re-cite the sentence from the first edition:

I do not need to go outside [*aus*] the concept which I connect with the word body [*mit dem Wort Körper verbinde*].

When Kant states, as an example of an analytic judgment, 'All bodies are extended,' he is certainly not saying that all (instances of the word) 'bodies' are extended. It is not the word that has the essential property of (spatial) extension but the bodies (themselves): the objects. Extension, at least in the sense Kant wishes to convey here, is a property of bodies, not 'bodies.'<sup>6</sup>

Rereading his text, Kant recognizes this. It must have seemed to him a silly error, based perhaps on a misreading of the verb '*verbinden*,' whose use in the sentence contains an ineliminable ambiguity. The alternative—and there would appear to be only one alternative—is simple: he deletes '*Wort*.' But if the concept is not connected with the word 'body,' then with what? With the object? With the body itself?

Deleting '*Wort*,' this is the result:

I do not need to go beyond [*über*] the concept that I connect with (the) body [*mit dem Körper verbinde*, perhaps 'with that body']



Is this a satisfactory alternative? Does the alternation satisfactorily extinguish the difficulty?

Having excised the word, what seems required at and as the locus of the concept's connection is what is not the word: the object, the object *itself*. Is this what we get? What is the status of '*dem Körper*'? Is it not already a *general* notion of (...) the body?<sup>7</sup> To inscribe something general at the nexus with the concept is already to have entered the domain of concepts. That is: the 'body' referred to is a *general concept* (of the body).

What is the difficulty? Even for Kant, here, the concept must be connected with a *certain object*, whose (empirical) properties, even in the restricted Kantian sense of the empirical, determine it as a concept—determine, that is, the concept *of the object*. Even within the Kantian field of the ubiquity of representations, where the object is itself invariably a representation and not the thing itself, this connection between the *concept* and *what it is a concept of* is, naturally, essential. The concept must be connected with a particular object, and not merely with another concept: the concept of a body or bodies *in general*. This is a logical necessity and a logical problem for the Kantian system. If the concept is connected with a (or another) concept, and not with *the object which it is a concept of*, then the object might cease to function in a way that would give any sense at all to a notion of the empirical—even for Kant, whose empiricism is developed in a necessary intrigue with idealism. More problematically, it would appear then that the concept connected with a general 'body' is connected with none other than itself. This would isolate the concept from the fundamental relation in which it is a concept of *that which it is a concept of*.

How then to signify what is necessary at this juncture? What it is necessary to *represent* here is what Kant has determined (and properly so) as *unrepresentable*, as at the limit of representation: the numinous thing itself.

What the concept is to be connected with must itself be other than (the generality of) a concept. It must not be general. It must be, in a sense, *singular*. It must be a self-identity. It must be what the concept is a concept *of*.

This suggests an opening. Perhaps the difficulty lies with Kant's expression. The phrase 'the concept that I connect with...' is loose, imprecise, and, as we noted, decidedly ambiguous. It might simply be replaced by 'the concept of....' But what is it the concept of? Is it the concept of the body, or the concept of *body*, or of what?<sup>8</sup> Would

not the determination of this genitive then determine the locus and status of the connection, which is the very difficulty towards whose formulation Kant has drawn us? The difficulty of determining the connection reappears when the matter is rephrased by way of the genitive, and in a form further complicated by the intrinsic *genitival* ambiguity.

Another difficulty attends Kant's attempt to make his statement more precise by the deletion of the word 'word.' If the concept is *not* connected with the word but with the object, then how does the word come to announce, or to bear as its content, or to identify—or whatever other way we might describe this relation—the concept? Surely, to an important extent, the concept is implicit in the word. The word comes, as a word, with a concept: the concept of the word. (The ambiguity which we seek to formulate—if then only to eliminate it—recurs here.)

Perhaps the concept is, in reality, connected with both word *and* object—by way, perhaps, of a triangulation: word, concept, object. But to be connected with both, it would have to be able, at the same time, to be connected with *either*. This we have shown is a problem, especially if we are to maintain the clarity and integrity of these distinctions: word, concept, object. Is it possible that the concept is connected with neither word nor object? Or does the question of the *locus* of the connection not ask us exactly how we distinguish word and object—or word, concept and object—in the first place?

Kant's deletion of the word '*Wort*' (the word 'word') has not succeeded in making clearer what he means to say. In fact, quite to the contrary, Kant's deletion poses a host of difficult and fundamental questions—questions that will, with any luck, lead us some way into the representational problematic opened but not resolved in Kant's exposition of the analytic judgment.

What about the translator's solution? It is not completely clear what significance Kemp Smith meant to attach to the quotation marks he placed around the word 'body.' The distinction formulated in analytic philosophy between 'use' and 'mention'—'*body*' (with a hard space for the absence of quotation marks) and '"body"'—is too murky a formulation to be applied without some adaptation to Kant's text, whose task is nothing less than a harmonization of empirical realism and transcendental idealism (see A 369-71). The formulation of the distinction of use and mention in analytic philosophy

often leans on the presuppositions of realist doctrine. But Kant's object is 'itself' a representation and not the termination of a chain of representations in a 'mind-independent' or 'real' world—a world which representations seek, as representations, to represent. Though the body is the object the word 'body' refers to, it is not a 'real' object—in the sense that it exists and is (perhaps) knowable independently of the conditions of its presentation in intuition (the possibility of the intuition of the object is *pure* intuition, or space) or of its subsumption by conceptuality (the possibility of the experience—that is, empirical knowledge—of the object is its subsumption by the pure concepts of the understanding). The body is an object, and the object, for Kant, in so far as it is intuitable or knowable, is already (and always) a *representation*. What does it represent? What is intuited? What is known?

What are represented, intuited, and known, are only appearances. There is no knowledge, intuition, or representation, according to Kant, of things themselves. This is essential, within the Kantian critical framework, to the possibility of there being any knowledge of objects at all.

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Kant's proscription of a knowledge of things themselves would solve a fundamental metaphysical difficulty. Is it the same difficulty Kant sought to solve by means of the excision, the disappearance of the word—of the word 'word'? In the formulation of this solution, the *things themselves* disappear. They are no longer what we have, nor have they ever been. Somehow, however, the difficulty persists, and insists at every level, for, we ask—and we are not the first—*what appears?*

This question vibrates with an incipient corruption: *what* appears appears, the appearance appears, appears to appear; only what is other than the appearance is what appears—the appearance appears.

This essential equivocation, which informs and drives Kant's onto-epistemology, his science of objects, provokes a further question, as if by some peculiar bifurcatory, reproductive mechanism:

*Is the object an appearance or the representation of an appearance?*

At different times Kant puts it in either way:

1. The object *represents* an appearance, which is an *effect* upon the (faculty of) sensibility of an otherwise unknowable thing in itself (the transcendental object).
2. The object *is* an appearance, and appearances are (already) a kind of representation (A 375n).

To a certain extent, this ambiguity is accommodated in the duality of intuition and understanding (sensibility and intelligibility). Kant makes the distinction between an object of sense (*Objekt*, given in intuition, but *pre*-conceptual) and an object of cognition (*Gegenstand*, given in intuition and subject to the conceptuality of the understanding) (A 51, B 75).

However, the work of several Kant scholars to interpret systematically Kant's differentiation of these terms (*Objekt* and *Gegenstand*) fails to warrant the conclusions proffered. It is not so much that the two German words, two different words, simply mean the same thing—and hence that their conflation in English as 'object' is appropriate—as that their distinction cannot be systematized. If Kant *is* systematic in his use of a *Gegenstand/Objekt* distinction, such a systematicity remains veiled.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, at the same time, an inability to read the distinction systematically does not mean that a distinction of objects along the lines outlined above is not *necessary* to the coherence of the Kantian system. The coherence of the system depends—*comes* to depend—on this distinction. It comes to depend on a general proliferation of distinctions, a family of objects: a systemic efflorescence. Each distinction marks both the opening of a hole in the system and its integration.

Though a full taxonomical survey of the various Kantian objects is beyond us here, a confusion, linked to the nascent series of questions that opens this section, remains, and ought to be dispelled. This confusion is a function of the taxonomical mechanism.

The object of sense, intuited, is preconceptual: intuition and conception (understanding) are distinguished in Kant. Knowledge is the determination of the object, and occurs as the integration of intuition and understanding. However, the object known is not then an *intelligible object*. The latter is an object without a sensible intuition, and Kant does not admit non-sensible intuitions. Thus the sensible object is *conceived* by the understanding, becoming an object of empirical knowledge (or, as we called it above, an 'object of cognition'). This object, though intelligible in one sense, is not an intelligible

(or supersensible) object. Intelligible objects have no sensible dimension—God, for example.

Yet the object of cognition *is* the object of sense. The object of cognition is the cognition of the object of sense. Hence, *precisely*: the object of cognition is (the cognition of) the object of sense. This ambiguity is quasi-systematic and persistently undermines the labor Kant invests in precision. It renders the confusion that we said 'ought to be dispelled' more or less endemic. Kant distinguishes objects in order to account for their differences (their differentiation), but cannot then account for the peculiar overlapping or mutual intrigue of these differences. As much as the sameness of the object requires a distinction where it is (or comes to be) (self-)different, the (formulation of a) distinction masks a sameness antagonizing the very *integrity* of the (difference as) distinction.

These distinctions of kinds of objects (phenomenal/noumenal, sensible/intelligible, empirical/transcendental, admissible/inadmissible) are underwritten by a general use of the word (that is, the words translated by) 'object':

Everything, every representation even, in so far as we are conscious of it, may be entitled object [*Objekt*]. (B 234-35)

There is a ubiquity of objects. Moreover: There is a ubiquity of *the object*. This *general* object, then, if necessary, receives a limitation: intelligible, of sense, in itself, transcendental, etc.

Kant defines the object:

[A]n object [*Objekt*] is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is *united*. (B 137, Kant's emphases)

This definition, though strictly of the object of cognition (the object 'has' a concept), is ambiguous: it defines the cognized object *and*, at the same time, the possibility of (the philosopher's) conceiving the sensible object; in other words, to define the *sensible* object is *already to conceive* it and is to then make of it a *cognized* object.

This familiar ambiguity is nonetheless not what interests us in this definition. The critical aspect of the object is its *unity*. Only as a unit(y) is it an object. Every representation is an object inasmuch as each is *discrete*, is a discrete unit(y). The object

is the unit both of sensibility and understanding. It is this essential characteristic of the object in general (hence, of every object, sensible and cognized)—and without which there could not possibly be *an* (that is, *one*) object or objects—that Kant must account for.

The object in general is the *transcendental* object:

[W]e are in a position to determine more adequately our concept of an *object* [*Gegenstande*, Kant's emphasis] in general. All representations have, as representations, their object, and can in turn become objects of other representations. Appearances are the sole objects which can be given to us immediately, and that in them which relates immediately to the object is called intuition. But these appearances are not things in themselves [*Dinge an sich selbst*]; they are only representations, which in turn have their object—an object which cannot be intuited by us, and which may, therefore, be named the non-empirical, that is, transcendental object = *x*. (A 108-9)

'*x*,' the variable, the unknown, name of an unnamed or unnameable, appears here at and as the limit of representation.<sup>10</sup> What? *What* appears? '*x*' appears. '*x*' is what, is what appears.

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The object is the body (itself). The body (itself) is the body *as* an object, and distinct from the *word* 'body,' which represents the object. It is not the *thing* (in itself), for the object is an effect of a thing—a 'transcendental cause' (A 391)—that cannot itself be known: 'we do not apprehend [things in themselves] in any fashion whatsoever' (A 44, B 62). The object is an appearance, and is *real* inasmuch as appearances constitute reality according to *a priori* and objective categories of the understanding.<sup>11</sup> The object is then (already) a representation, a representation of a thing that was, is, and will never be present in itself. Is the object then properly termed a *representation*? Kant formulates this paradox with characteristic perspicuity:

[N]othing in [space] can count as real save only what is represented in it<sup>a</sup>.... [to Kant's footnote] <sup>a</sup>We must give full credence to this paradoxical but correct proposition, that there is nothing in space save what is represented in it. For space is itself nothing but representation, and whatever is in it must therefore be contained in the representation. Nothing whatsoever is in space, save in so far as it is actually represented in it. It is a proposition which must indeed sound strange, that *a thing*

[*Sache*] can only exist in the representation of it, but in this case the objection falls, inasmuch as the things [*Sachen*] with which we are here concerned are not things in themselves [*Dinge an sich*], but appearances only, that is, representations. (A 374-74, my emphases)

Do we say: the thing in itself never appears? Or is the appearance the appearance of the thing in itself but not the thing in itself *itself*? Kant says: 'a thing can only exist in the representation of it.' The thing is not the thing in itself. The thing is (always) the appearance (or representation) of the thing.

Kant crystallizes here the thinking of the hegemony of representation. How might we think a representation referred not to something that presented itself but to a representation? Hence: a representation of a representation. Kant constructs the system of representations as the representation of representations. But he does not carry through the thought to its consequences for (the principle of) identity. It is in Kant's saturation of the fields of intuition and of knowledge by representation, and his proscription of the presentation in intuition of the thing in itself, that we obtain a clue as to Kant's brevity with regard to the matter of the analytic judgment.

Kant writes:

All our representations are, it is true, referred by the understanding to some object; and since appearances are nothing but representations, the understanding refers them to a *something* [*Etwas*, translator's emphasis], as the object of sensible intuition. But this something, thus conceived, is only the transcendental object; and by that is meant a something = *X*, of which we know, and with the present constitution of our knowledge can know, nothing whatsoever.... (A 250)

In the transition from object to transcendental object (that is, in the transcendence of the object) appears the variable: '*X*.' '*X*' is a co-ordinate marking the intersection of, or the frontier dividing, something and nothing. The something such that 'something = *X*' is a kind of nothing, for it cannot be an object of knowledge (knowledge being the determination of objects).

'*X*' is the thing in itself. What, for Kant, is the thing in itself? It is indeterminate. It is 'something = *X*.' What is '*X*'? '*X*' represents the thing in itself. What is represented in representation? The thing itself: '*X*.'

Strictly, according to the affection theory, this is wrong. '*X*' is the 'transcendental cause.' The relation is, according to Kant, affective, or causal, and not representational.

The appearance, an intuition, is an effect of the thing itself upon the faculty of sensibility. This appearance, then, ought not to be strictly an object. Why not? Because, according to Kant, all objects are *representations* (this is a variation on the issue that we were trying to clarify earlier: *Is the object an appearance or the representation of an appearance?*). Were appearances representations, then they would be representations of what? Of things themselves. Kant often insists that the relation is affective, not representational, and for good reason.

However, reading the two remarkable passages cited above, it is clear that the critical issue of this affectivity, one which Kant scholars have labored to elucidate, is a diversion by means of which Kant seeks to elude the paradox arising from the necessary proscription of a knowledge of things themselves in order that the knowledge of objects be possible. In these passages, not only does the question of '*X*' remain essentially within the representational problematic (which is, anyway, according to Kant, ubiquitous), rather than being deflected by the issue of causation, but Kant formulates with clarity the fundamental opacity, or obscurity, of the noumenon/phenomenon relation—the very relation by which Kant would overcome metaphysical difficulties attendant upon the admission of a knowledge of things themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Kant's '*X*' both brings the thing in itself, as a variable, into the (possibility of a) general calculation (into knowledge) and forecloses the possibility of there being a value of the variable other than it representing the thing in itself, which is unknowable.

'*X*' is the terminus of the chain of representation. '*X*' is the limit of representation and Kant is *entirely rigorous* in his conceiving it as the limit of the conceivable. (Is the limit of the conceivable the inconceivable?) '*X*' enters the field of knowledge as the limit of knowledge: the unknowable. Yet '*X*' (the thing in itself) enters the field of knowledge only as what it is necessary to *exclude* (as unknowable), and to exclude systematically, in order that metaphysics be possible *as a science*. For the fundamental error of all metaphysics prior to Kant's critical philosophy was to confuse appearances and things in themselves—was to be unable to demarcate knowledge as a discrete field within, or better, coextensive with the (hegemonic) field of representation.

Representations represent (other) representations.<sup>13</sup> The terminus of the chain of representation, in the beyond of representation, is the unknowable '*X*.' (Is the variable the essence of representation? Is it, perhaps, *representation itself*?) The terminus of the

chain of representation is *at the same time* the limit of representation: the unknowable 'X.' There is *nothing* beyond representation ('nothing whatsoever' [*gar nichts*], says Kant). Limit and beyond are held in a dire inextrication.

There are two alternatives here: transgression of the limit discloses only the non-beyond of the limit transgressed, only a redelimitation, only the impossibility of the beyond; the limit, the limit *itself*, is already beyond, already in excess of the limit.<sup>14</sup> These alternatives are not empty speculation, for Kant constitutes the beyond of representation as the noumenon—the transcendental cause, the thing in itself, the unknowable—and the thought of the noumenon is a thought, precisely—and within what Kant thinks as the general negativity of his critical project—of limitation:

The concept of the noumenon is thus a merely *limiting concept* [*Grenzbegriff*], the function of which is to curb the pretensions of sensibility; and it is therefore only of negative employment. At the same time it is no arbitrary invention; it is bound up with the limitation [*Einschränkung*] of sensibility, though it cannot affirm anything positive beyond the field of sensibility.<sup>15</sup> (A 255, B 310-11, my note)

Though they are not simply interchangeable, it is possible to read 'representation' here for 'sensibility.' Is it then a question of curbing the 'pretensions' of *representation*? Representation pretends that it can represent what is beyond representation. The function of 'X,' the noumenon, is 'to curb the pretensions of' representation. And yet, what is beyond representation? The noumenon: 'X.' As the limit of representation, 'X' is beyond representation.

What is 'X'? 'X' is a representation. Its *negativity* does not make 'X' itself any less a representation. 'X' represents what would be beyond representation, were it representable, which it is not: the thing itself. At the limit of representation is the thing itself.

The beyond of representation is the thing itself. The beyond of representation is the limit of representation: 'X.' What is 'X'? 'X' is a representation. 'X,' we recall, is the thing itself. The thing itself is a representation. Or better: the thing itself is representation *itself*. The beyond of representation is the limit of representation: *representation itself*. Representation is what it is at this limit. Where else?

Can we escape the conclusion that 'X' is representation itself?

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What is, for Kant, the ground of representation? To approach a response to this question we must follow Kant in a long and remarkable passage of the Transcendental Deduction:

At this point we must make clear to ourselves what we mean by the expression 'an object of representations' [*dem Ausdruck eines Gegenstandes der Vorstellungen*]. We have stated above that appearances are themselves nothing but sensible representations, which, as such and in themselves, must not be taken as objects capable of existing outside our power of representation. (A 104)

Note here that Kant writes, '*representations... in themselves*.' What might be the 'in itself' of a representation? Appearances, sensations, perceptions, intuitions, objects—all are of the genus of representation (A 320, B 376-77). As representations, all represent something. But what are they, then, *in themselves*?

Is not the 'in itself' of the representation what it *is*? Is not the disclosure of the representation in itself, the analytic judgment ('representation is...') by which the concept (of representation) is exposed? Does not the *analyticity* (the 'in itself') of *each* of these terms coming under the genus of representation rest on a self-identity?<sup>16</sup>

Here then is the persistent problem for Kant's system, which would proscribe knowledge of things themselves: the 'itselfness' of the thing is what it is, is its identity, its self-identity. Though proscribing *things* themselves, since we deal in representations, we must also deal in representations *themselves*. Isn't this inevitable? (And if *not*, what are the consequences?) Inasmuch as the representation is *identifiable*, inasmuch as it too is invariably, and importantly, a *thing*, it participates to an essential degree in noumenality. The field of representations, of representations themselves, is coextensive with the field of things themselves.

But is this quasi-systematic ambiguity, this intrigue of representations and things themselves, a *problem*? Yes, because it thwarts and distorts the process of theoretical construction. But, also, and at the same time, it is the interminable irresolution of this intrigue that is the dissymmetry or differential driving the elaboration of the system.

What, then, is to be understood when we speak of an object corresponding to, and consequently also distinct from, our knowledge? It is easily seen that this object must



be thought only as *something* in general =  $x$ , since outside our knowledge we have *nothing* which we could set over against this knowledge as corresponding to it.

Now we find that our thought of the relation of all knowledge to its object carries with it an element of necessity; the object is viewed as that which prevents our modes of knowledge from being haphazard or arbitrary, and which determines them *a priori* in some definite fashion. For in so far as they are to relate to an object, they must necessarily agree with one another, that is, must possess that unity which constitutes the concept of an object. (A 104, my emphases)

There is a (parenthetical) idiom whose peculiar aptitude is to render precisely the quasi-systematic ambiguity that we locate in Kant. Hence, we can make this small adjustment to Kant's sentence:

Our modes of knowledge... must possess that unity which constitutes (the concept of) an object.

The unity is equally the concept's and the object's. To think the object is to conceive it—to think the concept of the object. What of the object 'distinct from our knowledge'? What of the object, that is, *at the limit* of our knowledge? This object, 'distinct from our knowledge,' appears to lose its distinction: 'this object must be thought only as *something* in general =  $x$ .' Again, at the limit of representation is the variable. We recognize in Kant's formula (*something in general* =  $x$ ) the peculiar generality and singularity of the variable, both *something in general* =  $x$  and *nothing in particular* =  $x$ . The variable occurs in Kant precisely as the proximity of something and nothing, 'since outside our knowledge we have *nothing* which we could set over against this knowledge as corresponding to it.' The 'something in general =  $x$ ' 'distinct from our knowledge' is, precisely, the '*nothing* which we could set over against this knowledge as corresponding to it.' The event of the variable is the event of a *something* = *nothing*. What kind of event is this?

But it is clear that, since we have to deal only with the manifold of our representations, and since that  $x$  (the object) which corresponds to them is *nothing* to us—being, as it is, *something that has to be distinct from all our representations*—the unity which the object makes necessary can be nothing else than the formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations. (A 105, my emphases)

Again, but reversed: *nothing* = *something*. According to Kant, there is nothing that is distinct from all our representations.  $x$  is that nothing.  $x$  = 'nothing' = 'something that has to be distinct from all our representations.'

What is  $x$  such that it occurs at this unlikely nexus?  $x$  is, itself, quintessentially, *a representation*. But of what? Of nothing? Or of something?

In realist doctrine, the 'something that *has to be* distinct from all our representations,' is the something that *is* distinct from all our representations: *what* is represented, the object or entity, which, a self-identity, is the ground of identity.<sup>17</sup> This entity is, to all intents and purposes, the thing itself. There is a problem that arises for the realist at this point, one to which Kant is particularly alert: How do we and how much can we know this thing?

In Kant, what arrives at the moment of the realist's entity is  $x$ . Is  $x$  the ground of representation?

What is representation itself? Representation (*itself*) is that which, distinct from all representations, is represented (but quasi-covertly) in representation. Representation is, in effect, the *difference* between the representation and what is represented (the thing itself). That is: representation is the *difference* between *the* representation ( $x$ ) and *what* is represented ( $x$ , the thing itself). What is this difference, which *is* representation, other than  $x$ ? It remains to be seen whether there is a mechanism by which this tendency of  $x$  to come to occupy all the positions can be restrained.

The modulation by means of which Kant becomes a realist transposes what Kant considers the affective or causal relation of thing in itself and appearance into terms of representation (this move is both implicit and proscribed in Kant). The appearance, an *effect* of the thing in itself, *represents* the thing. This is the subsumption of causation under representation—*precisely what Kant would avoid at all costs*.

For Kant, since the thing itself is nothing, this thing cannot supply the object's essential unity. The unity (identity) of the object is in the presence of the concept, but such an interior presentation is a presence before what? For Kant, the ground of representation is not in the presence of a properly external object—the object of realism—registered and delimited by sensation, but is the *subject of representation*. In the determination of the necessity of the subject of representation, Kant responds to a

series of questions that remain dormant in all empiricism: Who or what looks? Who or what senses? Who or what represents?<sup>18</sup>

This original and transcendental condition [of representation] is no other than *transcendental apperception* [*transzendente Apperzeption*].... There can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuitions, and by relation to which representation of objects is alone possible.... This pure, original and unchangeable consciousness I shall name *transcendental apperception*. (A 106-7, Kant's emphases)

The unity of the object, which is the essential property of any objecthood, is a derivative unity, derived from that of what Kant calls 'transcendental apperception': the unity of the subject of consciousness.

The subject of transcendental apperception is the possibility of representation ('this original and transcendental condition [of representation] is no other than *transcendental apperception*'). Yet, if transcendental apperception is the possibility of representation, how then can transcendental apperception itself be represented? How can the eye that sees see itself? As the possibility of representation, is not transcendental apperception at the limit of, or beyond, representation?

The difficulty in accounting for, in representing transcendental apperception, is profoundly related to the difficulty which leads Kant to proscribe a knowledge of things themselves. The source to which Kant ascribes the unity of the object retains a residual obscurity. That he calls it transcendental *apperception* clouds the issue in a pseudo-transparency.

Is it not the case, in reality, that the subject of transcendental apperception =  $x$ ?

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There is a tension in the third sentence of the passage from the introduction to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* with which we opened this paper. Let us recall the citation:

If I say, for instance, 'All bodies are extended,' this is an analytic judgment. For I do not need to go beyond the concept which I connect with 'body' in order to find extension as bound up [*verknüpft*] with it. To meet with this predicate, I have merely to analyse the concept, that is, to become conscious to myself [*mir* added in B] of the

manifold [*des Mannigfaltigen*] which I always think in that concept. The judgment is therefore analytic. (B 11)

Kant adds the word '*mir*' to the second edition. What does '*mir*' add? What is the difference between 'I have merely... to become conscious of the manifold,' and 'I have merely... to become conscious *to myself* of the manifold'? Is it likely here that the reader would think it possible that the becoming conscious would be other than the subject's (the 'I' of 'I have merely...')? The word '*mir*' adds *emphasis*. The emphasis adds to the sense of the *interiority* (and presence within the space of the interiority) of a consciousness which is the home of the concept. The addition of '*mir*' masks a certain unclarity that remains inexplicit in the notion of a 'becom[ing] conscious of the manifold.' The space of this unclarity is occupied by the subject of transcendental apperception: the subject who hosts the representation of the manifold.

'Manifold' (a substantivation of the adjective '*mannigfaltig*') is the word Kant selects to occupy the pivotal position in this statement. It is 'pivotal' because the word that occupies this position must absorb the momentum of the movement that is a 'becom[ing] conscious of....' A becoming conscious *of what*? The term 'manifold' displaces 'concept.' It is not the concept itself that is thought. The concept *itself* is not what is thought, or what Kant is conscious of, but the 'manifold which I always think *in* that concept' (B 11). It is the manifold that presents itself to consciousness in the thinking of the concept. 'Manifold,' a term in Kant's lexicon with a number of important occasions, brings the requisite *unity* to the concept of the concept as both a series or aggregate, and more than just a series or aggregate, of analytic predicates (that is, of attributes, properties). The manifold, as a multiplicity brought under the heading of a single word ('manifold'), allows Kant to determine a mediation between number (multiplicity) and unity: that the essential predicates of a subject together form a unity—the concept of the subject. Kant is compelled to disclose the manifold contained within the unity of the concept: the (unitary) repository of difference and differentiation within identity. The word 'manifold' functions here—like the word 'concept,' and to the same end as the invocation of the principle of identity—as a kind of hold-all, a portmanteau into which difficult questions about the presentation to consciousness of the concept, as a unity only available as a series of predicates (moreover, predicate-concepts), can be packed.

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\* \*

Kant says we cannot conceive of the body without the concept of the body (the concept of *body*) containing the property (which is also the concept) of extension.

Some critical questions persist: *what* do we conceive of when we conceive of the body? And what is the concept of the body connected with if not the word?

In a way closely related to the difficulties these questions raise, Kant speaks of a spectral object (which is the *concept* of the object) corresponding to *and* distinct from our knowledge. At the moment of this object's invocation the variable appears:

What, then, is to be understood when we speak of an object corresponding to, and consequently also distinct from, our knowledge? It is easily seen that this object must be thought only as *something* in general = *x*, since outside our knowledge we have *nothing* which we could set over against this knowledge as corresponding to it.  
(A 104)

We recognize in the variable the locus of a knowledge which we would acquire. Where *x* appears, it marks the place of a knowledge to come—though, perhaps, in Kant's formulation, *infinitely to come*. If the knowledge is not here and now, but to come, then this (indefinite) futurity of knowledge is, again, its limit. *x* is (at) this limit. In giving *x* a specific value, is it extinguished or displaced?

If *x* is, as we have demonstrated, (at) the limit of representation, it is equally (at) the limit of knowledge. If *x* is, as we have demonstrated, representation *itself*, then, as what represents the infinite and indefinite futurity (or, for that matter, anteriority) of knowledge, it is equally knowledge *itself*. *x* appears as knowledge and in the place of knowledge.

What then about the knowledge of objects? Of bodies? The knowledge of what is intrinsic to the concept of the object is what is contained in analytic judgments. In seeking a precise account of these, Kant produces an essential equivocation.

Can we make the clear distinction (or can we make clear the distinction) between word and object that would appear to be indispensable? Can Kant make this distinction without recourse to the realist schema he explicitly rejects and whose paradoxes he determines with such perspicuity?

Kant's deletion of '*Wort*'—the disappearance of the word—brings us again to the brink (of the *necessity*) of a philosophy and a science of language. But is it just a science of *language*? Must not this science describe for us the 'translations' between the linguistic and the non-linguistic? Must not this science, in thinking the limit of the word, think words, *in* words, and in the beyond of words? The beyond of words, the non- or extra-linguistic, is what is conjured at the limit of the word.

In the (non)transgression of the limit of the word (and this limit is ubiquitous) is the redelimitation of the limit of the word—not the beyond of words as such, but the limit, its reimposition, again. The limit of the word recurs, never having been reached (what could bound the limit itself?) and never less than in an *absolute proximity*. The limit recurs, never again and again: the quasi-omni-presence of the limit. The limit of the word—the beyond of words, what is other than a word—is none other than the word *itself*. Not, then, the thing itself? The word itself is the thing itself. And the thing itself? The thing itself = *x*.<sup>19</sup>

We said: 'Kant's deletion of "*Wort*"... brings us again to the brink (of the necessity) of a philosophy and a science of language.' This 'brink' is a limit. This limit belongs equally to a philosophy of language and to deconstruction. At this limit, anticipating a philosophy of language to come or mourning its demise, we already have a kind of solution to the puzzle with which we began this excursion, a puzzle that can be read in either direction—from the first to the second edition, or from the second to the first edition, that can be read either as the appearance or disappearance of the word (which is the disappearance or appearance of the body)—a puzzle which is, precisely, that of the appearance and disappearance of the word:

If I say, for instance, 'All bodies are extended,' this is an analytic judgment. For I do not need to go beyond the concept which I connect with *x* in order to find extension as bound up [*verknüpft*] with it.

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What is the relation of *x* to deconstruction? Is *x* deconstruction itself? In 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' ('Lettre à un ami japonais'), Derrida writes: 'All sentences of the type

"deconstruction is X" or "deconstruction is not X" *a priori* miss the point [*manque a priori de pertinence*], which is to say that they are at least false' (Derrida 1987d, 392; Derrida 1991c, 275). Nonetheless, even if we cannot claim without falsification that deconstruction is X, it would appear from what has transpired that we cannot rule out the possibility that deconstruction is *x*.

*x* is and represents the referential nexus and the aporia of representation, according to Kant. In what sense is it *deconstruction* that makes possible the appearance of the aporia of representation in Kant? It is not clear that it is in the *same* sense that it is *Kant* who makes possible the appearance of the aporia of representation in the deconstruction that has perhaps taken place here, though without doubt the two senses are closely related. The Kant we have and have had here, inasmuch as we have and have had him, is the Kant we have and have had *as a consequence of deconstruction*. And vice versa. The path through this mutual dependency does not make itself immediately apparent, though it is the singular path we have followed.

What is the difference between Kant with deconstruction and Kant without it? What is the difference between Kant with *x* and Kant without it? This is the question of the difference of deconstruction—the difference deconstruction has made, for example, to reading Kant. The question of the difference of deconstruction is, here, the question of the difference of Kant. He is not the same Kant we had, or would have had, without deconstruction. He is a new Kant. Yet the difference deconstruction makes to Kant is not to *add* something that is or was not there, though it was not there until it appeared, and it appeared with the addition of deconstruction. There is a Kant who, perhaps, *coincides* with deconstruction, though he is not deconstruction. But it is not clear that this Kant is *not* deconstruction. Is Kant deconstruction? There is a path we have already taken towards this reductive identification, for Kant too—like deconstruction—is a word.

There was an indication at the beginning of this chapter that what followed would present 'a clear instance of the appearance of the aporia of representation, where such an instance is a consequence of deconstruction.' Hence, by implication, what was promised was an instance of deconstruction itself. Did this instancing take place? Yes, it did. There was some deconstruction there. How can we tell? There were, at the very least, the tell-tale signs of deconstruction. But are these signs a sufficient indication?

Deconstruction is more than a few generic reflexes derived from the master. There *was* deconstruction there, but the definitive signs of its having been present are not immediately apparent. At the same time, the instance of deconstruction—perhaps even a *classical* instance—must be distinguished, if possible, from an instance of Kant himself, exposed in the clear light of deconstruction. It is possible that the deconstruction at work in Kant does not necessarily belong to deconstruction. Perhaps it was Kant's all along. The signs of deconstruction were only visible in the light of the deconstruction of Kant.

Deconstruction says that it would expose the object in its *singularity*. It exposes the object in its singularity and along the axis of its deconstructing itself. Deconstruction is exposed to the object in its singularity. In such a situation deconstruction would all but disappear. The object deconstructs and deconstruction only reads the signs of this—carefully, rigorously, patiently, meticulously. Deconstruction is 'nothing more or less than good reading itself,' says J. Hillis Miller in *The Ethics of Reading* (Miller 1987, 10).<sup>20</sup> But this old promise of fidelity to the text is not the sole property of deconstruction. There are others, and they make the same promise, and it is equally theirs to make. They eschew method. They protest their allegiance to truth and nothing less. However, there is no state of being without preconceptions, says truth itself. There is no pure fidelity. The object is brought under concepts, says Kant. The word and the object coincide inasmuch as the object is only the object *of a concept*. There is nothing outside of the text, says the deconstructor himself, in truth, and this is no lie.

Where is the difference or different difference of deconstruction then? It is only deconstruction that walks or can walk the winding path between the singularity of the object beyond all concepts and preconceptions, beyond language, beyond any appropriation or incorporation, beyond distortion and misappropriation, beyond reduction and indifference, beyond thought, beyond calculation and regulation, on the one hand, and, on the other, the object always already conceived and preconceived, always already language, always already appropriated and incorporated, distorted and misappropriated, always already calculated and regulated. It is not clear that there is such a path. There is the path between these two, which is the same path on either side of the abyss. Deconstruction is not quite alone on this solitary highway. There are the others, and deconstruction is one such. It is alone there, amongst the others. Is this the

truth of its different difference? *Deconstruction is at least equally different from the others.*

Kant is one such too. Kant is the other of deconstruction, or at least one of the others. The consequence of Kant is deconstruction, without doubt. Kant engendered (this) deconstruction. Kant walks the winding path between the singularity of the object beyond all concepts and preconceptions, beyond language, beyond any appropriation or incorporation, beyond distortion and misappropriation, beyond reduction and indifference, beyond representation and representativity, beyond calculation and regulation, and the object always already conceived and preconceived, always already language and representation, always already appropriated and incorporated, distorted and misappropriated, always already calculated and regulated. There is a word for the absence of this path and it is 'deconstruction.' The singular name for this path is deconstruction, though it probably has other names too. The different difference of *deconstruction* resides here: amongst a host of other words each equally, each radically different from the other: relic, onto, grape, anticipate, indigo, hastily, sponge-towel, all, side, greeting, bamboo, for, Alan, limpid, resonate, ungrateful, hypertrophy, ink, oblong—to mention a mere handful of them.

One of countless others, and a *singular* example, is the word Kant. Let us extract it from amongst its neighbors and inspect it at close quarters:

Kant

Kant is a word. Can it be doubted? But the different difference of deconstruction, ultimately, is this: there is only *one* word, and that word *is* deconstruction. Let it be unveiled to us, the Word, in its immediate presence:

Deconstruction

Is there room for two? For Kant and deconstruction? How can they possibly share the world?

Kant, deconstruction. Kant,deconstruction. Kantdeconstruction. DeKantconstruction. DeconKantstruction. DeconstrucKantion. DeconKantion. DeKantion. DeKant. Kant. Kandecont. Kandeconstrut. Kandeconstructiont. Kandeconstruction. Andeconstruction. Deconstruction.

What cannot be digested here? What cannot be assimilated? What happens to the material?

It is not clear how Kant and deconstruction go together, both in their sameness and in their difference. They are the same, and in this they differ equally. They differ and their difference is the same. The problem, in general, for the determination of the different difference of deconstruction, may then be reducible to the question of the relation of *identity* and *difference*. The preponderance of this question emerges here in a singular way. To represent the relation of identity and difference is the end of deconstruction, and of philosophy too for that matter. It is an investigation of this relation that provides the focus for Chapter Six.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> '[In analytic judgements], the predicate B,' writes Kant, 'belongs to the subject A, as something which is covertly contained in this concept A.... Analytic judgments are... those in which the connection of the predicate with the subject is thought through identity.... [Analytic judgments], as adding nothing through the predicate to the concept of the subject, but merely breaking it up into its constituent concepts that have all along been thought in it, although confusedly, can... be entitled explicative' (B 10-11). Apart from these remarks, the other short passage in which analytic judgments are described is cited at the beginning of the next section.

Quotations from the first *Critique* are from two texts: (1) Raymond Schmidt's 1924 German edition (with Kant's original punctuation) of the A and B texts (Kant 1924); (2) Norman Kemp Smith's English translation, based on Schmidt's edition, and published under the title *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1964). All references refer to the standard pagination of the 1781 and 1787 texts (A and B respectively).

<sup>2</sup> Max Müller's translation of the *second* edition gives this rendering: 'I do not need to go beyond the concept connected with the name of body, in order to find that extension is connected with it' (Kant 1881, 6). J. M. D. Meiklejohn renders the sentence in this way: 'For I do not need to go beyond the conception of *body* to find extension connected with it...' (Kant 1893., 7). Meiklejohn's contraction and italics are a compromise that nonetheless tends towards Kemp Smith's interpretation. Italics are often used when an emphasis is required but it is not quite clear whether it is fully an instance of 'mention' (if the concept is an *object* to which the word refers then it is an instance of 'mention'). Any attention drawn to a word in such a way tends *precisely by means of that attention* to inhibit the disappearance of that word, as a word, in its referentiality (when a word represents something, what the word itself is—a word—is overwritten by the representative function of the word, wherein the word *is* what it represents).

<sup>3</sup> Here is Wesley Salmon's account of the rule: 'The following sentence is nonsense: Table has five letters. It is ungrammatical, for it confuses use and mention of a word; it violates the general principle that to *mention* an object we must *use* a name that is distinct from the object being mentioned. The fact that we are talking about a word is no license to confuse the object being discussed with the words used in the discussion' (Salmon 1984, 141). I examined this rule in some detail in Chapter Four, 'Logic of the Word.'



- <sup>4</sup> That this distinction is a *logical* necessity is consistently emphasized in the work of W. V. Quine. See, for example, *Word and Object* (Quine 1960). In the tradition of realism, the distinction between the representation and what is represented is the first principle. This distinction then determines by default the course of this philosophical tradition, configuring its problems, producing its obstructions, and supporting its solutions.
- <sup>5</sup> The terms 'body' and 'object' are (already) fundamentally related, and we need to keep this in mind.
- <sup>6</sup> Extension is in fact a property of the word 'bodies,' or of the word 'body.' Firstly, the word 'body' has a spatial extension. Secondly, the extension of the word 'body' is, according to the technical meaning of extension, all the objects to which the word 'body' might be applied (*OED* notes the first English usage of the word with this meaning in 1725). The word 'body' extends to a set or class or collection of objects—that is, bodies. Though the notion of extension in space and the notion of the extensionality of terms clearly express different things, their proximity ought not be overlooked in this discussion. Both notions of extension come to a particular prominence in the early eighteenth-century. See *OED*: 'extension.'
- <sup>7</sup> The '(...)' indicates that the designatory difficulty recurs here. The expression 'the body' is, at the very least, a necessary compromise.
- <sup>8</sup> There is another quasi-grammatical convention in contemporary philosophy that suggests the use of italics in a circumstance like this: the concept of *body* (see Meiklejohn's translation of the sentence in question, cited above). The italics point to a difficulty with regard to the status of..., of what? Of (the) body? Of 'body'? Or *body*? The difficulty recurs here. Anticipating what follows, we might also put it this way: the italics point to a difficulty with regard to the status of *x*.
- <sup>9</sup> In 'Two Kinds of Transcendental Objectivity,' Charles Sherover comes to describe the use of *Gegenstand* and *Objekt* with an emphasis the reverse of mine (Sherover 1982). My interpretation was limited to the passage (A 51, B 75) loosely paraphrased above. Though Sherover's reading is thorough and scholarly, its interest lies more in the difficulty it has clarifying the distinction, and then correlating this with Kant's usage, than in its conclusions.
- <sup>10</sup> Though the variable ('*x*,' for example) features in what follows, I have addressed the question of the variable in greater detail in 'The Value of the Variable: An Excursion in the Abyss of Precision,' in *Philosophy Today* (Humphries 1997).
- <sup>11</sup> See A 93, B 125, and A 371-77; 'The real [*Reale*] of outer appearances is therefore real [*wirklich*] in perception only, and can be real in no other way' (A 376).
- <sup>12</sup> We take up this matter again below.
- <sup>13</sup> Of the judgment in general Kant writes: 'Judgment is therefore the mediate knowledge of an object, that is, the representation of the representation of an object' (A 68, B 93). Since an object is, for Kant—and inasmuch as it is a possible object of experience—always already a representation, then Kant's definition of judgment becomes: judgment is the representation of the representation of a representation.
- <sup>14</sup> There is an intricate logic or quasi-logic of the limit, closely linked to the question of the impossible. See, for example, Maurice Blanchot, *Le pas au-delà* (Blanchot 1973) and Derrida, 'Pas,' in *Parages* (Derrida 1986), where this logic—a logic and a deconstruction of and at the limit—is pursued tirelessly. The problem with regard to this impossible logic of the limit (at the same time a limit logic of the impossible) is to recognize a limit or transgression of the logic, where it encounters what is sometimes called the *event*. In 'L'impossible en effet(s),' Catherine Malabou asks the question which poses itself at the limit, 'Peut-on passer les frontières en effet?' (Malabou 1994, 237). Not merely 'Peut-on passer les frontières?'

but, 'Peut-on passer les frontières *en effet*?' The hard thing to calculate is precisely what is added to the (impossible) logic of the limit by the addition of the 'en effet.'

- <sup>15</sup> Also: 'The concept of the noumenon is, therefore, not the concept of an object, but is a problem unavoidably bound up with the limitation of our sensibility . . .' (A 287, B 344).
- <sup>16</sup> Analyticity: that the concept of the term can be disclosed in analytic judgments like 'All bodies are extended.'
- <sup>17</sup> Gottlob Frege's example is canonical: the Evening Star and the Morning Star are both names of the same thing, revealed to us by astronomical observation—that is, the planet Venus.
- <sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the *subject* of representation for the realist is the *entity*, which is a self-identity.
- <sup>19</sup> Despite their general facility, there is of course no grounds for complacency about the terms 'is' and '='. See Chapter Six, 'Hegel and Heidegger: Identity and Difference.'
- <sup>20</sup> In 'As if I were Dead,' Derrida pays homage to Geoffrey Bennington's reading of Kant in 'X' (Bennington 1996), a paper concerned with the 'X' in Kant's first *Critique* in a way that at times complements the reading offered in this chapter. 'Geoff Bennington's reading of Kant is,' says Derrida, 'I am almost sure, a valid countersignature for Kant. It adds something new that is Geoff's gesture, Geoff's invention; but this invention is an interesting one only to the extent that it acknowledges an event that was already there, which is Kant's text' (Derrida 1996a, 220). This observation enjoys the sudden sweetness of the aporia of invention and disclosure, but it poses the same question that Miller's claim poses: Is there a case of being closer to Kant? If so (and we would hope so), how is this to be measured? With what kind of yardstick? There may well be a stick which measures fidelity to the text, but *to which text*? Can the aporia itself be harnessed for the purpose of a legitimation? In other words, there is perhaps no way of clearly distinguishing between such a 'fidelity to the text' and a loyalty to another—even a loyalty to the One (to the master, or to the book, etc.). We would not have thought that 'fidelity to the text' would be a family matter, but of course it is always possible that this is so. Could this be avoided? Ought it to be? '[T]his invention is an interesting one only to the extent that it acknowledges an event that was already there, which is Kant's text.' This statement unfolds with remarkable facility. Surely it is true, and its truth is a very old-fashioned one. It readily *discriminates*, in other words. How could it do otherwise? Yet it is an impossible truth, where the coincidence of invention and disclosure is not necessarily an event of harmonization. 'I am almost sure,' says Derrida. This must be the place where responsibility and undecidability interrupt the difference of the deconstructive reading too, whose exceptional facility here is oddly prone to the seductive intuition of a uniformity of the text, a uniformity which permits any fidelity to be. If there is not a *true* reading, then there must be at least a *faithful* reading, in order to separate the wheat from the chaff. There may be multiple and contradictory readings that are still faithful. There is however no measure of fidelity other than the thing, and the thing repels every fidelity as another betrayal. How then to mete out this approbation? If there is a deconstructive *interruption* here, in the distribution of the goods, *where is it*?
- Hence it becomes necessary to think *fidelity* and *transference* together. The link would then have to be made between these two words and the de Manian distinction between a *deliberate* and a *passive* knowledge. This is very difficult terrain, and though the implications of the necessity to think these difficult connections are everywhere in my inquiry, it is not possible to develop them here explicitly. One text one might turn to for assistance would be Lucette Finas, 'Jacques Derrida: une écriture pressante' (Finas 1996). This text both reads a text by Derrida and at the same time *analyzes the transference*, but the question we must ask of the text is the following one: *Is this analysis deliberate or passive? Where is the analysis taking place?*

## Hegel and Heidegger: Identity and Difference

It is not possible to evaluate the different difference of deconstruction—if there is such a thing as deconstruction's different difference—without a consideration of difference. Yet difference, despite its constitutive solitude, is, as we have seen, rarely encountered unaccompanied by its adversary, identity. They are, and have always been, the closest and most intimate of marriages. *How close?* This is the question that will be investigated here. The *different* difference of deconstruction might be a difference irrecoverable by identity, for example, as distinct from a difference that is only a moment of identity. Certainly there is an assertion in Deleuze, elaborated in some detail in *Difference and Repetition*, of a difference to be differentiated from another, less different, difference, and the *philosophy of difference* has the task of articulating this different difference.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, however, it will not be Deleuze who guides us through the problem, but Hegel and Heidegger, in whose thought the question of the relation of identity and difference is given protracted attention. Hegel proposes the identity of identity and difference, and this ultimate identification is the apotheosis of his speculative science. But it is, at the same time, the determinate aporia of the system as a whole. The quasi-Hegelian formula *identity = difference* determines the limit and the abyss and the aporia of representation, which the system would contain (as though Hegel might swallow Kant whole). The formula *identity = difference* announces the appearance of the aporia of representation in Hegel, which is equally the aporia of Hegel. Hegel contains the aporia in the formula.

Heidegger, in a related gesture, proposes a leap into the abyss, a leap beyond representation. In the beyond of representation is the 'belonging together' of being. The leap itself then is the leap *of the logos* and of *logocentrism* and of *representation itself*.

The leap in Heidegger—which is of course *the act*, the *definitive act*—is the *sign* of a different difference, a difference which exceeds the difference of representation. What is the relation of the different difference of Heidegger to the different difference of deconstruction? The question of the different difference of deconstruction is played out in this same drama, even where, and precisely where, deconstruction differentiates itself from both Hegel and Heidegger.

## I

Let me begin by recounting briefly a story which introduces the problem of identity, difference and representation in one of its classically obstructive instances. Some time ago, a friend of mine was invited to respond to an article, published in a journal of philosophical theology, which addressed the relation between the concept of the sublime in Kant and the quasi-concept of *différance* in Derrida. In the original article, the author briefly accounts for the provenance of the Derridean term as follows:

'*Différance*' as everyone knows is a portmanteau-word from two French verbs, verbs for 'to differ' and 'to defer'....<sup>2</sup>

When my friend came to consider this passage in his reply, it was hard for him to conceal his impatience, and, a little naively, he wrote the following:

Interestingly, the author is quite unlikely to have acquired this story from reading the essay by Derrida which bears the word '*différance*' as its title. His phrase, 'as everyone knows,' does, however, point to a possible origin of his account: having heard this story on the academic grapevine, he recounts it here in the same way one retells a joke, perhaps with a few personal embellishments. Certainly, had he read the essay, this kind of distortion would not have been possible. Why so?

1. '*Différance*' is not a portmanteau-word. The latter, according to the *OED*, is 'a word like those invented by Lewis Carroll, made up of the blended sounds and combining the meanings of two distinct words (as *slithy*, meaning "lithe and slimy").'
2. There are not *two* French verbs, but one: *différer*. This one verb has two meanings: to differ, and to defer. It is this specific coincidence of meanings in the *one* word that interests Derrida.

The 'a' Derrida introduces into *différence* to produce *différance*—which introduces only the essential graphical difference between 'e' and 'a'—is an inaudible, or nonphonetic, difference... [and so on].

Not long after my friend submitted his reply he received a phone call from the editor of the journal, who explained to him that the author of the article was a distinguished scholar of venerable years, an associate editor of the journal in fact, and that such an error as the one my friend had alleged was highly unlikely. Hence, it would be necessary for him to make an appropriate adjustment to his analysis. As corroboration for the accuracy of the author's account of the provenance of the term *différance*, the editor suggested that my friend consult a linguist, the editor's colleague, with whom the editor had already discussed the issue.

Open to the editor's suggestion, my friend went to see the linguist. In the course of a cordial conversation, the linguist explained to him that the French verb *différer* had two roots and that what the French had done, somewhat recklessly, was to conflate them. Hence the author of the original article was in fact correct in his assertion, though one needed to look beyond Derrida's essay to the etymology of the word in order to recognize this.

My friend listened attentively to this suggestion, gave it due consideration, but could not fully allay his skepticism about the theory regarding *différer* the linguist had proposed. The problem, which he realized was predominantly one of *tone*, remained. An 'adjustment' was required, but it was not clear how to make the adjustment without endorsing what still appeared to him as an error of exposition symptomatic of the kind of non-reading of Derrida frequently attributed to critics of deconstruction by frustrated deconstructors. Eventually, a simple solution arrived, and his revision read as follows:

Interestingly, the author's account of the provenance of Derridean *différance* differs significantly from the account given in Derrida's essay.... The difference between Derrida's account and the author's interpretation might be accounted for in this way: there *is* a sense, of course, in which there are *two* verbs: *différer*, meaning 'to differ,' and a different *différer*, meaning 'to defer.'

The editor was pleased with this compromise, in which more attention was given to maintaining a tone appropriately respectful of the author's scholarly standing, and which sought to interpret, more or less sympathetically, how the author came to make his unorthodox assertion regarding *différer*. However, in making this alteration, which resolved a dilemma for the editor, the solution in fact raises a far more intractable problem, which is this: How can we decide in cases like *différer* whether there is in fact

one word with two meanings, an instance of polysemy, or two identical words, sometimes indiscernibly superimposed, with one meaning each, an instance of homonymy? For the lexicographer, the logician, the linguist, or for anyone concerned to understand the basic mechanism of language, an answer to this question is exigent.<sup>3</sup>

It is when it is necessary to decide such a question that the representational problem the question frames approaches the moment of aporia. The aporia only carries its aporetic force (which is at the same time a peculiar powerlessness) if what drives or draws us towards it is an implacable logic, like gravity itself. Without the momentum of this logic the problem can be eluded. This is the contiguity of logic and aporia which is, perhaps, a characteristic of deconstruction, or to which deconstruction characteristically draws attention, or to which it is *attracted*—though susceptibility to this attraction is not the exclusive province of deconstruction, unless we understand deconstruction as precisely that which is, in a sense, present or produced or invoked when there is the incongruous congruity of logic and aporia.

Let us consider another illustration. Take the following two sentences:

- (1) The speeding train ran over many a sound sleeper.
- (2) The speeding train ran over many a sound sleeper.

In these two sentences, which may in fact be different versions of one sentence, is the word 'sleeper' the *same* word? The sameness or otherwise of the two instances of the word 'sleeper' has consequences then for the sameness or otherwise of the two instances of the sentence 'The speeding train ran over many a sound sleeper.'

The problem is, perhaps, a function of what one calls a word—of what is the limit and territory of the word. For example, we might substitute for word the classification 'signifier.' There may be a single *signifier* in both the cases under consideration—the signifier 'sleeper,' and, in the original example, the signifier *différer*—and different or multiple *signifieds*.

However, it is not clear that this simple mechanism provides a satisfactory solution. If by the term 'signifier' we mean something that is *constitutively paired with a signified* in order to form the signifying unit called a *sign*, then the problem of word and meaning

is precisely reproduced: it will not be clear whether it is the same signifier linked to two signifieds or two signifiers each with its own signified.

If by the term 'signifier' we mean, in this case, a particular concatenation of letters, letters without a space between them, forming the sensible part of a unit of linguistic signification, then it is clear that *différer* is a, or is one, signifier. Two instances of the signifier *différer* are the same provided that all their letters are the same and in the same order. But in providing for this simple singularity, whereby the signifier is strictly determined according to the identity of its phonic or graphic features, we have eliminated the possibility of determining the character of the signifier according to its linkage with *its* signified. Either the signifier *différer* is singular and iterable but detached from the signifying process, or, on the other hand, it is one element of the unitary sign and tied in its essence to its signified. In both cases we have left the problem of *différer* untouched. Reclassifying 'word' as 'signifier,' or breaking the word down into signifier and signified, does not eliminate the aporia, but repeats it.

In analytic philosophy, there is talk of 'types' and 'tokens,' of type-words and token-words. The philosopher John Searle puts it in the following way: 'If, for example, I write the word "dog" on the blackboard three times, have I written one word or three? Well, I have written one *type* word, but I have written three different *token* instances of that word. That is, the token is a concrete physical particular, but the type is a purely abstract notion. We need this distinction because the identity criteria for types and tokens are quite different. What makes something a case of "the same token" will be different from what makes it "the same type"' (Searle 1994, 642). Does the distinction of type and token clarify the problem of 'différer'? Unfortunately, this distinction again reproduces rather than resolves the problem, because it is not clear what makes these token instances tokens of the *same* type. If sameness is restricted here to the sensible features of the word 'dog' then the repetition of the letters 'd' and 'o' and 'g' in that order will produce three instances of (the word) 'dog.' But (the word) 'dog' is then a meaningless series of scratches on the page. It is impossible to see a path through to the word. Such an abject state of the word, divorced from all representational capacity, is, in any case, inconceivable. In Searle's example, the three sets of marks on the blackboard that each make 'dog'—the tokens—represent the type 'dog'. That is what they each refer to, and the distinction of type and token has merely legislated to that

end. The distinction of type and token has not described anything about language or words, except symptomatically. On the other hand, if the distinction of type and token takes into account semantic identity criteria, then it is not clear that the three instances of the word 'dog' are instances of the same type.<sup>4</sup>

It is hardly uncommon for the 'same word' to have different meanings. Puns draw attention to this in order to achieve the punning effect, which is as clearly exemplified in Shakespeare as in Lacan, for example, both keen practitioners of this dark art. The punning effect can appear, on one hand, as disruptive of communicative symmetry, as an embarrassment for linguistic propriety, or, alternatively, as serendipitous, affirming a certain intelligence, even wit, in language itself. Derrida's *différance*, for example, is perhaps a complex *antanaclasis*, where a *phonetic* homonymy plays on a *graphical* difference. The pun brings together sameness and difference as though their proximity were itself a moment of providential alignment or of malevolent disruption in the scheme of things.

The punning effect is particularly striking, even shocking, when the same word has two quite opposed meanings. A classical instance is detailed in Freud's account of the vicissitudes of the German word '*heimlich*' in his essay 'The Uncanny' ('Das Unheimlich').<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Freud was prompted to this inquiry after reading Hegel, for in the second preface to the *Science of Logic* (*Wissenschaft der Logik*), Hegel makes a brief but emphatic allusion to this issue. For Freud, the case of *unheimlich* serves to confirm a thesis about the nature of repression. For Hegel the conjunction of two opposite meanings in the one word is precisely the collusion of the German language and dialectics which confirms the basic thrust of his logic:

German has many advantages over other modern languages; some of its words even possess the further peculiarity of having not only different but opposite meanings so that one cannot fail to recognize a speculative spirit of the language in them: it can delight to come across such words and to find the union of opposites naively shown in the dictionary as one word with opposite meanings, although this result of speculative thinking is nonsensical to the understanding. (Hegel 1951, 10; Hegel 1969, 32)

Hegel is not disturbed by these coincidences but in fact delighted. The delight reflects the affirmation. Language itself confirms his thesis. What higher approbation could there be? Thus Hegel can readily assimilate this otherwise disconcerting phenomenon.

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What is at the core of this prodigious assimilative power that is so often remarked of Hegel? It can be rendered quite simply. Hegel is able to articulate *identity* and *difference* as inextricable moments of an ultimate identity in the concept. Hence he speaks on important occasions of *the identity of identity and difference*, which we can simplify in this formula, which I call the essential quasi-Hegelian formula, or formula (A):

(A) identity = difference<sup>6</sup>

It is this capacity to articulate the inextricable character of identity and difference which lends Hegel's system its power and its distinctive rhetorical style. It is a crude simplification to assert of Hegel that he *reduces difference*. Hegel does not reduce difference—that is, he does not *simply* reduce difference. In any case, there is a common intrigue of identity, difference *and* reduction. Hegel attends to the question of difference with great care, and the subtlety of his analysis exceeds that of many more recent thinkers of difference. While in some cases these philosophers of difference demonstrate a recognition of the proximity of identity and difference, nonetheless, there is a tendency, in this post-war tradition, to endorse a value called 'difference' and disparage a value called 'identity,' and to oppose this new configuration to the Hegelian inclination. This is a simple dogma or morality—a different dogma. An ethics of difference (whatever that might be) is placed ahead of a thinking of difference, and hence the ethics is undermined: it is other than what it intends—it is the same. If there is a philosophy of difference which advocates difference, it does not necessarily support those who wish to do battle with Hegel as though it were a battle between identity and difference, where difference represents the values of creativity, non-conformism, and so on. Such a battle takes place in all its violence within Hegel. Somehow, however, Hegel averts the escalation of this conceptual violence into catastrophe, which is the intractable instance of the aporia. Formula (A) is the final and recuperative gesture that serves to avert the catastrophe, for the system, of the aporia of identity and difference.

But this is not quite so straightforward, for we have not yet understood the formula which, presiding over the Hegelian system, comprehends the whole. Let us take a little



time to characterize the movement in Hegel which would bring us to this ultimate moment.

I call the formula *identity = difference* 'quasi-Hegelian' because it is not, strictly, Hegel's formula. Of identity, in the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel writes:

It is of great importance to reach an adequate understanding of the true significance of identity, and this means above all that it must not be interpreted as *abstract* identity, i.e., as identity that excludes difference [*Unterschied*]. This is the point that distinguishes all bad philosophy from what alone deserves the name of philosophy. In its truth, as the ideality of what immediately is, identity is a lofty determination both for our religious consciousness and for the rest of our thinking and consciousness in general. It can be said that the true knowledge of God begins at the point where he is known as Identity, i.e., as absolute identity. (Hegel 1991, 181, translation slightly modified; Hegel 1992, 147)<sup>7</sup>

This is the divine burden of identity in Hegel. Both to avoid a fatal confusion of absolute with abstract identity, and to distinguish an identity still less than absolute, Hegel has recourse in this text to the term 'unity' (*Einheit*) in formulating the *penultimate* sublations (*Aufhebungen*) on the path to the thinker's actualization of absolute knowledge—it is the *unity*, then, rather than the identity, of (abstract) identity and difference, and of all other dialectically-opposed pairs: for example, 'the Idea [is] the unity [*Einheit*] of the ideal and the real, of the finite and the infinite, of identity and difference [*Differenz*]....' (290/217-18); and elsewhere: 'Ground [*Grund*] is the unity of identity and difference [*Unterschied*]' (188, trans. sl. mod/152).

Now, Hegel does not rest with the fundamental notions of *idea*, *ground*, and *concept*, for in the end they remain complicit with a Kantian formalism, which for Hegel is a lack of concrete content. This pernicious formalism threatens the totalization that actualizes philosophy in absolute knowledge, a totalization by which abstract and concrete are identified while, at the same time, preserving their distinction. Thus, as Hegel determines these fundamental notions, situating them relationally within his system, he registers their limit, and in their limitation is invoked a beyond—something in excess of their containment.

Hegel seeks a sovereign term. He raises the *idea* to the Absolute Idea. With such an Idea Hegel hopes to identify pure form and content, to express 'the cognition that the Idea is the One Totality.' The Absolute Idea is:

for-itself the *pure form* of the Concept, which intuits its content as itself. It is its own *content*, inasmuch as it is the ideal distinguishing of itself from itself; but in this identity the totality of the form (as the system of the determinations of the content) is contained.... [The] true content [of the absolute idea] is nothing but the entire system. (303-4/228-29)

Here Hegel reaches for the moment. It is the Absolute Idea that would crown Hegel's system. In the realization of the Absolute Idea the thinker would accede to divinity. It is Hegel's quasi-christological ascension.

Can we entrust ourselves to Hegel's distinction between *unity* and *identity*? Can we accept a necessarily contrived hierarchy of identities, abstract and otherwise, which anticipates but also misconstrues an absolute identity? Clearly the demand of the Hegelian system entails such distinctions, which defer, perhaps narrativistically, the supervision of a culminative, climactic and true identity—and defer at the same time the very *weakness*, *anticlimax* and *pathos* of this crucial supervision. The exigency here, for Hegel, is equally the deferral *and* the supervision. This exigency is the system. The system as a whole, as everything and nothing, as mere propaedeutic *and* as true embodiment, is to be accommodated by the Absolute Idea.

For our purposes here, we can omit these necessary complications and bifurcations spurred by the heroic labor of systematization and express the identity of identity and difference—that, ultimately, of the Absolute Idea—with the simple formula *identity = difference*, a formula whose apparent simplicity and resolution serves as a natural disguise for its incalculable density.

Within the field of the inescapable that this formula circumscribes is the essential obstacle that this formula presents for the task of comprehension, and this despite the fact that the formula represents, for Hegel, the moment of a total comprehension. This formula is an inevitable conclusion, the conclusion, perhaps, of all thinking, a conclusion to which Hegel would lead us by many slow, intermediate, and necessary steps, and yet in its conclusiveness is harbored an essential indecision, a note of interrogation: a question that is the difficulty and more than the mere difficulty of digesting the formula. Hence:

(B) identity = difference?

Formulas (A) and (B) are the same. What distinguishes them is the mark of the question itself, which is what? The question that it is necessary to sustain here is the question already inhabiting and excoriating the essential quasi-Hegelian formula.

To approach the question we need to add another closely related formula:

(A) identity = difference

(C) difference = identity

Now '=' is the sign of identity. Formulas (A) and (C) represent the classical Hegelian thesis of the ultimate identity of identity and difference. However, according to this logic, if *identity = difference* and '=' is the sign of identity, then '=' is equally the sign of difference. This is why I reversed (A) to produce (C): (A) = (C) and (C) is different from (A). Hence the identity of identity and difference is the *difference* of identity and difference, is *equally* the *difference* of identity and difference.

To propose the identity of identity and difference is the *same* as to propose that identity differs from, that identity *is not* difference, where the notion of the *sameness* by which these propositions are related is subject to the same perturbation, equivocation, and recursion.

Hegel's system attests to the labor of thought in its thinking both the dialectical facilitation and the obstruction presented by the essential quasi-Hegelian formula, and Hegel clearly determines its character as:

- (1) the very principle of dialecticism (which is, in a sense, the *Aufhebung* itself, especially inasmuch as the *Aufhebung* is identifiable with the Absolute Idea, and,
- (2) the fundamental obstacle to the supervention and arrest of an interminable dialectic in the identification of its very process, the movement of the Concept itself, whose cognition is absolute knowledge.

There is an atmosphere of complication and contradiction that gathers around the quasi-Hegelian formula, a formula which is itself meant to comprehend every contradiction. The attempt to think the formula intensifies the difficulties. The centrifugal and centripetal force exerted by the formula influences the orbit of other terms in the system. Of the notion of *ground* (*Grund*), Hegel says, 'Ground is the unity of identity and difference.' He continues:

When we say that ground is the *unity* [*Einheit*] of identity and difference [*Unterschied*], this unity must not be understood as abstract identity, for then we would just have another name for a thought that is once more just that identity of the understanding [*Verstand*] which we have recognised to be untrue. So, in order to counter this misunderstanding, we can also say that ground is not only the unity but equally the difference too of identity and difference. Ground, which we encountered first as the sublation [*Aufhebung*] of contradiction, therefore makes its appearance as a new contradiction. But, as such, it is not what abides peacefully within itself, but is rather the expulsion of itself from itself. (188-89/152)

Hegel determines ground as ground and as not ground. Ground was first encountered as the 'sublation of contradiction.' It grounded contradiction. Ground appeared as the *neutralization* of (the aporia of) contradiction *in the moment* (of the aporia) of contradiction, wherein that which would 'abide peacefully within itself' experiences on the contrary the 'expulsion of itself from itself.' But this sublative and synthetic grounding was a passing moment, and in fact ground 'makes its appearance as a new contradiction,' Hegel says, which it, as ground, does not contain or ground. Ground is not a harmony and containment of contradictions, as the *very possibility* of contradiction; ground is 'not that which abides peacefully within itself, but is rather the expulsion of itself from itself.' Ground is one in a series of Hegelian penultimates, the suspense and the suspension of the system.

It is in trying to reproduce Hegel's terminal gesture, that of the installation of the Absolute Idea as the terminus and containment of the system, and in interpreting the Absolute Idea as precisely the moment of the essential quasi-Hegelian formula, that we approach the aporia of the system, which animates it.

Other than as its repetition, the thinking of this fundamental 'equation,' *identity = difference*, does not resolve to a universal identity—whatever that might be, for such a thing is barely conceivable, even though its concept and intuition continue to exert an irresistible attraction. The equation in question cannot in itself give priority to an identification already inhabited by its nemesis. It cannot understand or render identification—though, in an important sense, it clearly represents it *absolutely*. The equation is not *necessarily* an equation at all. The logic of *identity = difference*, though it constitutes a world, our world, at the same time uproots that world and blindly dissipates it. Nonetheless, the formula, which is, in its own way, a kind of madness, is

inescapable, ubiquitous. It is the *one* thought, the *only* thought, and the thought of thoughts.

It is according to *this* difficult, aporetic, yet familiar logic, that the principle of identity is determined and perverted. The movement of identification harbors a difference which is the difference that conditions identity. But also, and problematically for the philosophy of difference, which would recognize an ethical imperative in difference: the movement of difference harbors an identity which is the identity that conditions difference.

The equation, faultless in its logic, falters here, with the aporia of absolute knowledge. The logic is not satisfactory. It is the disability of what would be an able and effective logic. It is logic itself. It is an illogic, or would be, if only 'is' were able, and the essence of this logic is a disabling of the 'is,' of what 'is' would be, of an 'is' always already unable, always already unable to be. This is its ability: to be unable to be. Being so, it is what it is. An able 'is' is a necessary presumption of this logic, for it too must copulate. This logic copulates in the absence of possibility.

## II

In the brief preface to *Identity and Difference* (*Identität und Differenz*), which introduces two important essays brought together from different sources to constitute a book with this unifying title, Heidegger writes:

*Die Zusammengehörigkeit von Identität und Differenz wird in der vorliegenden Veröffentlichung als das zu Denkende gezeigt.* (Heidegger 1969, 84)

This sentence carries the force and impetus of Heidegger's title, but it is not an easy sentence to translate. Joan Stambaugh renders it as follows:

The close relation [*die Zusammengehörigkeit*] of identity and difference will be shown in this publication to be that which gives us thought. (Heidegger 1969, 21)

In a different translation, Kurt Leidecker offers:

The togetherness of identity and difference will be demonstrated in the present publication as the object of thought. (Heidegger 1960, 11)

The two translations broadly agree except for their rendering of the phrase '*als das zu Denkende*,' which is problematic, and which produces two quite divergent versions, though we can see where they are both heading. *Die Zusammengehörigkeit*, meaning 'belonging together, unity, solidarity, homogeneousness,' is a key theme of the first essay, 'The Principle of Identity,' so we might stay with Stambaugh's translation, 'close relation,' in order to leave the question of 'belonging together' for when we come to Heidegger's elaboration.

In fact, 'relation' is a very useful word here, because it sustains a certain ambiguity. Amongst the community of analytic philosophers there has been some debate about whether or not identity is a relation.<sup>8</sup> This is an obvious difficulty because identity already poses the problem of a simultaneous unity and multiplicity, such a difficult simultaneity being both a logical necessity and a moment of aporia.

Can this close relation of identity and difference—which we determined earlier as characterized by the essential quasi-Hegelian formula *identity = difference*—be thought? Before we proceed, there is a significant ambiguity in this question which we need to spell out:

(1) Can this relation be thought?

(2) Can this relation be thought?

What signs could we employ in inscribing these two questions to indicate their distinction? In one sentence, the word 'thought' is part of a verb, and in the other a noun: thought and thought, a banal distinction, but one which produces a distinctive alternation.

In attempting to render Heidegger's sentence, Stambaugh has carefully reproduced the same ambiguity of thought:

The close relation of identity and difference will be shown in this publication to be *that which gives us thought*. (21)

'That which gives us thought': both 'that which gives us to think' and 'that which gives us thought itself.'

So, can we *think* the relation which gives us *thought*? Here, as it so often is, the difficulty is a kind of interrupted reflexivity, in this case the paradigmatic Heideggerian reflection, which can be represented concisely in the following way:

thinking thinking.

There is a difference here that makes this brief poem not merely a repetition, or an echo of thinking—it is the difference between noun and verb (or between the gerund and the participle). One word, two meanings: thinking thinking. Is it just a case of more thinking, or is there a substantive thinking to be thought?

For example, let us consider these two sentences also:

(1) Heidegger is thinking.

(2) Heidegger is thinking.

It is an open question how we might distinguish these two sentences systematically. For example, we might distinguish between the participle 'thinking' as an action, or an activity, with the 'is' as its auxiliary in forming a continuous present, on the one hand, and on the other the gerund 'thinking' as a more or less static state of being, with which Heidegger is identified by means of the copula. This second sense, which implies in this instance a rather grandiose universality, might be conveyed by a simple typographical modification: Heidegger is Thinking. However, these two senses maintain their intrication, and it is at this point—where we are at the threshold of one sense, entering the other, a limit which is always imminent, a threshold which appears even as we seek the essence of one sense to the exclusion of the other—it is here that the difference between the two senses is not clear, the difference between the *process* and the *thing*: the thinking thing. But the difference does not quite collapse, even when, finally, there is so little to differentiate.

Here is an interstitial space then which something we might call 'deconstruction' seeks to chart. It approaches this task in this case with the aid of a peculiar instrument, the essential quasi-Hegelian formula, *identity = difference*. It is with this unlikely and aporetic instrument that it seeks the measure of the aporia, which is instanced here in the short pseudo-Heideggerian poem: thinking thinking.

The matter of the difference and the identity of thinking and thinking is already somehow tied up with the question of the *relation* of identity and difference. In the relation of the equals sign, identity and difference are at the same time identified and differentiated, which is not particular to this equation, but to all identifications. Understanding this relation, not uncontentiously, as mediated by the equals sign, which both mediates and immediates, we discovered a residue of unthinkableness or aporia in the relation which Heidegger is right to place at the origin of thought.

Given this difficulty, to which Heidegger is, in his own patient way, very attentive, how does he characterize the possibility of communicating the thought of the origin of thought that is shown in the relation of identity and difference, which I have formulated with the aid of the '=' sign, which is a kind of *conduit* for any possible relation?

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In 'The Principle of Identity,' Heidegger recalls the classical formula for identity:  $A = A$ . He takes issue with it:

For something to be the same, one is always enough. Two are not needed, as they are in the case of equality. The formula ' $A = A$ ' speaks of equality.<sup>9</sup> (Heidegger 1969, 23-4)

Heidegger then invokes a distinctive Platonic formulation in order to define identity:

Every A is itself the same with itself.<sup>10</sup> (25)

He continues: sameness implies the relation of 'with,' that is, a mediation: 'the unification into a unity.' Heidegger understands Idealism as having introduced this essential mediation into identity. Since idealism:

It is no longer possible for thinking to represent the unity of identity as mere sameness, and to disregard the mediation that prevails in unity. Wherever this is done identity is represented only in an abstract manner.<sup>11</sup> (25)

Here Heidegger uses 'abstract' in a very Hegelian sense.

Heidegger substitutes 'A is A' for 'A = A,' the former better representing the intention of Plato's formulation. He then focuses on the 'is', which tells us how every being is: it itself is the same with itself.

The principle of identity speaks of the Being of beings. As a law of thought, the principle is valid only insofar as it is a principle of Being that reads: to every being as such there belongs identity, the unity with itself.<sup>12</sup> (26)

Heidegger takes the conventional formulation of identity 'A = A' and brings it closer to Plato's intention: A is A. But it appears this is only more precisely to figure the *metaphysical* concept of identity.

It is with the introduction into Heidegger's argument of the fragment from Parmenides that we approach the limit of the metaphysical concept of identity.

For the same is perceiving (thinking) as well as being.<sup>13</sup> (27)

Where for metaphysics identity was a characteristic of Being, here in Parmenides being is a characteristic of the same, of identity:

The sameness of thinking and being that speaks in Parmenides' fragment stems from further back than the kind of identity defined by metaphysics in terms of Being, as a characteristic of Being.<sup>14</sup> (28)

The question is now, oddly, one of who owns what, of priority, of originality. Heidegger has approached the problem of identity, by way of its classical formulations, and introduced difference into the problem as mediation, but then invoked Parmenides in order to displace the question of identity onto another question: that of the belonging together [*Zusammengehörigkeit*] in the same of thinking and being. Here the emphasis must fall not on the 'together,' says Heidegger, but on the belonging. This belonging, which is, one assumes, mutual, introduces the moment of *Ereignis*, translated here by Stambaugh as the 'event of appropriation.' The *belonging* is, naturally enough, an appropriation. Its event is what Heidegger calls a *singulare tantum* (36)—not unlike a singularity.

Having introduced sameness to help us trace the concept of identity, and this sameness as that of thinking and Being, the matter now becomes that of the belonging together of man, as the thinking being (as the being for whom thought is), and Being:

Man and Being are appropriated to each other. They belong to each other.<sup>15</sup> (31)

What is this belonging to which Heidegger lends significant emphasis in his investigation of identity? Heidegger lends such an understanding of belonging a distinctly experiential dimensional when he notes this:

We do not as yet enter the domain of belonging together [*Zusammengehörigkeit*]. How can such an entry come about? By our moving away from the attitude of representational thinking. This move is a leap in the sense of a spring [*ist ein Satz im Sinne eines Sprunges*].... (32)

Heidegger is unambiguous about where this spring leaps to.

Into the abyss? Yes, as long as we only represent the spring in the horizon of metaphysical thinking. No, insofar as we spring and let go. Where to? To where we already have access: the belonging to Being.<sup>16</sup> (32-3)

The abyss is a figment of metaphysical thinking. It is conjured by representation. But, letting go, instead of the abyss what greets us like a true homecoming is the belonging to Being, which is a harmony.<sup>17</sup> There is nothing remote about where this spring springs to, for it is 'where in reality [*eigentlich*] we already are' (33).

It is in thinking this leap, which brings us decisively to where we already are, that the going gets difficult. There are some who might argue that this is where a certain kind of analysis must break off. The leap is this break. Heidegger can only lead us to the brink.

But Heidegger anticipates the leap and prefigures its beyond. How are we to read this?

The abyss is no abyss when the leap lets go of metaphysical thinking, when there is no longer resistance, no longer a distance between where we are, but are not and where we are in reality. But a problem arises once this beyond-the-leap is announced: is the leap still a leap when there is no abyss? Is not the leap constituted as such only in relation to the abyss? Is not the leap itself, as the promise of an exit, inextricably linked to the mechanism of representation, whose primary action is the constitution of that non-representational essence towards which it invariably gravitates? Perhaps representation itself produces the non-representational or unrepresentable as its own characteristic symptom. Representation ceaselessly invokes the beyond of representation, which *is*.



Thus the logic of the leap, its principle, is that it be a leap that seeks to leap out of representation towards the belonging to Being, but only if, to be a leap at all, it must be a leap into the abyss of representation, where it already is and from which it seeks an exit.

In essence, then, the leap itself withdraws.

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There is an inescapable dual seduction of thought, to which Heidegger, as one who thinks, cannot but acquiesce, a seduction which is heard in the Parmenidean fragment:

For the same are thinking and being.

On one hand, then, to think thought itself, which is identified as non-representational or true thought, as Being; on the other hand, to think oneself out of thought, which is identified as fallen or representational thought, to Being.

This is the fundamental shape of the Heideggerian problematic.

The difficulty is to understand precisely how these two alternatives are invariably superimposed, how their originary superimposition introduces into thought a tell-tale vibration, sometimes barely perceptible, sometimes monstrous, a vibration that Hegel calls the 'dialectic.'

Of course, as we have seen, it is Hegel who would *embrace* the simple contradiction of thought's dual seduction, whose irreconcilable alternatives are properly synthesized according to the aporetic logic of the formula *identity = difference*.

It has been suggested that the essential quasi-Hegelian formula *identity = difference* is the *one* thought. It is the thought in which one can discern, as in a crystal ball, the aporia clothed in its most lurid attire, busily and madly and meticulously raveling and unraveling the Concept itself, which it is. Hegel lives there, in the realm of the one thought, but it is not clear that he has made it his home. He cannot quite find the one thought, rest it in the palm of his hand, turn it over and enjoy it. He can only think an infernal host of lesser thoughts, which he transcribes *ad infinitum*—for they are, each and every one, the one, the same one and a different one. Hegel is not one who abides

peacefully within himself, but he is rather the expulsion of himself from himself, a dialectical antidote to an excess of incorporation.

Heidegger follows the one thought to its Heideggerian limit. He expels himself from representation in the step back and beyond, in which the beyond withdraws. The abyss of the leap and of the principle (*der Satz*) is no abyss. There, where there can be no attestation, there, where there can be no telling, there, where there was the abyss of representation, *there it is*: the womb of primordial being, the belonging together of identity and difference.

So, can we say that a *deconstruction* has exposed the desire in Hegel to realize the Absolute Idea to its indefinite protraction? Can we say that a *deconstruction* has exposed the ideology of the leap beyond representation in Heidegger to its captivation by representation? Surely, a deconstruction has deliberately exposed what was inert, latent, passive, silent, unconscious, or unspoken, in the Hegelian and the Heideggerian text, which is nothing less than a transcendence. Is not the very movement of a (deconstructive) reading somehow tied up with this supervention? With this transcendence of transcendence? In this sense, a deconstructive reading is not merely what one might call an 'appreciation.' It is *distinguishing itself*, as it were. Or are there very different relationships (of deconstruction) to the object text? Of course, there must be. There are as many different relationships as there are fidelities and infidelities, resistances and submissions. But what governs these relationships, these strategies? Where are they formed? We can say one thing with certainty: they are formed in the crucible of the essential quasi-Hegelian formula, *identity = difference*, which is the locus of the aporia of deconstruction.

What are the consequences of the analysis of the quasi-Hegelian formula *identity = difference* for the question of the different difference of deconstruction? Does the quasi-Hegelian formula belong to deconstruction or does deconstruction belong to the quasi-Hegelian formula? Though it is possible that deconstruction employs the formula as an instrument of deconstruction, deconstruction neither comprehends the formula, nor comprehends its incomprehensibility. It comprehends the formula at least as well as it comprehends other things. It need comprehend nothing more than the formula. In this its comprehension is no more nor less than the others: it is absolute.

Can deconstruction comprehend its *belonging* to the quasi-Hegelian formula? In this difficult terrain, the symptoms multiply and deconstruction struggles, along with the others, to grasp the principle of its own perpetual symptomatology:

Deconstruction understands that deconstruction is a stupid symptom of the one thought, *identity = difference*, which is the essence and the limit of the comprehensible.

There is a *radical equality* here, in which the absolute singularity of deconstruction, its different difference, absolutely incommensurable and irreducibly different, is gathered together with the others, all on the same footing, sharing the same ground, Hegel, Heidegger, Plato, Parmenides, Derrida, Deleuze and so on, an infinite retinue.<sup>18</sup> There, they participate, willingly or otherwise, in thought's long-winded testimony to 'that which gives us thought.'

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> 'We tend to subordinate difference to identity,' says Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* (*Différence et répétition*), 'in order to think it (from the point of view of the concept or the subject: for example, specific difference presupposes an identical concept in the form of a genus). We also have a tendency to subordinate it to resemblance (from the point of view of perception), to opposition (from the point of view of predicates), and to analogy (from the point of view of judgement). In other words, we do not think difference in itself. With Aristotle, Philosophy was able to provide itself with an organic representation of difference, with Leibniz and Hegel an orgiastic representation: it has not, for all that, reached difference in itself' (Deleuze 1968, 12; Deleuze 1994, xv). The patent difficulty with 'difference in itself' is that it is a *different* difference—a difference that *is different* (there is an essential ambiguity here). Difference 'in itself' will be difference in itself and difference from itself (a different difference). In an obvious sense, then, there can be no 'difference in itself.' Or we could say, with Deleuze, 'difference is monstrous' (29/44). At the same time, 'difference in itself' is difference identified, and a different difference is identity.

<sup>2</sup> The reference for this article has been omitted.

<sup>3</sup> On this issue see the R. H. Robins, 'Polysemy and the Lexicographer,' in *Studies in Lexicography* (Burchfield 1987). Robins tries to establish a distinction between homonymy (different words with different meanings but the same graphical or phonetic form), and polysemy (one word with different meanings). The difficulty of this distinction has been a crux for lexicography since the beginning.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter Four also discusses the distinction of type and token.

<sup>5</sup> 'What interests us most in this long extract [from the *Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*],' says Freud, 'is to find that among its different shades of meaning the word *heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*. What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*. (Cf. the quotation from Gutzkow: 'We call it *unheimlich*; you call it *heimlich*.').... Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*' (Freud 1925, 375, 377; Freud 1947, 235, 237).

<sup>6</sup> The distinctions that might be made between sameness and identity, equality and sameness, and so on, are all then reworked in the context of the consequences of the quasi-Hegelian formula, 'identity = difference.' The formula might have read, 'identity is difference,' or 'identity is the same as difference,' or, more interestingly, 'identity is identical with difference.' That the formula *is* 'identity = difference' and *not* the other alternatives is its difference from them.

<sup>7</sup> The three translators of *The Encyclopedia Logic* did not concur on the translation of 'Unterschied.' In the text, the term is translated by 'distinction.' In his dissenting prefatory statement, W. A. Suchting argues for retaining the traditional translation of 'Unterschied' by 'difference' (Hegel 1991, xlv-xlvi). I have modified the text to read 'difference' where Hegel writes 'Unterschied,' which assists in maintaining the clarity of my argument. Nonetheless, it would be equally possible to make a similar argument with the term 'distinction' opposite 'identity.' Either the force of the terms 'distinction' and 'difference' is the same, or what distinguishes distinction from difference is a different difference. Indeed, the word 'distinction' has a number of senses which would make a useful contribution.

The German text referred to here is the *Gesammelte Werke* (1992) without the *Zusätze* (Additions) which, according to the translators' preface of *The Encyclopedia Logic*, were 'added posthumously by the editorial committee that published the first edition of Hegel's *Werke*' (Hegel 1991, vii). The translation here is from the addition which in the *Werke* follows §115, but which is omitted in the 1992 edition.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Christopher Williams, 'Is Identity a Relation?' (Williams 1980), and G. H. Merrill, 'On the Uniqueness of the Identity Relation' (Merrill 1979).

<sup>9</sup> I have reproduced the German text of the quotations from *Identity and Difference* in full. 'Damit etwas das Selbe sein kann, genügt jeweils eines. Es bedarf nicht ihrer zwei wie bei der Gleichheit. Die Formel A = A spricht von Gleichheit' (Heidegger 1969, 86).

<sup>10</sup> 'Mit ihm selbst ist jedes A selber dasselbe' (87).

<sup>11</sup> 'Seit der Epoche des spekulativen Idealismus bleibt es dem Denken untersagt, die Einheit der Identität als das bloße Einerlei vorzustellen und von der in der Einheit waltenden Vermittelung abzusehen. Wo solches geschieht, wird die Identität nur abstrakt vorgestellt' (88).

<sup>12</sup> 'Der Satz der Identität spricht vom Sein des Seienden. Als ein Gesetz des Denkens gilt der Satz nur, insofern er ein Gesetz des Seins ist, das lautet: Zu jedem Seienden als solchem gehört die Identität, die Einheit mit ihm selbst' (88).

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger translates: 'Das Selbe nämlich ist Vernehmen (Denken) sowohl als auch Sein' (90).

<sup>14</sup> 'Die Selbigkeit von Denken und Sein, die im Satz des Parmenides spricht, kommt weiter her als die von der Metaphysik aus dem Sein als dessen Zug bestimmte Identität' (91).

<sup>15</sup> 'Mensch und Sein sind einander übereignet. Sie gehören einander' (95).

<sup>16</sup> 'Springt er in einen Abgrund? Ja, solange wir den Sprung nur vorstellen und zwar im Gesichtskreis des metaphysischen Denkens. Nein, insofern wir springen und uns loslassen. Wohin? Dahin, wohin wir schon eingelassen sind: in das Gehören zum Sein' (96).

<sup>17</sup> In the preface to *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger refers explicitly to the harmony of *Ereignis* (Heidegger 1969, 22, 84).

<sup>18</sup> This 'infinite retinue,' if it continues to acquire members according to the rule established by the six examples which illustrate the *type* or *genre* of retinue that it is, is hardly infinite. Were it infinite, would not *everyone* be there, in the end? For one thing, its infinity is, at this point, a sexed one, and this is not insignificant. That is: its sex is a *sign*. The sexual difference appears here like an absolute divide, the very interval and interruption of irreducible

difference itself. What will happen to the sex of the retinue on the path to its infinity? Will it alter? Will it be transformed? To bring the organs of sexual determination, the same ones and different ones, close to the essential quasi-Hegelian formula, *identity = difference*, is to feel a blast of unearthly heat, whether it is the same ones being divided by their difference, the different ones being united by their sameness, the same ones being divided by their sameness, or the different ones being united by their difference. In what furnace were these alien organs of difference and identity forged? According to whose instruction? One thing is certain: to think the relation of sexual difference to the formula *identity = difference* is to think the relation of *body* and *word* at its most resistant point, where one gives way to another.

## THE CONCLUDING ACT: PATIENCE OR POLITICS

*Transgression transgresses by passion,  
patience, passivity.*  
—Maurice Blanchot<sup>1</sup>

*Il faut apprendre à le lire avec une  
patience infinie.*

*There is no politics of death.*  
—Jacques Derrida<sup>2</sup>

*A poem is a democratic state.*  
—John Crowe Ransom<sup>3</sup>

*Why not actually translate what  
deconstruction has done on texts into the  
realm of historical and political action?*  
—Barbara Johnson<sup>4</sup>

At one, early point in what might be called the 'epoch of deconstruction' the notion of a *deconstructive politics* appeared as an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. It seemed that the very movement of deconstruction undermined the taking of a position, *la prise de parti*, which is a *fundamental or founding political moment*, whether it comes at the beginning of a text, as its generative element, in the middle, or at the end, as a concluding act.<sup>5</sup> The politics is *identified* with and in the position—that is, with and in the decision—which comes to be instituted there, in the field of play, where the text has its effects. The consequences of taking a position are political, for the one who takes a position is now politically situated, relative to the others. They *stand for* something. They are a player. It was not coincidental that deconstruction arrived, in tandem with a broader movement called 'poststructuralism,' at the time of the demise of the Marxist project, which had pursued Lenin's exhortation to take a position. There is no doubt that Marxism, particularly in France, suffered a loss of impetus around the time that deconstruction came to prominence.<sup>6</sup>

It is precisely *that which is employed to maintain the position* which is always deconstructible: the network of justifications, the points of anchorage in the extra-textual world, the programmatic or conventional connections, the strategies of stabilization. The position is supported there, but it is deconstructing despite itself. At

the point of the position, characteristically a point of *reference*, there is an adhesion, there is an attachment to something which does not move. Is there such a thing? Call it a *commitment* if you like. It is a choice too, or a decision. It is a commitment to a position. Deconstruction exposes the asymmetries and the disjunctions between the commitment and its reasons or its reasoning. It loosens the soil. It dissociates the commitment from its organic context. The commitment comes unstuck from its reasons and its reasoning. Where is the commitment now? What *was* it in any case? Did it really exist? What was it *really* committed to? Where was it actually heading? What less overt end was it serving? Deconstruction undermines the substance and the force of the commitment by detaching it from the reasoning which prefigures it as its condition of possibility. The position appears to be unworthy and indefensible. In this new light, it looks positively unreasonable.

In detaching commitments from their reasoning, from their justifications, in exposing the detachment of one from the other, in exposing the commitment to the duration of an infinite undecidability, deconstruction appeared to produce, in the field of politics, a kind of *depoliticization*.<sup>7</sup> The commitment is exposed in its solitude and frailty. That is: it stands alone and unsupported by reasons. It cannot be adequately justified. It lacks a valid legitimizing apparatus. It is neither properly the *product* of reasons nor is it their *source*. The commitment is committed *blindly* to what it commits itself to. Call it a *dogma*, if you like, a poor, unsupported thing, blind faith, the enemy of genuinely rational thought.<sup>8</sup> From the courage of decision to the cowardice of dogma—the commitment falls from grace. It is a false calculation, foreclosing on the aporia of the decision. In this exposure, it is drained of its strength. The isolation of the commitment from its network of justification appeared as a consequence of deconstruction. It coincided with deconstruction.

Nonetheless, on the other hand, it had seemed, at first, that deconstruction's extension of the analysis begun by structuralism and its exposure of the hegemonic violence in the relation of binary oppositions was indeed a work of political emancipation. For example, and classically, deconstruction drew our attention to the pair speech/writing. Speech had always been dominant in the West and this hegemony Derrida gave a name: he called it *phonocentrism*. Phonocentrism, like its sister, logocentrism, was, then, as a corollary of its exposure in the work of deconstruction,

denounced and anathematized. It was that which we ought to distrust and resist. As exposed by Derrida, phonocentrism was that before whose hegemonic force we ought to display the signs of resistance, most prominently the deconstructive terms themselves—phonocentrism, logocentrism, etc. These were the terms of a resistance. *Of Grammatology* is then a manifesto for the liberation of writing from subjugation by the ideology of original speech.

However, this was not inevitably the moral drawn from the lesson of deconstruction. It was not clear that deconstruction was the champion of the *Untermensch* in a general transvaluation of values, releasing the oppressed term from its state of servitude. Progress was rapid in the epoch of deconstruction, and there was another possibility. The ubiquitous structuration of the conceptual field according to a logic of binary oppositions produces an *arbitrary* privilege, within an oppositional pair, for one element of the opposition. Aggressive intervention on behalf of the oppressed element produces a reversal. As a function of the binary logic in general, this structural reversal is repeated, and repeated again. It becomes a moment of structure. There emerges the general law of conceptual inversion or reversibility. This reversal becomes, in due course, *merely* a reversal, and the new privilege of the oppressed party is merely its ascendancy to the position of power and hegemony from which its other was deposed. Hence, within deconstruction, the new *sophistication* becomes to move straight beyond the moment of reversal to the *transcendental point of structuration* itself wherein the pair of opposites are effectively neutralized by an indifference to the value of their relative ascendancy; that is, it does not matter which element of the binary pair is dominant or which is oppressed, for they are both in effect the same. They are mutually substitutable elements of structure.<sup>9</sup> This limit is often called formalism.

Two-party democratic systems are a good example of a binary opposition. There is a tendency for representative democracies to take this shape. This structure produces, some would argue, relative stability. The party not in power is called the Opposition, as though in conformity with the dialectical laws of binarism. The structure of the oppositional system demands that the parties differentiate themselves, and the nature of the task of the opposition produces this result in a crudely contrived discourse of systematic repudiation. But, at each election, where the voters are presented with the choice between the sovereign government and the opposition, there are many who argue

that the distinction between the parties is spurious, that in fact the parties are *two sides of the same coin*. This recognition may signal the moment of a new politics, a politics of the margins, for example, or it may be the cause of a depoliticization or alienation from political process, a paralysis of the means to meaningfully intervene.

Deconstruction then, recognizing the futile structure of infinitely reversible opposition, appeared as neutral, neutralizing, politically indifferent, if not in fact subversive of political engagement in general. What was the point, after all? *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Deconstruction became a path to the transcendence of worldly political intrigues, all tangled in the dreary toing and froing of the infernal dialectic, which is the engine of an interminable conceptual binarism in general. Deconstruction was not engaged, but ironic, and Derrida was then, in Richard Rorty's words, a 'private ironist.'<sup>10</sup> Irony was the knowing sign of a certain resignation, of a certain repetition, of elevation and transcendence, of failure, of the double game.<sup>11</sup> The quasi-literariness associated with the deconstructive enterprise was a sign of its ironic relation to the demand for concrete reference to and description of real things. Deconstruction's literary preoccupation tended towards a decadent aestheticism, however much it rejected this accusation. Where the others labored with integrity at the coal face of social change, deconstruction danced on the graves of the righteous ones, those who had fallen in the service of emancipation. Deconstruction rose above the mess of quotidian politics on a cloud of ethereal Gaulloise indifference, or so it seemed. From this height it could deconstruct at leisure but remain itself beyond the reach of deconstruction. In an interview in 1986, Derrida announces, polemically, 'A critique of what I do is indeed impossible' (Rötzer 1995, 55), at once radically distinguishing deconstruction from other things in the field with which it might be confused, and deliberately provoking the charge of a deconstructive retreat from the conventional rules of academic debate, where each protagonist submits their position to the critical scrutiny of their peers. 'You can print that if you like,' Derrida adds, ironically.<sup>12</sup>

But there were not only the familiar accusations of disengagement or aloofness, of depoliticization, or of apoliticism, there was also, as it happened, another, rather more trying, problem. There was the matter of the politics of Martin Heidegger, from whose paternal term *Destruktion* was born the errant child deconstruction.<sup>13</sup> And then, if Heidegger's rectorship at Freiburg University and his membership of the National

Socialist party between 1933 and 1934 were not worrying enough, there was the tumult in the world of theory caused by the Paul de Man affair. The publication of de Man's 'collaborationist' writings from the early period of the occupation of Belgium caused a storm of outrage, an extraordinary violence and upheaval, an eruption of barely submerged internecine hostility. The apolitical or depoliticizing dimension of deconstruction was exposed, it seemed, as something more sinister—as linked in reality to fascism. De Man's deconstructive method, it was contended, was continuous at the very least with the moral vacuity and opportunism that allowed him to advance his journalistic career writing pro-German literary reviews for the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*.<sup>14</sup> Deconstruction's apparent lack of commitment to a position, its neutrality, its apoliticism, its negativity, was in fact an opportunistic collusion with power—if, indeed, it did not conceal a more essential connection with fascism, perhaps via the genealogical link with the champion of the *Übermensch* and philosophical patron saint of National Socialism, Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>15</sup>

The battle raged and when the smoke settled, it was not clear what had been decided, but certainly it was a time of tribulation and transformation in the epoch of deconstruction, and though there were no concessions and some casualties on either side, the name Paul de Man seemed then to have acquired altogether too much anguish and complication. What was the outcome of this dark accumulation? Can we say that, for some at least, perhaps it was more prudent from that point onwards to give this wounded name less emphasis? It is impossible to say. This is surely the place where the violence of insinuation is merciless and the risks enormous.<sup>16</sup>

But it was here, in late 1980s, that the question of a deconstructive ethics and politics came to preoccupy deconstructors. What had been implicit or tacit or undeveloped with regard to political issues became explicit and overt. Some deconstructors turned on their literary colleagues and accused them of the political castration of deconstruction, which had seemed all too readily accommodated by the American literary-critical institution, as the natural successor to the New Criticism.<sup>17</sup> Though Derrida argued forcefully that deconstruction had *never not* been ethical and political in its thinking, nonetheless the questions of ethics and politics acquired a new prominence, and with them a set of familiar terms came to signify this direction: responsibility, friendship, the gift, hospitality, forgiveness, democracy to come (*la démocratie à venir*), and so on. This



was the lexicon by which deconstruction declared to the others that it was and had always been, despite appearances and accusations to the contrary, *engaged*, even if the terms of that engagement were necessarily interrogated and transformed according to the exigencies of context and strategy. Deconstruction entered politics, where it had always been, but only inasmuch as politics might then undergo a deconstructive thinking and a transformation.

Was this the moment of a new construction or constructivism within deconstruction? This is a difficult question. Certainly there was a shift in the rhetorical emphasis or inclination of deconstruction. Was this towards construction, and ought we to link this with the emphasis on the affirmative in deconstruction? This is hard to measure. Though there was not a concession to *programmacity*, there was nonetheless something akin to *advocacy*, which sometimes seemed to verge on the programmatic, or at least, and this is not quite the same thing, carefully to reread the old prohibition on the program as a calculation and quantification of future outcomes.

This is the terrain of a double politics. Once upon a time, it was the *ideal* as the promise of a presence to come that was actively deconstructed, as though to bring things down to earth. The ideal was, as such, there and then, it seemed, undone. The *program* was the set of moves, organizing the future, by which the ideal might be realized, a pathway towards the sun. But then the ideal came home as unextinguishable. It lived on in the promise of another one. And the promise bloomed as the democracy to come.<sup>18</sup> The program became the practice of an 'openness to the other'—which is not really a program, but is just as much a program as the others: that is, *an impossible one*.

Temporality was of key importance here, for politics is an art or a science of the future. Even when focused on the present *process*, it is an ideal or possible process that guides it. Politics is a considered, sometimes collective, orientation in social space towards something else, towards a possibility, an ideal, a harmony, a *telos*.<sup>19</sup> This orientation was never more eloquently expressed than by Marx himself, caught with his hopes up in a Marxian idyll, fishing rod in hand. The transcendental values of possibility and potential are registered by deconstruction as instances of temporality, of futurity, of the promise. They bespeak what is to come. The law of the to-come is *différance*: difference and deferral. *Différance* is simultaneously the sign of the promise and of its

always already being, and having been, broken. The future does not arrive. The past too, as Derrida insists, is always before us.

However, it is difficult for us to conceal the suspicion that there is not some kind of necessary and deconstructing disjunction between the constructive and deconstructive moments of deconstruction. It is true, they can neither be seamlessly conjoined nor radically distinguished. That which is deconstructed is undone according to an inner necessity, it is claimed. The deconstructor lets it happen. She is the vehicle of the undoing which happens, and which opens upon the other. This is a passivity of deconstruction. But in the deconstruction, in the very term itself, indissociably, there is a constitutive voluntarism, there is an action to be performed, there is the active acquisition and promulgation of a difference. In the paradoxical movement of this acquisition, there is a kind of power too—there is the highest power—because deconstruction would coincide with the inevitable and the implacable itself, as though through an active and rigorous fidelity to itself, like a destiny of undoing. In the deconstruction, the deconstructor, she herself is raised up, despite her prudent reservations, for she has exposed what was concealed in the object of deconstruction; if even for the briefest of moments, she has conquered the blindness in the other. She is the blindness in the other. She has traced its very path, and her frequent gestures of humility before the implacable supervention of the other do not convince us otherwise. If it was grace, then it was she who was blessed with it. She has the vista before her and the smoking gun in her hand.

(Is this not what happens? At least, this is how it might appear to the others.)

There is a complex inclination here which is not readily simplified, even with the best of intentions. For example, there is deconstruction's double game, its double gesture, double science, and its double politics too perhaps. It is inside and outside at the same time, a critique and yet not a critique, a deconstruction and yet there is no such thing. This is deconstruction's facility, its peculiar difference. It accrues to deconstruction, despite itself perhaps. And yet we would be very hard pressed to characterize deconstruction's *relation* to the double game (let us persist and say 'double game,' though the word 'game' is not used in a reductive way). The double game it names and plays, the one whose rules it makes up, the one whose rules it discerns with singular fidelity and acuity, is the game which is there to be played. It is played by one

and all, is it not? But is there a game there? Is it a *game*? It is played it seems. Yet can it be *played*? Or is it played out? Or is it *already* played out—somewhere else perhaps? It is not clear that the double game can be *played*. It is there no doubt and it is played, but who plays? Is it really there? The double game is doubling there, but it is not clear who is playing. Where is the *intervention* here? *What* intervenes and with what end in view? Deconstruction intervenes. It give itself up to an intervention. But in all this it is not clear if there is some way to control the traffic between the effect and the cause. Deconstruction is 'what happens,' we have heard, and here is a kind of *passivity*—but *what is happening*?

The critical force of deconstruction assumes the accretion of critical-normative value to key words like 'logocentrism,' 'phonocentrism,' 'phallogocentrism,' whose coinage is clearly already normative in inclination, if sometimes subtly so. In the double game, the machinations of a hegemonic logocentrism, for example, are exposed, but it is recognized at the same time that it is not possible to escape decisively from logocentrism, which is ubiquitous and inescapable. Deconstruction accrues its force according to the exposure of the normative value of logocentrism, and this *moment* of exposure is not neutral but colonial. Deconstruction resists logocentrism, but, naming it, it is the new law, and it conforms in turn to the law that makes its installation inevitable. Nonetheless, when emphasis falls on the other side, deconstruction affirms the inevitable. Sometimes it takes a position too, because there is no not taking a position, and it can measure and advocate a political value as well as the others. There is 'infinite responsibility,' for example, borrowed from Levinas. It does not matter how difficult and aporetic this notion may be, how immersed in complications, it takes its turn in the ring, in the war between good and evil. It will be held aloft as a sign. There will be those who commit themselves to it, and to the reasons and reasoning for it. At this stage, the transformation is fully under way, and there is a deconstruction which emerges again and singularly from its perpetual chrysalis as the guardian of the spirit of the new enlightenment. Simon Critchley proposes this deconstruction as vitally linked with democracy too: 'democracy is the future of deconstruction,' he writes in *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity* (Critchley 1999, 154).<sup>20</sup> The three now harmonize: deconstruction, democracy, enlightenment.

But even as deconstruction seems most deconstructible in its constructive moment, a quasi- or Levinasian deconstructor like Simon Critchley determines a space of the undeconstructible: justice, for example, and infinite responsibility.<sup>21</sup> Is this a reversal? Is this a surprise? Have some expectations been transgressed—and more than just expectations—in order that deconstruction arrive here, as the voice of enlightenment? What is a deconstructive politics? What might it stand for? Alexander Garcia Düttmann invokes the notion of 'permanent revolution.'<sup>22</sup> But can there be such a thing? It is an appropriate paradox that this infinite revolutionary movement should bring a deconstructor like Critchley to the point of advocacy of a universal value. But what does this undeconstructibility mean when, as Derrida argues, deconstruction is not in any case the same as critique, and deconstruction is already the master of and in the grip of the double game?

It is fortuitous that Düttmann joins for us the idea of permanent revolution with the undeconstructibility of deconstruction in 'The Violence of Destruction.' 'Perhaps one could link the politics of *différance* to an ontologically or quasi-ontologically construed idea of a perpetual, permanent revolution,' writes Düttmann, closing a paragraph concerned with 'the thought of *différance*.' In the following paragraph he continues:

If political reaction in the United States reproaches deconstruction for neglecting to deconstruct itself, then this objection shows clearly that deconstruction is not understood as a thought, but rather as a mode of more or less effective and efficacious procedure. Is such an understanding, which is often based on willful ignorance, in the end not already implied in the announcement with which Derrida expressly identifies his lecture on Benjamin as an exercise in deconstructive thought? What happens to a thought if it becomes the object of a reflection that displays how one can interpret a text or a work of art in the sense of this thought? For example, does not the paradoxical limit of a theory of literature consist in the fact that it must always remain without an object, regardless of how it thinks its relation to the object and its own status as theory? That deconstruction cannot be deconstructed can be explained by neither a dogmatic, obscurantist ban on critique or thought nor by the ruses and cunning of those whose names one associates with this thought. Deconstruction does not exempt itself from deconstruction: it is, "as such," so to speak, the nondeconstructible "itself." The possibility of speaking of a deconstruction implies (before all possible critique), that everything can be deconstructed, even the situation in which the word "deconstruction" is being used—everything can be deconstructed, except deconstruction.

Deconstruction occurs, it has always already occurred, because it is the nondeconstructible: if it could be deconstructed "in its turn," there would be no

deconstruction. The nondeconstructible is the immemorial event of deconstruction or deconstruction is an immemorial event. (Düttmann 1996, 182-83)

The terrain that Düttmann explores here is perhaps the most difficult and treacherous of all, particularly when it is explored according to a powerful and seductive *logical intuition* or *theo-logic* which recognizes the undeconstructibility of deconstruction. What does it mean to acquiesce to this intuition? As much as it is essential *logically* that deconstruction be precisely that which is undeconstructible (for the same reason perhaps that the eye that sees cannot see itself, not even when it stares deep into the aporia of reflection), it is equally the case that it is the undeconstructible which is always the object of deconstruction. The eye that sees can only see itself. Deconstruction is ever- or infinitely deconstructible, no more nor less than the others. The only thing that could ever be deconstructed, if such a thing is possible, is the undeconstructible. In this case then, nothing is deconstructible, and deconstruction is relieved of its *action*, as it were.

Of course, given the basic and foundational undeconstructibility of deconstruction (an undeconstructibility which is logical or essential or indispensable *and* strategic), the 'deconstructor' must take every precaution *not to identify with* deconstruction, because otherwise it would be impossible to attribute a difference or different difference to deconstruction: in other words, the undeconstructibility of deconstruction would be the same as the putative or attributed undeconstructibility of the many deconstructibles that deconstruction deconstructs, such that there is deconstruction (that is, all the foundations, origins, things themselves, moments of presence or immediacy, etc., which have always been posited and promised as absolutely necessary and undeconstructible from the beginning). We have already seen how these elaborate and careful gestures of non-identification of and with deconstruction cannot clearly be distinguished from identifications of and with deconstruction. Düttmann is probably no more exemplary than the others in this regard.

Deconstruction is, 'at bottom,' says Derrida, 'what happens' (Derrida 1995d, 17). This is the delicate position occupied by a deconstructive politics, for there is both 'what happens,' as the ineluctable, and, on the other hand, there is no abandonment or harmony or reconciliation or acquiescence to 'what happens.' This is what happens too. Equally, in deconstruction, there is the principle of 'what happens' and the principle of *pure resistance*. Can there be a politics of 'what happens'? Any deconstructive politics

must carefully think its way into the peculiar *passivity* of the 'what happens,' which cannot be reconciled with resistance.<sup>23</sup> This passivity is, at the same time, patience. If Derrida has asked of *us* anything in the epoch of deconstruction—which, in an important sense, belongs to him—it has been something for which 'patience' would be one name. He began in this way, asking of us that, reading him, and reading the others too, we have patience, the patience *not to act*—not to act, perhaps, precipitately, nor to *react*—but to follow him and his words faithfully, as though there were a truth that could not then but prevail. Unfortunately, it is not clear, as deconstruction has taught us also, that there is a patience patient enough to avoid the precipitation of the act, whose rashness looks so much like an inability to read.<sup>24</sup>

The different difference of deconstruction lies here: between the patience to avoid acting (or reacting) precipitately and the precipitation of the act. The precipitation of the act is the impatience of a life, so how can anything intervene at this point? What intelligence could avert the totalitarianism to come? There is an intensification of *responsibility* by way of the logical aporia of undecidability and hence *against* the hegemony of calculation, regulation, digitization, appropriation, subordination, totalization, and so on. Such an intensification must insert a difference here—in the place where the act can no longer be deferred and where at the same time the interminable propaedeutic to the act must be endured. The determination of such a difference is deconstruction's one and only opportunity. There is no second chance. Like the rest of us, *deconstruction too must make this difference differ*. This is its responsibility. This is the aporia of deconstruction, which says without abdication of responsibility, *There is always the aporia*. Deconstruction lies here, but it must be said that it shares its solitary home with a multitude of others, none of whom can call it theirs—though often they do.<sup>25</sup> They all lie there together, in other words.

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Deconstruction thinks the relation of 'always' to the aporia: there is always the aporia; the aporia is that which (always) interrupts the always. There is always the possibility that a thought of the aporia will be tempted by the very ubiquity of the aporia towards plenitude and totality. In a thought of the aporia, a fine distinction between totality and

infinity cannot be sustained. There is only a general *implication*. If the aporia can be saved from falling into the abyss of divine plenty, then let this thankless work be done, but is it the work of deconstruction? It is hard to say, even now, what does or does not belong to deconstruction.

There is a worthy labor of resistance which would hold two opposed things apart, despite an infernal centripetation. *The aporia is the Same*, says the force of this collapse, called *Eros*. There is a worthy labor of resistance which would hold things together, despite an infernal centrifugation. *The aporia is inscrutable: irreducible difference itself*, says the agent of dissemination, called *Thanatos*. Deconstruction has cast in its lot with the aporia, but this neighborly gesture provides no immunity or exoneration.

Everything arises, has arisen, and will arise from the divine aporia, like an emanation. Deconstruction coincides with the aporia, perhaps. Could it be otherwise? It is *stalked* by the aporia. This is no coincidence but destiny, which wonders where its next step will fall. Deconstruction's difference here is at its most equivocal, for this is (only) *what happens*: a dumb, garrulous, discordant coinciding with the aporia—infinately reversible, irresolute, implacable, and changeless. At this limit, control is tenuous, for the deconstructors and the others alike. Are there *degrees* of (and in) this tenuousness? The situation is far worse than a mere lapse in the labor of mastery, for deconstruction too will be and will do everything it does not want to be or to do. It will start unjust wars and massacre the innocent. It will license the most oppressive dogmatisms. It will practice torture and extortion. It will betray what it holds most dear. It will act as readily on behalf of the dominators as on behalf of the marginal and dispossessed. There is no thought of a responsibility that can avert this naked irresponsibility. The movement of a thinking of responsibility cannot but be, at the same time (or *almost* at the same time), towards the assuagement of the demand of responsibility: towards irresponsibility. 'There is no front,' says Derrida in *The Gift of Death (Donner la mort)*, 'between responsibility and irresponsibility' (Derrida 1992b, 70; Derrida 1995a, 70). There is, then, no high ground upon which deconstruction can stand above all this carnage, and no thought of the absence of such a place of sanctuary that does not seek sanctuary there.<sup>26</sup>

This is certainly the place where the institution of the different difference of deconstruction is most urgent, and the urgency of the situation demands a drastic

solution. At the end of 'Force of Law' ('Force de loi'), Derrida is compelled to formulate such a solution—*such a difference, such a difference from the other*—because the alternative is unthinkable.

[D]espite all its polysemic mobility and all its resources for reversal, [Benjamin's *Critique of Violence (Zur Kritik der Gewalt)*] seems to me finally to resemble too closely, to the point of specular fascination and vertigo, the very thing against which one must act and think, do and speak, that with which one must break (perhaps, perhaps). This text, like many others by Benjamin, is still too Heideggerian, too messianico-marxist or archeo-eschatological for me. I do not know whether from this nameless thing called the final solution one can draw something which still deserves the name of a lesson. But if there were a lesson to be drawn, a unique lesson among the always singular lessons of murder, from even a single murder, from all the collective exterminations of history (because each individual murder and each collective murder is singular, thus infinite and incommensurable) the lesson that we can draw today—and if we can do so then we must—is that we must think, know, represent for ourselves, formalize, judge the possible complicity between all these discourses and the worst (here the final solution). In my view, this defines a task and a responsibility the theme of which (yes, the theme) I have not been able to read in either Benjaminian "destruction" or Heideggerian "*Destruktion*." It is the thought of difference between these destructions on the one hand and a deconstructive affirmation on the other that has guided me tonight in this reading. It is this thought that the memory of the final solution seems to me to dictate. (Derrida 1992c, 62-3; Derrida 1994b, 145-46)

Is there anything more plaintive in Derrida than this parenthetical 'perhaps perhaps,' attached to such fierce and unforgiving imperatives? This is where deconstruction is violently divided unto itself, and the two are there together, oddly concatenated. There is a final dictation which cannot endure the trial of the undecidable, and it must be sheltered from it. To adhere as one must to what is dictated thus: Is it the highest responsibility or the greatest irresponsibility? It is the terrible dogma of fidelity to the event. A difference is instituted: What is 'too messianico-marxist or archeo-eschatological for me' is perhaps the messianico-marxism or archeo-eschatology of the other. Nonetheless, despite every possible deconstruction, this is the place where deconstruction must inscribe its difference—must inscribe itself as difference. It must inscribe itself as a difference from the other. It must bring into the fold what belongs to it and disown the rest.

But let there be no mistake on this point: despite its altitude, its distance and solitude, deconstruction is not alone in this. It shares its plight with the others. *For all its care, deconstruction can only stand apart from the rest in its sameness.*

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There is now a well-trodden path which traces the contours of a deconstructive and infinite responsibility.<sup>27</sup> There is not only a descriptive or a structural account of infinite responsibility, whose necessity can hardly be disputed, but also, in a sense, an advocacy.<sup>28</sup> The ordeal of infinite responsibility is a true (if impossible) responsibility when opposed to the false responsibility or irresponsibility represented by the complacency of those Derrida calls the 'moralizing moralists and good consciences who preach to us with assurance every morning and every week, in newspapers and magazines, on the radio and on television, about the sense of ethical or political responsibility' (Derrida 1995a, 67).<sup>29</sup> But it is not clear that a deconstructive responsibility (that is, the responsibility exposed by deconstruction), for all its care in relation to the rule, is for this any less irresponsible. Deconstruction teaches us this difficult lesson ('There is no front,' says Derrida 'between responsibility and irresponsibility'). Deconstruction is not necessarily any more responsible, even as it endures the risk beyond the rule (of the rule). It cannot lay claim to a higher or more subtle or sophisticated responsibility. Its responsibility is equally and at the same time an irresponsibility, no more nor less than the others. It can no more enter or sustain the infinitude of responsibility than can the others, who would deploy the rule as a welcome release from the impossible burden of an infinite responsibility. Deconstruction's infinite responsibility (it is not, strictly, *deconstruction's*) is no less compromised by finitude than a rule-governed and finite responsibility is ruptured by infinitude.

What is infinite responsibility then? It is at once a terrible and unavoidable reality, a *de-idealization* of responsibility, and an ideal. Its structural description, coolly detached from wishful thinking or moral romanticism, is an idealization. Nonetheless, according to a discourse of deconstructive and infinite responsibility, deconstruction assumes responsibility.<sup>30</sup> Deconstruction is responsible in relation to the 'irresponsibility,' the failure of responsibility, that it bluntly deconstructs as a finite and calculative

responsibility. This is the familiar effect of critique against which deconstruction would set itself: an automatic and structural assumption by the critical exponent of the positive value implied in the critique. Deconstruction is not more responsible, even though it assumes a responsibility (an infinite and impossible responsibility) in relation to the irresponsibility of responsibility-as-finite-calculation-and-rule-following.

This difficulty of an infinite and deconstructive responsibility which provides no responsibility, and no difference from finite and calculative responsibility, and no difference from irresponsibility, is a deconstructive difficulty which belongs equally to deconstruction and to the others. Hence, where there is an assumption of responsibility in deconstruction's discourse of responsibility, despite the aporia of responsibility, then there is an irony. This discourse responds strategically, in a concrete historical situation, to 'unjust' accusations of deconstruction's (ethical and political) irresponsibility: the *very possibility* of responsibility (which *functions* as a possibility despite the new jargon of impossibility, since the possibility of responsibility is *infinite*—and impossible—responsibility) is not in a learning-by-deconstruction, or in a deconstructively attuned and aporetic reading-writing 'experience' (if there is such a thing), it is not in a distinctive risk at the limit of responsibility to which deconstruction is particularly sensitive, or in a deconstructive instruction which exceeds the abdication of responsibility through instruction, or in a rigorous and vigilant 'thinking through' of the matter.<sup>31</sup> The possibility of a deconstructive responsibility is in a scene of instruction, a scene of learning-by-deconstruction in which there is one, lord and master, who plays the leading role. The possibility of responsibility, of a discourse of a possible and deconstructive responsibility, is conditioned by a relation to the name which is, which names, which annuls and diverts responsibility.<sup>32</sup>

Responsibility must rest there, with the one. It rests with an authority that cannot be deconstructed, only transferred or displaced. Responsibility lapses. It is assumed. It is handed on, or transferred. There is a transference of responsibility. It is relinquished. It is resisted. It cannot be assumed. *Whose* responsibility is it? Infinite responsibility is an impossible responsibility: it falters, it relaxes, it returns, it devolves. Responsibility rests with the other. There is faith in this one. He is the master of infinite responsibility. *His* responsibility is infinite, and they will dwell in him.



It is the peculiar responsibility of the master to bring his disciples to the limit of their subjugation: to bring them to *their* responsibility, where they will endure its unendurable infinitude. 'Its up to you,' he says. And this is the difficulty: they can only be brought there, to the limit of their subjugation, if they are disciples. The master who does not repeat for his disciples the ordeal of Abraham is not fulfilling his responsibility to the others.

It is the peculiar responsibility of the One to bring the Other to the limit of its subjugation. And vice versa? Perhaps this is a structural relation of the One to the Other. This is to raise again the question of the difference of deconstruction and the question of its consequences. *Responsibilities and consequences are closely related*. Yet it is not clear what it is about alterity that can be *learned*, as the lesson of deconstruction, nor is it clear that there is something which distinguishes deconstruction's relation with the other, for whom and for which it is already infinitely responsible.

Let us take two related claims. Firstly:

(1) The aporia (of responsibility) is, and marks, the possibility and impossibility of responsibility.

This is both the point of a blunt intransigence of experience (where the intransigence is such because it *repels* experience), and the point of the possibility of an acquisition of experience. It is finely balanced. Keep in mind that anything that might be *learned* from such a statement depends already on the *possibility* of responsibility.

Then, perhaps more contentiously, the next step:

(2) Responsibility is the encounter (if such it is) with the aporia and impossibility of responsibility, beyond the dialectical space of mastery and discipleship.

Such claims have, perhaps, only become possible, thinkable, since the advent of deconstruction.<sup>33</sup> To what extent can deconstruction take responsibility for these closely related but different claims?

There is, firstly, the deconstructive difference which resides solely in (1). It is deconstruction that makes (the assertion of) (1) possible—though in what lies this *possibility* is unclear. Perhaps, we could say: it is deconstruction that opens the space in which (1) can be *thought* (if it can be thought).

Secondly, it is possible that there is an *assumption* which carries us from (1) to (2): this assumption is the deconstructive difference set in bolder type. The assertion of such a difference assumes that the state of affairs represented in (1) can be *assumed*. Hence, there is an assertion something like the following:

(3) Responsibility is a passage (or non- or quasi-passage, if you prefer) into (infinite) difficulty, rather than an evasion of difficulty.

It is, then, according to such an assumption, *already* possible to take responsibility for what is claimed in (1). That is: to *acknowledge* (1) is to take (or already to have taken) the consequent step towards (2). (2) says no more than that (1) can be comprehended, acknowledged, or understood. (1) has consequences, or responsibilities. It can, in a sense, be learned. (2) is, in this sense, implicit in (1). There is an entailment. There is a consequential movement. There is a responsibility to the truth.

But (1) is, as a statement, already an abdication of responsibility. It *arrests* the difficulty. It *betrays* the aporia, much as every negative theology betrays its God, covertly as it were. (Its negativity is the endeavor all the more carefully to conceal its betrayal.) Inasmuch as the statement (1) is and belongs to deconstruction, deconstruction betrays the aporia too. It is faithless, *like* the aporia. In their faithfulnessness, they are much alike and much like the others, for the aporia is deconstruction. Hence:

(4) The aporia is, and marks, the possibility and impossibility of infinite responsibility, no more nor less for deconstruction than for the others.

There can be no talk of 'moralizing moralists and good consciences' (Derrida 1995a, 67) without the implicit assumption, within the deconstructive discourse of responsibility, of a finite and calculable and calculated and decided and possible responsibility as its other. In this construction, the other is less responsible; the other is responsible for its irresponsibility, and so on. Is this not a familiar tune? The difference that deconstruction makes here is not clear. It is a singular difference, but it is not clear what it is. It is so difficult then to distinguish the responsibility of deconstruction, though we have been preoccupied with its consequences for quite some time.

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The difference or different difference of deconstruction, which is no doubt *what deconstruction is*, is something that it shares equally with the others. This is therefore its prior destitution: it cannot be, in other words, it is *impossible*, it is free. It is this equality—a failure to distinguish itself decisively from, for example, the ‘moralizing moralists and good consciences,’ and indeed from *all* the others—that forms the community of deconstructors as the destitution, destination, determination, desire, solitude and freedom of each one, deconstructor or otherwise. There is a great gathering of us and them, and who knows which is which, though the mass is neatly split in two and neatly split again according to very precise regulations.

Deconstruction says: I will be distinguished by what cannot but fail to set me apart. In this, its difference—its different difference, if you like—deconstruction is no different from the others from whose community it is excluded. Deconstruction is an outcast the same as the rest.

What are the consequences of *this* deconstruction? What can one say about this brutal *equality* which makes deconstruction’s distinction—as the one (or one of the ones) which ‘make[s] room for the Other’ (Gasché 1994, 21)—so precarious?

Deconstruction resists the alteration of deconstruction. Embracing the other of deconstruction, deconstruction resists it no less. Although we speak and have spoken of nothing else, there is as it happens so little that can really be said about this resistance except that *it resists*. Where is the purchase here? *It resists*. It resists alteration. It resists sameness. On what grounds? To what end? It resists as its constitutive gesture perhaps, and in all likelihood it dissipates there, where it comes to be. Resistance permeates it utterly, where it is infinitely susceptible to influence. It follows the master without thinking. It follows the program, and the program dictates that it ‘make room for the Other,’ or perhaps it dictates something completely different. The program itself cannot be brought to light, but its effects are ubiquitous.

There is a deconstruction which resists the alteration of deconstruction, and there is a deconstruction which announces at the same time, according to the program and with the best of intentions, that it ‘make[s] room for the Other.’ It resists the other of

deconstruction and makes room for the other. These are of course irreconcilable.

Perhaps these different deconstructions are what deconstruction is.

Is there a distinction between learning and programming? Something has changed, whether by chance or by deliberation. Has something been acquired? What lesson has deconstruction taught? What are its consequences *in me*, as it were, let alone out there amongst everything? It is hard to tell, for if it is true that deconstruction is ‘what happens,’ as it no doubt is, then I was colonized before I could know any better.

There is no eluding the program, which is only the ceaseless grinding of the gears of the mechanism of representation itself, doling out its daily measure according to its own laws. This is the end of decision, and of responsibility. This is the passive moment, the release into the custody of the other, but we can hardly entrust ourselves to it in any case. That is, there ought to be but there is no acquiescing in it. It cannot be trusted to be on time, for example, so we anticipate, and even so things often go haywire for no good reason at all.

What would it be to acquiesce there? To be patient? Is there a passivity passive enough to let it be? To accede? But the waiting game is surely a futile one. There is no knowing what will arrive, and though each day I thank God it is so, I am not content with the situation. I will not rest until I know what is coming next. Surely, at the very least each one is at the wheel and each one has to come to a decision and each one has to take responsibility for the consequences, for one way or another they cannot only be avoided. Can one not say *I will have this thought next* and then take charge of things?

Deconstruction has struggled to distinguish itself. It has ascended and it has descended. It has inclined this way and that way. It has often sought another path, sometimes despite itself, and sometimes a pathless path. However, there is a universal principle of equality given one formulation in the title of Chapter Three: it announces that *deconstruction is a word*, as though to bring things to their natural terminus.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Le pas au-delà* (Blanchot 1973, 134; Blanchot 1992, 119), quoted in ‘Pas,’ in *Parages* (Derrida 1986, 53). The themes of patience and passivity are frequently taken up in Blanchot. See also, for example, *The Writing of the Disaster* (Blanchot 1986, 13ff), *L’écriture du désastre* (Blanchot 1980, 15ff). Though I do not attend to Blanchot’s texts in this final chapter, it is more than likely that in another—almost identical—writing of the same chapter, reading Blanchot with deconstruction would be indispensable.

<sup>2</sup> Respectively: *Parages* (Derrida 1986, 41); *Aporias* (Derrida 1993a, 59), *Apories* (Derrida 1994a, 330).

<sup>3</sup> *The New Criticism* (Ransom 1941, 43).

<sup>4</sup> 'I think it is the merit of deconstruction,' Barbara Johnson continues, 'to produce that as an inevitable question, and that the intersection between the deconstructive activity and the imperative to go further is where both good Marxist work and good deconstructive work can be done.' These remarks were made in a symposium entitled 'Marxism and Deconstruction' at the Conference on Contemporary Genre Theory and the Yale School, in 1984, published in *Deconstruction at Yale* (Davis and Schleifer 1985, 78).

<sup>5</sup> This definition of the political in an essential relation to the *position* (that is, the decision) is inverted in the development of a deconstructive politics, as we shall see. The position comes to be the terminus and closure of the political. It is, on the other hand, undecidability which is the condition of possibility (and impossibility) of the political. See, in particular, Ernesto Laclau, 'Deconstruction, Pragmatism, Hegemony,' in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (Laclau 1996).

<sup>6</sup> A number of those in France desiring transformation deserted Marxism at this time and became regulars at Lacan's seminar. There was, interestingly, a shift of politico-cultural impetus from Marxism to psychoanalysis. In a sense, this reversed the direction of Marx's famous rejection of Hegel. A Derridean text prior to *Specters of Marx* documenting the encounter between Marxism and deconstruction is the interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta entitled 'Positions' (Derrida 1972c; Derrida 1981b), which reads today with a remarkable prescience. In 'La question de la démocratie,' in 1982, Claude Lefort describes a movement of depoliticization, a falling away from the Marxist exigency, with the express aim of diagnosing and addressing the problem. 'Mon propos est de contribuer et d'inciter,' writes Lefort 'à une restauration de la philosophie politique. Nous sommes quelques-uns à cheminer dans le même sens. Sans doute, ce petit nombre accroît-il depuis quelque temps. Toutefois, il faut convenir qu'une telle tâche n'a pas encore rencontré beaucoup d'échos. Ce qui m'étonne, c'est que la plupart de ceux qui seraient les mieux capables de s'y adonner, en raison de leur tempérament intellectuel qui les incline à rompre avec des croyances dogmatiques, de leur culture philosophique, de leur souci de trouver dans les événements de notre monde *du sens*, quelle que soit leur confusion, ceux dont on attendrait le souci de se déprendre des idéologies dominantes et rivales, pour déchiffrer, au moins, les conditions d'un devenir de la liberté, éclairer, au moins, les obstacles auxquels ils se heurtent, ceux-là manifestent, continuent de manifester un aveuglement obstiné au politique. Liberté, ce simple mot que je viens de prononcer, nous le voyons le plus souvent banni du langage savant, renvoyé au langage vulgaire, à moins qu'il ne serve d'enseignement à un petit groupe d'intellectuels qui déclarent avoir choisi leur camp et se suffisent de l'anticommunisme' (Lefort 1983, 71). To what factors does Lefort attribute this trend? He locates the problem in a paralyzing excess of philosophical interrogation which entails the loss or abandonment of a certain bread-and-butter realism, with its immediate material priorities. 'Quand ils entendent le mot totalitarisme,' Lefort says, 'des philosophes demandent: de quoi parlez-vous? s'agit-il d'un concept? quelle définition en donnez-vous? la démocratie ne recouvre-t-elle pas la domination et l'exploitation d'une classe par une autre, l'uniformisation de la vie collective, le conformisme de masse? sur quel critère fondez-vous la distinction entre démocratie et totalitarisme? à supposer que l'histoire ait engendré un monstre, quelle est la cause de la mutation? est-elle économique, technique, ou tient-elle au progrès de la bureaucratie étatique? Je m'étonne, disais-je: Est-il possible de manier avec subtilité la différence ontologique, de rivaliser de prodiges dans l'exploitation combinée de Heidegger, Lacan, Jakobson et Lévi-Strauss, et de revenir au réalisme le plus outré, dès qu'il s'agit de politique?' (72). In other words, too much thinking, of a certain relentlessly

interrogative kind perhaps, drains political realism of its impetus, it weakens its grip on things. The real *itself* responds in this instance to what Niall Lucy calls the 'political imperative' (Lucy 1995, ix). Lefort makes a case then for the survival of some presumptions as presumptions, unconditionally as it were. And, of course, it is not clear that an ever-vigilant deconstruction can any more do without them than the others. Here, then, equally, for Lefort, for the ones he names (Heidegger *et al.*), and for deconstruction too: the real as (always) a presumption and an aspiration.

<sup>7</sup> The key question that arises when politics meets a certain 'quasi-doctrinal' undecidability (there is a sense in which politics has always already encountered undecidability *per se*) is formulated by Barbara Johnson in *A World of Difference*. 'Is writerliness conservative?', asks Johnson at the beginning of her essay. 'It will probably come as no surprise that I don't have a clear yes-or-no answer to this question. It may well be that, asked in these terms, the question is undecidable. But, as I hope to make clear, it is precisely the status of the undecidable that is, for me, at issue in the question. For in recent "Left" criticism of recent "Left" criticism, undecidability, described as an outgrowth of certain critical theorists' privileging of language, has repeatedly been deemed politically suspect as an oppositional strategy' (Johnson 1987, 25). That is, undecidability negates the position, and the position is the possibility of political resistance. Johnson proceeds then to a careful examination of the terms that compose the question. Éric Clémens pursues a related question in 'De-limitations: Politiques, Écritures, Démocratie,' where he asks, 'Y a-t-il une politique de l'écriture?' (Clémens 1994, 127). Derrida takes up the question of a depoliticization the apparent result of deconstruction in a formidable fashion in 'Marx and Sons,' collected in *Ghostly Demarcations* (Derrida 1999b, 221-24), where his target is a reading of *Specters of Marx* by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak 1995).

<sup>8</sup> An inquiry into dogmas or into the dogmatic would quickly lead to a consideration of the related questions of belief, of faith, of the vigilance of reason, and so on. In 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering,"' Derrida describes 'deconstructive' thought as that 'which insists on yielding [*qui exige de céder*] as little as possible to dogmas and presuppositions' (Derrida 1993d, 50; Derrida 1995b, 21). This is a significant description, which suggests a certain construction of the deconstructive difference. What would need to be determined is the precise difference of this non-yielding, non-acquiescence, resistance to yielding, etc.

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this structure, see the section of Chapter One entitled 'The Disciple and the Discipline of Double Reading.'

<sup>10</sup> See Rorty, 'From Ironist Theory to Private Allusions: Derrida,' in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Rorty 1989). See also, Simon Critchley's critique of Rorty, 'Derrida: Private Ironist or Public Liberal?' in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (Mouffe 1996).

<sup>11</sup> On the question of irony, see Chapter Three, note 17.

<sup>12</sup> I address the question of deconstructibility and undeconstructibility a little later.

<sup>13</sup> A number of texts from the period of Heidegger's rectorship are collected in Martin Heidegger, *German Existentialism*, translated and edited by Dagobert Runes. According to Runes, who is antipathetic to Heidegger's philosophy in its entirety, Heidegger 'degraded his historic profession... by becoming a spokesman for National Socialism and attempting to mold his theories into one pattern with Hitlerism' (Heidegger 1965, flyleaf). In Runes' view, the Nazi episode is symptomatic of a sickness that permeates the whole of Heidegger's being. Richard Wolin's collection, *The Heidegger Controversy* (Wolin 1993), also gathers a number of texts by Heidegger that are implicated in the question of Heidegger's relation to Nazism.

A number of important texts have addressed the question of Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism, including Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the Jews"* (Lyotard

1990), *Heidegger et "les juifs"* (Lyotard 1988), and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Ari And Politics* (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990), *La fiction du politique* (Lacoue-Labarthe 1987). Lacoue-Labarthe writes, 'Recognition of the importance of [Heidegger's] thought—or indeed unreserved admiration for it—in no way excludes infinite mistrust [*une infinie méfiance*]. Not of the thinker himself... but of what his thought entails or carries with it, what it sanctions and justifies' (Lacoue-Labarthe 1987, 30; Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 14). As we have seen, it is probably not easy to determine what are the consequences of Heidegger's thought, in order then to distrust *them* rather than the man (another difficult distinction). On this difficulty, see Chapter One, note 66. The relation of Heidegger's thought to his involvement with events in Germany in the 1930s is given sustained consideration by Derrida in *Of Spirit* (Derrida 1989c), *De l'esprit* (Derrida 1987a).

The controversy about Heidegger was brought to a head firstly with the publication of Victor Farias, *Heidegger et le nazisme* in 1987 (Farias 1987), and then the collection of essays, *The Heidegger Controversy*, edited by Richard Wolin. Derrida objected to the unauthorized inclusion of an interview with Didier Eribon originally published in French in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (November 6-12, 1987), in the first edition of Wolin's collection. The dispute between Derrida, Wolin and Thomas Sheehan was accompanied by public exchanges in the letter pages of the *New York Review of Books*. Columbia University Press subsequently withdrew the book and a later edition, without Wolin's translation of the Derrida interview, was published by MIT Press. The interview, 'Heidegger, The Philosophers' Hell,' was retranslated and published in *Points*. Derrida discusses what he calls the 'Wolin/Sheehan affair' in 'The Work of Intellectuals and the Press,' also in *Points* (Derrida 1995c, 422-54); his letters to *NYRB* are reprinted there as an appendix. Wolin wrote a long introduction to the MIT edition of his collection telling his side of the story: he seeks to justify his decision to include the interview and gives a psychological or psychologizing interpretation of Derrida's reaction to the unauthorized publication. Wolin portrays Derrida as a hypocrite for attempting to restrict the dissemination of his text, and so on. Though the affair has some genuine complexities, in retrospect it seems however that the issue is really a very simple one: it is a basic gesture of intellectual courtesy—regardless of the legalities of copyright, regardless of doctrinal positions and psychological idiosyncrasies—wherever possible to request the permission of the author to translate or republish their work in a new context, where the assumption of readers will be that the text appears there with the author's blessing.

<sup>14</sup> It is not possible here to reconstitute the details of what David Lehman calls, somewhat predictably, 'the fall of Paul de Man.' Derrida responds to de Man's wartime writings in an extended and careful way in 'Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War' (Derrida 1989b), 'Comme le bruit de la mer au fond d'un coquillage... La guerre de Paul de Man' (Derrida 1988b). The texts in question were published in Paul de Man, *Wartime Journalism, 1939-1943* (de Man 1988). Responses to the discovery of de Man's wartime writings were collected in *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism* (Hamacher, Hertz, and Keenan 1989). A number of authors already hostile to deconstruction were pleased to discover in the de Man revelations the ideal referent for their concerns about deconstruction. They were vindicated there. David Lehman's *Signs of the Times* (Lehman 1991), for example, is an unequivocal condemnation of de Man's involvement with Nazi propaganda, of deconstruction as clearly complicit with fascism, and of the other 'deconstructionists' among de Man's colleagues and students who were seduced by the benign exterior which concealed the rotten core. Lehman's account, written with a flair for simplification and an obvious relish for historical ironies, is, unfortunately, oddly unable to recognize in this most bitter and painful of dramas anything more than an opportunity to pass easy judgments.

<sup>15</sup> 'There might even be "grounds for viewing the whole of deconstruction as a vast amnesty project for the politics of collaboration in France in World War II,"' writes Jeffrey Mehlman, quoted without reference in Lehman, *Signs of the Times* (Lehman 1991, 213).

The controversy surrounding de Man and Heidegger is prefigured by a considerable debate over many years regarding the question of Nietzsche's 'politics,' with some emphasis given to his apparent anti-Semitism and proto-Nazism. There are many examples of passages in Nietzsche that could serve a fascist ideology. 'What is good?,' asks Nietzsche at the beginning of *The Antichrist* (*Der Antichrist*). 'Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself,' he responds. 'What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness. What is happiness? The feeling that power is growing, that resistance is overcome. Not contentment but more power; not peace but war; not virtue but fitness.... The weak and the failures shall perish: first principle of our love of man. And they shall even be given every possible assistance' (Nietzsche 1958, 1165-66; Nietzsche 1982, 570). On the question of Nietzsche's 'failed voluntarism,' the *Übermensch* and Nazism, see Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (Conway 1997, 120-23).

It is very much against a decontextualized and univocal ideological appropriation in general that deconstruction militates. In other words, deconstruction makes or ought to make such appropriations that much more difficult. Derrida argues in 'Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War' (Derrida 1988b; Derrida 1989b) that Paul de Man's wartime writings are plundered by academics already antipathetic to de Man's influence for those sections of them that are immediately attributable to the direct influence of National Socialist ideology. These ill-considered readings are then taken up by a press hungry for sensation. Derrida calls for careful, patient and responsible reading, against the current of journalistic simplification and homogenization. On the other hand, those hostile to de Man and deconstruction in general had found exactly the evidence they required, so they interpreted this call as an attempt by Derrida and other friends of de Man to dissolve the patent collaborationism of de Man's words in a rhetorical soup of unnecessary complexity and obscurantism. 'The deconstructionists... retreated to a position of mystification,' writes Lehman (Lehman 1991, 217).

Of course, de Man's wartime writings and Nietzsche's more 'problematic' texts are not necessarily analogous. Nonetheless, they serve to intensify the *problem of reading*, where what one would like to discern, ideally, in order to support a judgment, is a *meaning* or *intention*. With reference to Derrida's *Spurs* (*Éperons*), Niall Lucy reminds us that a reading of Nietzsche should not confine itself either to the vertical axis of hierarchized intentions or to the horizontal axis of associative multiplicity. But how is this delicate operation, which both refuses to privilege any one reading of Nietzsche, and at the same time refuses to acquiesce to an 'interpretative freeplay,' to be accomplished? '[H]ow Nietzsche is read,' writes Lucy in *Postmodern Literary Theory*, 'cannot be dissociated from what Nietzsche wrote, but neither is it reducible to it. Hence we might say that, in reading Nietzsche, we are obliged to pay attention to his writing in the most literal sense—to the words on the page, as he wrote them—but not in order to find a unitary or coherent meaning "behind" those words. Instead it is a question of considering how certain interests "outside" Nietzsche's texts can attach themselves to certain rhetorical devices "in" his texts, bringing them under the sway of those interests' (Lucy 1997, 211). Therefore, according to Lucy, the *problem of (good or faithful) reading* (which has preoccupied us for some time) tends to find its counterpoint, as it were, in a *pragmatics*, for 'it is not so much a question of deciding between "true" and "false" readings of Nietzsche, but of accounting for the different *effective* readings of his work' (205). There is no blunt reduction to a pragmatics here, however, for Lucy carefully maintains the irreducible tension between these alternative reading strategies, these alternative relationships to the text.



<sup>16</sup> How can we measure the consequences of the de Man affair a decade or so later? This is a very difficult task, for there is not an alternative or parallel history from which the de Man affair is absent with which to make a careful comparison. Is there now less sustained exegetical attention to de Man's postwar texts than might otherwise have been the case? Or is there more? Are there less de Manians now than there otherwise might have been? (Have there ever been 'de Manians'? What would they be?) I do not have the expertise to hazard a guess on these questions, nor the opportunity to research them thoroughly, but nonetheless the questions remain significant ones. The effect of the affair, in its privacy and in its publicity, was *traumatic*. Here was an event which could not have been predicted and whose consequences could not be controlled. The destruction of a reputation is a terrible thing to observe, taking place as it does in a public space liberated from all reasonable constraints and ignorant of the protocols of responsible reading. The effect upon deconstruction was perhaps to increase its burden of responsibility, its responsibility for responsibility, to focus its attention upon responsibility, to bring to light, with the aid of Levinas, an infinite responsibility, whose burden can surely as such neither be increased nor decreased—for can there be increments of an infinite responsibility?

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter One, sections 1.5 and 1.6.

<sup>18</sup> See Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*: 'For democracy remains to come; this is its essence insofar as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even when there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present, it remains the theme of a non-presentable concept' (Derrida 1994c, 339-40; Derrida 1997c, 306).

<sup>19</sup> *Telos* is the name of a Marxist journal prominent in the 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>20</sup> Simon Critchley and Ernesto Laclau both argue this point, but with different, sometimes conflicting, emphases. See, for example, Laclau, 'Deconstruction, Pragmatism, Hegemony' (Mouffe 1996).

<sup>21</sup> There is 'an experience of infinite responsibility, which [is] undeconstructible,' says Critchley (Critchley 1999, 108). On the theme of justice, Critchley quotes Derrida from 'Force of Law' ('Force de loi'): 'Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice' (Critchley 1999, 99; Derrida 1992c, 14-15). In the French text of Derrida's paper, the identification is italicized: '*La déconstruction est la justice*' (Derrida 1994b, 35).

<sup>22</sup> The concept of permanent revolution derives from Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution* (Trotsky 1972).

<sup>23</sup> The implication here is an opposition of resistance and passivity. In this opposition, revolution is with resistance. But there is a sense perhaps in which resistance is more passive (or less active) than revolution, and also a sense in which revolution might be passive too. The Earth revolves around the sun, yet it is not clear that it revolts. Or perhaps its orbit is a permanent revolution. It is flight held in suspense by a higher authority. Can one, as a revolutionary, acquiesce to revolution? One can certainly resist revolution, even as one can resist the world turning. What is the *relation* to revolution in the case of *permanent* revolution?

<sup>24</sup> The *opposition* of passivity or patience to politics is one that tends perhaps to understand politics as the politics of the Left. In other words, politics as such belongs to the Left. Is a relationship to the time or temporality of politics that emphasizes passivity (if it is possible to emphasize passivity) then necessarily an anti-politics or a politics of the Right? There are a series of related pairs: left and right, active (or activist) and passive, conservative and radical,

etc. In an earlier note (note 66 in Chapter One), we discussed the difficulty of ascribing Derrida's or deconstruction's politics to the Left as a problem, in a sense, of *reading in general*. In *Derrida and the Political*, Richard Beardsworth imagines what he calls 'two possible futures of Derrida's philosophy.' In setting out these prospects for Derrida's philosophy, Beardsworth gives the opposition, within the political, of politics to passivity an entire idiomatic framework. 'The first,' he says, 'would be what one may call within classical concepts of the political a "left-wing" "Derrideanism." It would foreground Derrida's analyses of originary technicity, "avoiding" the risk of freezing quasi-transcendental logic by developing the trace in terms of the mediations between the human and the technical (the very process of hominization). In order to think future "spectralization" and establish a dialogue between philosophy, the human sciences, the arts and the technosciences, this future of Derrida's philosophy would return to the earlier texts of Derrida which read metaphysical logic in terms of the disavowal of *techné*. The second could be called, similarly, a "right-wing" "Derrideanism." It would pursue Derrida's untying of the aporia of time from both logic and technics, maintaining that even if there is only access to time through technics, what must be thought, articulated and witnessed is the passage of time. To do so, this Derrideanism would mobilize religious discourse and prioritize, for example, the radically "passive" nature of the arts, following up on more recent work of Derrida on the absolute originarity of the promise and of his reorganization of religious discourse to think and describe it' (Beardsworth 1996, 156). Beardsworth's reflections, couched in an idiom so very different from my own, link a "right-wing" "Derrideanism" with a passivity that bears witness to the passage of time, a passage one assumes whose passing is by way of the aporia which at once blocks and opens the way. Though clearly such a passivity, relinquishing all resistance, is impossible, or at least ideal, it is still necessary to ask: Is this passivity a *detachment* or an *engagement*? What is encountered in a passivity which does not resist time? The infinite patience required to read is infinite because there is no such patience. In such a patience, one gives one's attention and there is faithful reading. This patience, one imagines, allows what is there to bear its fruit. (On the question of patience and reading, see, for example, Michel Lisse, '«...le lire avec une patience infinie...»' (Lisse 1996, 191-208)). Yet even here, in this arid terrain, there may well be a Left and a Right: there will be fruits on either side. Beardsworth's reflections suggest both the way in which the classical opposition of Right and Left is so quickly exceeded and the way in which it remains indispensable.

<sup>25</sup> It has become a fairly consistent theme in the course of my inquiry: the different difference of deconstruction (that which absolutely sets it apart, that which is singular) is that which deconstruction shares equally with the others. Deconstruction cannot possess this difference which is its very own, which makes it what it is. This 'sharing' with the others is an equivocal community, a community of the aporia, if you like; even an aporetic community; a sharing and communing that takes place in mutual isolation. Hence, this 'sharing' which has been invoked at key points becomes in itself a persistent and difficult question. With the aid of Edmond Jabès, Howard Caygill follows the tension between the shared, the unsharable, and community in 'The Shared World—Philosophy, Violence, Freedom.' Caygill begins with an epigraph from Jabès *Book of Shares* (*Le livre du partage*). 'At an early age,' Jabès writes, 'I found myself facing the incomprehensible, the unthinkable, death. Ever since, I have known nothing on this earth can be shared because we own nothing' (Quoted in Caygill 1997, 19; Jabès 1989, 1). The aporia of community is laid out plainly in these words. Firstly, there is nothing to share if nothing is owned; secondly, if nothing is owned, everything is shared; thirdly, Jabès writes, 'I have known nothing on this earth can be shared because we own nothing,' where the *I* (*je*) and the *we* (*on*) are distanced and coincide, harmonize and antagonize, constitute and dissipate the community of I's who can say, separately and together, 'we.' The different difference of deconstruction is a singular 'I' of this very kind.

The theme of community, opened up here by the question of what is shared, has of course



other significant occasions in recent times, notably Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Nancy 1991), *La communauté désouvrée* (Nancy 1986), and Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community* (Blanchot 1988), *La communauté inavouable* (Blanchot 1983). Part I of Blanchot's text, 'The Negative Community,' is a response to the first publication of Nancy's essay 'La communauté désouvrée.' See also, Nancy, 'Sharing Freedom,' in *The Experience of Freedom* (Nancy 1993), *L'expérience de la liberté* (Nancy 1988).

<sup>26</sup> In a less equivocal mode, see Hillis Miller: "[D]econstruction", if there is such a thing, whatever it is, is inherently untotalizable, anti-totalitarian, even, I should say, inherently democratic....' (Miller 1992, 10). Miller's claim is that deconstruction is a different and a special kind of thing—though it is, perhaps, not a thing at all, but a quasi-thing or quasi-nothing. In any case, it resists the bane of thingness. It resists conceptual and calculative circumscription, but remains, in the singular space of its evanescence, and despite an allergy to all predication, a good and wholesome nothing, constitutively opposed to totalitarianism.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Simon Critchley, 'Deconstruction and Pragmatism—Is Derrida a Private Ironist or a Public Liberal?'; Derrida, 'Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism' (Mouffe 1996); Critchley, 'Metaphysics in the Dark,' in his *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity* (Critchley 1999).

The notion of *infinite responsibility* has a significant development in Levinas. 'This trauma which cannot be assumed, inflicted by the Infinite on presence, or this affecting of presence by the Infinite—this affectivity—takes shape,' says Levinas in 'God and Philosophy' ('Dieu et la philosophie') 'as a subjection to the neighbour. It is thought thinking more than it thinks, desire, the reference to the neighbour, the responsibility for another.'

'This abstraction is nevertheless familiar to us in the empirical event of obligation to another, as the impossibility of indifference—impossible without fail—before the misfortunes and faults of a neighbour, the unexceptionable responsibility for him. It is impossible to fix limits or measure the extreme urgency of this responsibility. Upon reflection it is something completely astonishing, a responsibility that even extends to the obligation to answer for another's freedom, to be responsible for his responsibility, whereas the freedom which would demand an eventual commitment or even the assuming of an imposed necessity cannot find a present that includes the possibilities which belong to the other. The other's freedom can neither constitute a structure along with my freedom, nor enter into a synthesis with it. Responsibility for the neighbour is precisely what goes beyond the legal and obliges beyond contracts; it comes to me from what is prior to my freedom, from a non-present, an immemorial. A difference gapes open between me and the other that no unity of transcendental apperception can undo. My responsibility for the other is precisely the non-indifference of this difference—the proximity of the other. An absolutely extra-ordinary relation, it does not reestablish the order of representation in which every past returns. The proximity of a neighbour remains a diachronic break, a resistance of time to the synthesis of simultaneity.'

'The biological human brotherhood—conceived with the sober coldness of Cain—is not a sufficient reason for me to be responsible for a separated being. The sober coldness of Cain consists in conceiving responsibility as proceeding from freedom or in terms of a contract. But responsibility for another comes from what is prior to my freedom. It does not come from the time made up of presences, nor presences that have sunk into the past and are representable, the time of beginnings or assumings. It does not allow me to constitute myself into an *I think*, substantial like a stone, or, like a heart of stone, existing in and for oneself. It ends up in substitution for another, in the condition—or the unconditionality—of being a hostage. Such responsibility does not give one time, a present for recollection or coming back to oneself; it makes one always late. Before the neighbour I am summoned and do not just appear; from the first I am answering to an assignation. Already the stony core of my

substance is dislodged. But the responsibility to which I am exposed in such a passivity does not apprehend me as an interchangeable thing, for here no one can be substituted for me; in calling upon me as someone accused who cannot reject the accusation, it obliges me as someone unreplaceable and unique, someone chosen. Inasmuch as it calls upon my responsibility it forbids me any replacement. Unreplaceable in responsibility, I cannot, without defaulting, incurring fault or being caught up in some complex, escape the face of a neighbour; here I am pledged to the other without being able to take back my pledge. I cannot evade the face of the other, naked and without resources. The nakedness of someone forsaken shows in the cracks in the mask of the personage, or in his wrinkled skin; his being "without resources" has to be heard like cries not voiced or thematized, already addressed to God. There the resonance of silence—*Gelaut der Stille*—certainly sounds. We here have come upon an imbroglio that has to be taken seriously: a relationship to... that is not represented, without intentionality, not repressed; it is the latent birth of religion in the other, prior to emotions or voices, prior to "religious experience" which speaks of revelation in terms of the disclosure of being, when it is a question of an unwonted access, in the heart of my responsibility, to an unwonted disturbance of being. Even if one says right away, "It was nothing." "It was nothing"—it was not being, but otherwise than being. My responsibility in spite of myself—which is the way the other's charge falls upon me, or the way the other disturbs me, that is, is close to me—is the hearing or understanding of this cry. It is awakening. The proximity of a neighbour is my responsibility for him; to approach is to be one's brother's keeper; to be one's brother's keeper is to be his hostage. Immediacy is this. Responsibility does not come from fraternity, but fraternity denotes responsibility for another, antecedent to my freedom' (Levinas 1982, 116-18; Levinas 1989, 180-81).

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Keenan, for example, makes some strong claims with regard to the notion of responsibility: '[T]he only responsibility worthy of the name comes with the removal of grounds, the withdrawal of the rules or the knowledge on which we might rely to make our decisions for us. No grounds means no alibis, no elsewhere to which we might refer the instance of our decision' (Keenan 1997, 1). Though these are worthy sentiments, it is however hard to accept the last claim in this form. Even in the madness of the decision, is there not still a bitter struggle to locate this authorizing elsewhere? But more than this, *the (already moral) decision Keenan has clearly made here* with regard to the transformation of responsibility into one 'worthy of the name' is surely itself a decision with a transferential authorization. As much as it is Keenan's decision, it is already the master's decision too, if you like. Even at the limit, there is no sudden simplification of these complicated sets of relations, transferential or otherwise, and hence there is no clear justification for the distance Keenan wants to establish between an irresponsible responsibility and a responsibility 'worthy of the name.'

Simon Critchley speaks of a 'need for infinite responsibility' (Critchley 1999, 107), though this is only *ambiguously* an advocacy. He says there is 'an experience of infinite responsibility, which can be qualified as undeconstructible, unconditional, a priori and universal' (108). Though Critchley's assertion is clearly true, some distinctive transformation has taken place in order for such a statement to emerge, in the context of deconstruction. In a way, our enduring question simply asks: What is this transformation? What makes Critchley's statement possible?

<sup>29</sup> In the dedication which opens *Specters of Marx* (*Spectres de Marx*), the invocation of an infinite responsibility is more ambiguous where the good consciences are concerned. 'Infinite responsibility, therefore, no rest allowed for any of good conscience [*Responsabilité infinie, dès lors, repos interdit pour toutes les formes de bonne consciences*]' (Derrida 1993f, 11; Derrida 1994d, xv). Here it appears that the good consciences, despite their constitutive complacency, are subject to an infinite responsibility and can find no rest. There is another

reference to these 'good consciences' in the fraught and bitter context of de Man's fall. De Man 'will always interest me,' says Derrida in *Memoires (Mémoires)*, 'more than those who are in a hurry to judge, thinking they know, and who, with the naive assurance of good or bad conscience, have concluded in advance' (Derrida 1988b, 230; Derrida 1989b, 247). At this point, one feels compelled to ask: How do I proceed beyond this naivety? In *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Derrida considers the relation of the 'hiatus' or 'silence' to responsibility: 'Without silence, without the hiatus, which is not the absence of rules but the necessity of a leap [*un saut*] at the moment of ethical, political, or juridical decision, we could simply unfold knowledge into a program or course of action. Nothing could make us more irresponsible; nothing could be more totalitarian' (Derrida 1997a, 210; Derrida 1999a 117). Since however, a situation *without silence* and *without the hiatus* (without the aporia, if you like) is impossible, even unimaginable, it is difficult to see where the words *irresponsible* and *totalitarian* find their purchase in opposition to *responsible* and, say, *democratic*.

<sup>30</sup> There is, perhaps, as I have already implied as a possible objection, no *deconstructive* responsibility. In the same way, Derrida insists, as a necessary caution, that there is not a deconstructive politics or a deconstructive ethics. 'I don't think that there is such a thing,' says Derrida, 'as a deconstructive politics' (Derrida 1997b). This distinctive disavowal of responsibility has a certain inevitability, even as it attests, by inversion, to the different difference of deconstruction: deconstruction thinks responsibility, for example, but there is not, as a consequence, a deconstructive *theory* of responsibility. This does no more than defer the moment of institution, a moment which is impossible in any case.

<sup>31</sup> The question of what can be *learned* has been a more or less unobtrusive companion to our progress. It is immediately an ethico-political (if not *the* ethico-political) question. In the 'Exordium' to *Specters of Marx (Spectres de Marx)*, Derrida gives it pride of place. 'Someone, you or me,' writes Derrida, 'comes forward and says: *I would like to learn to live finally*.' This is 'ethics itself,' says Derrida (Derrida 1993f, 13-14; Derrida 1994d, xvii-xviii). One could say that the problematic of what can be learned is haunted by a certain repetition. If it is a trauma which teaches, then it teaches repetition. Is that what learning is? Hence Nietzsche's well-known subversion of the common wisdom, where he says that if we learn from our mistakes, it is only to repeat them more perfectly. What is required then, with regard to the question of the different difference of deconstruction, is to link the (im)possibility of learning marked by the trauma with the promulgation, in effect, of an 'experience (or experiment) of the impossible' in deconstruction. In 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other' ('Psyché: Invention de l'autre') Derrida says, 'The interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible' (Derrida 1987d, 27; Derrida 1989d, 36).

<sup>32</sup> This name is certainly singular, and this is intrinsic to its function. It might be the name 'Derrida' for instance, and in its singularity it cannot then be a mere instance. There would seem to be many instances when this is the case. But at the same time, despite this singularity, this name has a disconcerting substitutability. Like the loved one to whom one swears with complete sincerity eternal and undying devotion, it can be replaced. That is, the irreplaceable (the name of the One) can always be replaced (by the name of Another). It is hard to say what has changed in this replacement.

<sup>33</sup> Admittedly, here we would need to ascertain the exact place where deconstruction breaks with its genealogy or inheritance—its filial relation to Levinas, for example, and Levinasian infinite responsibility. This would be another and familiar kind of work that moves towards establishing the difference or different difference of deconstruction. Derrida does help in general in this regard. With Levinas for instance, at the end of *Adieu*, for example, he shows us one place where their paths diverge. See Chapter One, note 100.

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