Gerasimos Kakoliris

Derrida's Deconstructive Double Reading

The Case of Rousseau

DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTIVE DOUBLE READING

Gerasimos Kakoliris

Derrida's Deconstructive Double Reading

The Case of Rousseau

Acknowledgements

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Jacques Derrida

"Afterword"	"Afterword: Toward An Ethic of Discussion". Translated by Samuel Weber. In *Limited Inc*, 111-160. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993.
D	*Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981.
DIS	*La dissémination*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil, Collection "Essais", 1972.
DLG	*De la grammatologie*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967.
ED	*L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil, collection "Essais", 1967).
Khôra	*Khôra*. Paris: Galilee, 1993.
LI	*Limited Inc*. Translated by Samuel Weber. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993.
LInc	*Limited Inc*. Présentation et traductions par Elisabeth Weber. Paris: Galilée, 2000.
M	*Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972.
MP	*Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982.

OG   *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 40th Anniversary Edition. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016, 1976[1].

ON   *On the Name*. Edited by Thomas Dutoit. Translated by David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.

P   *Positions*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: The Athlone Press, 1987.

POS   *Positions*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972.

"Postface" "Postface: Vers une éthique de la discussion". In *Limited Inc*, 199-285. Présentation et traductions par Elisabeth Weber. Paris: Galilée, 2000.

SP   *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Translated by David B. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

VP   *La voix et le phénomène*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962.

WD   *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Works by Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Confessions *The Confessions*. Translated by J.M. Cohen. London: Penguin Books, 1953.

Essay   *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. Translated by J.H. Moran & A. Gode. New York: Frederick Uncar Publishing Co., 1966.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to outline the form of "deconstructive reading" that Jacques Derrida initiates, to determine the theoretical background from which such a reading emanates, to identify some of its consequences and, finally, to suggest some additional problems.

The focus of the first part will be further developed and deepened in the second part of this study by the critical appraisal of an "example" of deconstructive reading: Derrida's reading of Jean-Jacque Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages* and the *Confessions*. Derrida's engagement with Rousseau in the second part of *Of Grammatology* constitutes the most systematic, extensive example of deconstructive reading. Nevertheless, the problem of whether Derrida reproduces Rousseau's basic claims adequately (during the *first* reading enacted by deconstruction or the "doubling commentary", as Derrida names it) has, with the exception of Paul de Man,[1] remained a peripheral concern. This has meant that this may constitute a misreading, and the consequences that this would have for the deconstructive operation itself have not been adequately examined. Hence, this enquiry into Derrida's reading of Rousseau centres upon the extent to which Derrida distorts Rousseau's text to be able to confirm deconstruction's radical theoretical positions.

This study attempts to demonstrate the determinant role that the *first* motive or level of deconstructive reading (or the "dou-

bling commentary") plays in the deconstructive enterprise. In this way, the success of a particular deconstruction depends to a considerable degree on how persuasively this *first* reading "reproduces" or "doubles" the text. Derrida himself has recognised that "this [doubling] commentary is *already* an interpretation", and therefore, he does not "believe in the possibility of a pure and simple 'doubling commentary'", which would not be "already an interpretative reading" ("Afterword" 143-144/"Postface" 265). From this perspective, this interpretation, as with any other interpretation, can be doubted or fail to be persuasive, as in the case, for example, of Joseph Claude Evans, who dedicates a whole book, his *Strategies of Deconstruction: Derrida and the Myth of the Voice*,[2] to refute the accuracy of Derrida's reading of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*, or in the case of John Searle who accuses Derrida of misreading John Austin. For Evans or Searle, such an interpretation of the philosophical tradition is not persuasive, and the whole argumentation/demonstration/performance based on it fails to have any force. Similarly, Christine Glucksmann, by chiding Derrida for conceiving history "too linearly as the history of meaning" (*P* 49/*POS* 67), seems to attempt to cancel the deconstructive procedure by concentrating our attention on Derrida's *initial* determination or interpretation of the history of metaphysics.

The first part of *Of Grammatology* is presented by Derrida as a "theoretical matrix", while the second part (i.e., Derrida's deconstructive reading of Rousseau's *Essay* and the *Confessions)* is presented as an "example" of the first part:

> The first part of this essay, "Writing before the Letter," sketches in broad outlines a theoretical matrix. It indicates certain significant historical points of reference, and proposes certain critical concepts.
>
> These reference points and critical concepts are put to the test in the second part, "Nature, Culture, Writing."

> Moment, as it were, of the example, although strictly
> speaking, that notion is not acceptable within my argu-
> ment. (*OG* cxiii/*DLG* 7)

The first part lays the ground for a radical view of language and meaning, which fundamentally overturns all our traditional notions of interpretation and reading.

In "The Exorbitant. Question of Method", Derrida notes that deconstructive reading situates itself in the gap between what the author "commands" within their text (their "vouloir-dire") and what they do not "command", that is, what takes place in their text without their will. This distance, fissure or opening is something that deconstructive reading must "produce" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227). However, to produce this fissure or opening, deconstructive reading must first reproduce what the author "wants-to-say", something that requires submission to classical reproductive reading practices. The *traditional* reading (namely, the reproduction of the authorial or textual intention) is then *destabilised* through the utilisation of all those elements that have refused to be incorporated within it. Hence, the meanings produced during this *first* reading become "disseminated" during the *second* reading. That is, during this second reading the text loses its initial apparent semantic determinacy organised around the axis of its authorial intention, and is eventually pushed into producing a number of incompatible meanings that are "undecidable" in the sense that the reader lacks any secure ground for choosing between them. For example, in "Plato's Pharmacy",[3] Derrida exhibits the way in which the text of *Phaedrus*, despite Plato's intention of keeping the two opposite meanings of *pharmakon* – namely, the meanings of "remedy" and "poison" – separate, ends up affirming both *à la fois*.

A deconstructive reading, therefore, contains both a "dominant",[4] reproductive reading and a "critical", productive reading.

The *first* reading, which Derrida calls a "doubling commentary" (*commentaire redoublant*) (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227), finds a passage "lisible" and understandable, and reconstructs the *determinate* meaning of the passage read according to a procedure that the deconstructive reader shares with common readers. The *second* reading, which he calls a "critical reading" or an "active interpretation", goes on to *disseminate* the meanings that the *first* reading has already construed. In this double reading or "double gesture" ("*double geste*"), Derrida is obliged to use classical interpretative norms and practices and, at the same time, to negate their power to "control" a text, to thoroughly construe a text as something determinate and to "disseminate" the text into a series of "undecidable" meanings.

In this "double gesture", deconstruction is obliged to maintain a precarious poise between subverting and denying, between deconstructing and destroying, between understanding communicative "effects" and dissolving the foundations on which the effects rely, between deploying interpretative norms and disclaiming their power to "master" a text, and between meticulously construing a text as determinate and "disseminating" the text into a plethora of "undecidabilities". In this process, Derrida is also a logical prestidigitator who acknowledges and uses, as a logocentric "effect", the logic of non-contradiction, yet converts its either/or into a simultaneous neither/nor and both/and, in a double gesture of giving and taking back and re-giving with a *différance*.

The tension in Derrida's "double" interpretive procedure is rather apparent. Deconstruction can only subvert the meaning of a text that has already been construed. For a text's *intentional* meaning to become destabilised, the text needs to possess a certain stability so that it can be rendered determinate. The following passage, which undertakes explicating what in *Of Grammatology* Derrida referred to as "doubling commentary" – the initial

determination or reading that the deconstructive operation fo-
cuses on – brings us to the core of this *contradiction*:

> In short, what I sought to designate under the title of
> "doubling commentary" is the "minimal" deciphering of
> the "first" pertinent or competent access to structures
> that are *relatively stable (and hence destabilizable!)*, and
> from which the most venturesome questions and inter-
> pretations have to start [...]. (italics added) ("Afterword"
> 145/"Postface" 268)

The expression "relatively stable (and hence destabilizable!)",
mirrors the paradoxical presuppositions of deconstructive criti-
cism: the determination of the metaphysical text has to be *stable*
since the destabilising force of deconstruction can take place only
on something that possesses a certain stability while simultane-
ously being *unstable* for deconstruction to be possible,

   Initially, Derrida seems to be justified in arguing that a certain
structure, although stable, is potentially destabilisable: "A stabil-
ity is not an immutability" ("Afterword" 151/"Postface" 279).
Change is an ineliminable, never-ending possibility. However,
Derrida invokes those reasons for the destabilisation of a certain
textual structure that would preclude any (even "relative") stabil-
ity to it. Therefore, the question that arises is whether it is possible
to think together the possibility of stable determinations and
meaning as "dissemination" in a non-contradictory manner?

   However, how does Derrida justify the possibility of the "rel-
atively stable" structure of the "doubling commentary? For him,
the analysis of the constitution of meaning undertaken in the first
part of *Of Grammatology* and condensed in the statement that
"[t]he absence of the transcendental signified extends the do-
main and the play of signification infinitely" (*WD* 280/*ED* 411),
does not constitute an obstacle to the existence of relatively sta-
ble or determinate meanings. In contrast, *différance* – a neolo-

gism, or better a neographism, which Derrida coins to underline the fact that meaning is the product of the endless differential play of language – is not presented as a constitutive "indeterminacy" but rather as "render[ing] determination both possible and necessary" ("Afterword" 149/"Postface" 275). *Différance* is a playful movement that produces the differences that are constitutive of words and conceptualisation in general: "Differance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other" (*P* 27/*POS* 38).

Derrida's *différance* constitutes the radicalisation of Ferdinard de Saussure's structural linguistics and, in particular, of the determination of the sign as *arbitrary* and *differential*. For Saussure, a linguistic sign "is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern [*image acoustique*]",[5] or, respectively, a "signified" (*signifié*) with a "signifier" (*signifiant*). In this sense, the constitutive elements of the linguistic sign are not physical but mental. The bond between the *signifier* and the *signified*, Saussure tells us, is not natural but instituted or conventional. Therefore, signs are "arbitrary" within the given system of language and have meaning only within this system. The signs of language are not autonomous ideas and sounds that exist independently of the linguistic system. These ideas and sounds are simply elements of a linguistic system and have the status of conceptual and phonic differences produced within this system itself. A sign has meaning through the position that it occupies within a chain of conceptual and phonetic differences. As Saussure declares: "*In the language itself, there are only differences*".[6] These differences are not differences between positive terms, namely, between already formed acoustic images or ideas: "[…] in a language there are only differences, *and no positive terms*".[7] In that respect, language is not a system of identities but a systematic structure of differences.

Derrida infers from Saussure's position on the arbitrary and differential character of the sign that it is impossible "that a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself" (*P* 26/*POS* 37). Signs do not reflect pre-existing objectivities or meanings. The possibility of any significance is dependent on a silent system of differential references. In this sense, for any present element to signify, it must refer to another element, different from itself, that is not present. Derrida views meaning as a process of signification that functions according to this pattern and, thus, that the idea of the capacity to grasp the essence or the meaning of a sign – a true presence – is an illusion.

Since the signified is never present in its full plenitude, the structure of the sign is always already simultaneously marked by difference and non-presence. Derrida coins the neographism "*différance*" to describe the difference, or the being-different of these differences, the "production" and the "contamination" of each present element by something that is not present. The substitution of the "e" of "différence" by the "a" of "différance" from the present participle "différante" recalls the French verb *différer*. The verb *différer* has two seemingly quite distinct meanings that are drawn from the Latin verb *differere*. The double meaning of the French *différer* is rendered in English by the different verbs "to differ" and "to defer". Hence, *différer*, in the sense of the verb "to differ", signifies difference as lack of resemblance between two things, distinction, lack of identity, dissimilarity, or discernibility, while *différer*, in the sense of the verb "to defer", signifies "the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible" (*MP* 3/*M* 3).

Hence, *différance*, for Derrida, does not constitute an obstacle that would prevent someone from making *relatively stable* determinations regarding a text's meaning. In fact, *différance*, we are

told, is the condition of possibility and impossibility of meaning: while it makes meaning present, it excludes it from being *absolutely* present. Hence, the non-identity of meaning with itself, this *différance*, does not have the *slightest* effect on the establishment of a text's intentional meaning, as Derrida often argues emphatically in opposition to all those who, he thinks, are misinterpreting him when characterising deconstruction as "hermeneutic terrorism" (e.g., John Ellis)[8]: "[…] this process of intentions and meaning differing from themselves does not negate the possibility of 'doubling commentary'" ("Afterword" 147/"Postface" 270).

In this sense, deconstruction's "doubling commentary" does not differ radically from other traditional reconstructions of a text's authorial intentions. As Derrida himself confesses: "And you are right in saying that these 'practical implications for interpretation' are 'not so threatening to conventional modes of reading'" ("Afterword" 147/"Postface" 271). All those readers, who would "hastily" conclude that the radical view of language and meaning put forward in the first part of *Of Grammatology* fundamentally overturns all our traditional notions of interpretation and reading, would find themselves filled with surprise when, in the second part, in the section entitled "The Exorbitant. Question of Method", they are suddenly prompted to "respect" all the "classical exigencies" and "all the instruments of traditional criticism" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227).

In the same spirit, in "Afterword: Towards an Ethics of Discussion", Derrida cautions against reading "undecidability" as equivalent to "indeterminacy":

> I do not believe I have ever spoken of "indeterminacy," whether in regard to "meaning" or anything else. Undecidability is something else again. […] undecidability is always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibili-

ties are themselves highly *determined* in strictly *defined* situations (for example, discursive – syntactical or rhetorical – but also political, ethical, etc.). They are *pragmatically* determined. The analyses that I have devoted to undecidability concern just these determinations and these definitions, not at all some vague "indeterminacy." [...] Which is to say that from the point of view of semantics, but also of ethics and politics, "deconstruction" should never lead either to relativism or to any sort of indeterminism.

To be sure, in order for structures of undecidability to be possible (and hence structures of decisions and of responsibilities as well), there must be a certain play, *différance*, nonidentity. Not of indetermination, but of *différance* or of nonidentity with oneself in the very process of determination. *Différance* is not indeterminacy. It renders determinacy both possible and necessary. ("Afterword" 148-149/"Postface" 273-274)

Hence, Derrida does not seem to question the attribution of "relatively stable" meanings to words and, by extension, to texts themselves. This is what allows Derrida to be able to *decide,* for example, whenever Plato uses the equivocal word *pharmakon*, whether he means *either* "remedy" *or* "poison". The "essential" or "undecidable" equivocity of the word *pharmakon* is of another nature. It lies in the text's refusal to decide, against its author's intentions, in favour of the identification of the word with one of its two opposite meanings (thus the *pharmakon* is described as "undecidable"). The text does not refuse to *determine* different meanings for the word *pharmakon*; it refuses to *decide* in favour of the one or the other.

However, if *différance* "is not indeterminacy", if it "renders determinacy both possible and necessary", thereby allowing a text to possess "relative stability", then what is it that renders the *de-*

construction of these "relatively stable" determinations possible? The answer is again: *Différance.* All those elements previously described as intervening in the production of meaning – play, difference, *différance* – are also invoked to justify the deconstruction of that "effect" of meaning that the differential play itself has produced. In order to justify the possibility of a text's deconstruction, Derrida turns to the turbulent effects of *différance*, which, however, were previously declared as not constituting an obstacle to the attainment of those stable textual determinations that are now subject to deconstruction. The differential play, by preventing a concept's meaning from being fully *present* to itself, to its signified (*OG* 8/*DLG* 17), is now posed as that which pushes the concepts (see, for example, the concept *pharmakon*) – and by extension the text in its entirety – into "undecidability"; this, the same "play", which did not previously prevent concepts from possessing a relatively stable meaning. If, as Simon Glendinning writes, "the necessity of 'play' ensures that any putative 'unity of meaning' is *a priori* 'dispersed' in advance",[9] then which stability of meaning, even relative, is it possible to begin from? If the term "dissemination"[10] is another name for the "play", which, for Derrida characterises *all* conceptual identities, then the stability of meaning that the "doubling commentary" requires seems to have its possibility undermined.

Derrida seems to fall into a paradox when he presents this "play" or *différance* – the constant slipping of entities and their passage into their opposites as a perpetual reversal of properties – as limited only to "a *determinate* oscillation between [...] highly *determined* possibilities", without having any prior effect on the process of the *determination* of these possibilities. If there is a certain "*play or relative indetermination*" ("Afterword" 144/"Postface" 266) in the process of determination, as he declares, how then is determination possible in the form required by the "doubling commentary"?

Derrida interprets the effects of the differential constitution of concepts *at will*. To the extent that deconstruction needs the "doubling commentary", the constitution of a sign's meaning or identity through its differences from other signs does not prevent signs or concepts from carrying with them, at the level of their use, a certain, "relatively stable" load of meaning (something that, according to Derrida, allows the existence of stable determinations of a text's *vouloir-dire*, as that of his "doubling commentary"). On the other hand, when Derrida needs to explain and justify how the deconstruction of this "doubling commentary" is made possible, he invokes a certain "*play* or *relative indetermination* that was able to open the space of my interpretation, for example, that of the word *supplément*" (italics added) ("Afterword" 144/"Postface" 266).[13] Thus, Derrida seems to "remain blind" to the consequences of the existence of this "play or relative indetermination" in relation to the possibility of "doubling commentary" itself. The "hesitation" that Derrida exhibits in regard to the exact role that "indeterminacy" plays within deconstructive reading – a hesitation imposed by the very prerequisites of deconstructive double reading – forces him into contradictory statements such as when, on the one hand, he explicitly refers to a certain "play or indetermination" in order to justify the possibility of deconstruction, while on the other hand, he claims that "I do not believe I have ever spoken of 'indeterminacy', whether in regard to 'meaning' or anything else. [...] *Différance* is not indeterminacy" ("Afterword" 148/"Postface" 273). However, in a third passage Derrida declares again that "[o]nce again, that was possible only if a non-self-identity, a *différance* and a *relative indeterminacy* opened the space of this violent history" (italics added) ("Afterword" 145/"Postface" 267). Thus, due to the paradoxical presuppositions of deconstructive reading, all Derrida's descriptions will have to oscillate uncertainly between the need for the attainment of stable determinations and the possibility of their dissemination.

Notes

1. See Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau", in *Blindness & Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., (London: Routledge, 1983), 102-141.

2. J. Claude Evans, *Strategies of Deconstruction: Derrida and the Myth of the Voice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

3. Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy", in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 61-172 / "Le Pharmacie de Platon", in *La Dissemination* (Paris: Éditions de Seul, Collection "Essais", 1972), 77-213.

4. In "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion", Derrida calls this initial reading that deconstruction enacts on the text "dominant interpretation" (*interprétation dominant*) ("Afterword" 143/"Postface" 265).

5. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2009, 1986[1]), 66.

6. *Ibid.*, 118.

7. *Ibid.*

8. John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 134.

9. Simon Glendinning, *On Being with Others: Heidegger-Derrida-Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 1999), 81.

10. Explaining the term "dissemination", in her "Translator's Preface" to *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chacravorty Spivak mentions the following: "Exploiting a false etymological kinship between semantics and semen, Derrida offers this version of textuality: A sowing that does not produce plants, but is simply infinitely repeated. A semination that is not insemination but dissemination, seed spilled in vain... Not an exact and controlled polysemy, but a proliferation of always different, always postponed meanings" (*OG*, lxxxviii). While Richard Harland adds: "*Dissemination* must be distinguished from *univocity* or the state of single meanings maintained by the signified in the writer's mind; but it must also be distinguished from *polysemy* or the state of multiple meanings maintained by the signified in the reader's mind. *Dissemination* is the state of perpetually unfulfilled meaning that exists in the absence of all signifieds" (Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*, New York: Methuen, 1987, 135).

PART ONE

DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTIVE *DOUBLE* READING

A General Overview of Part One

The aim of the first part of the present study is to describe the two motives or layers of reading that deconstruction enacts on the metaphysical text, to discuss their relationship with each other, and to examine their condition of possibility, particularly in relation to the issues of language and meaning in the first part of *Of Grammatology*. This will lead to attention being focused upon the character of Derrida's engagement with the question of language. The neglect of the particular character of this engagement is common to both a certain type of positive account of deconstruction, in which Derrida is taken to have effected a total revolution in the way in which we must read texts, and to a certain type of negative account of deconstruction, in which Derrida is taken to have overthrown all possible criteria for valid interpretation leaving an anarchical, textual "freeplay".

In addition to the tension arising from the relation between the *first* level of deconstructive reading (the "doubling commentary") and Derrida's radical view of linguistic meaning, the other areas of concern of this part relate to the question of whether the concentration of this *initial* reading on *authorial* or *textual intention* (i.e., a text's *vouloir-dire)* stands in apparent opposition to Derrida's *critique* of the centre, and whether his *unequivocal* reading of this intention stands in apparent opposition to his view of meaning as something *equivocal*.

In "Signature Event Context", commenting on John Austin's re-iterated references to the intention of the speaker – necessary, for example, to determine a speaker's sincerity and seriousness – as a condition for the success of a speech-act, Derrida asserts that the speaker's intention is a condition whose fulfilment nei-ther the speaker nor his auditor can know with certainty and one that cannot control or "master" the play of meaning. Derrida's conclusion is that there can be no "communication", as he puts it, "that is unique, univocal, rigorously controllable, and transmit-table", and no way of achieving certainty about the "purity", in the sense of "the absolutely singular uniqueness of a speech act" (*LI* 2, 14, 17/*LInc* 18, 39, 44). Derrida makes this claim in order to assert that since no meanings are *absolutely* certain and stable, then all meanings are unstable and "undecidable". Semantic communi-cation, or the successful achievement of a performative or other speech-act, is indeed an "effect"; but it is, he says, "only an effect", and as such incapable of arresting the dispersal of signification into "a *dissemination* irreducible to *polysemy* (*LI* 2, 19, 20-21/*LInc* 8, 47, 50). Despite Derrida's claim that the meaning of a text is never exhausted by the intention of its author, the way in which decon-struction treats a text during the *first* reading is as if beneath all the text, runs a *unifying* essence known as "authorial intention" that can be determined *unequivocally*.

In practice, Derrida treats the text as if only one interpretation of authorial intention is possible. He never examines the possi-bility (without being theoretically able to preclude such a possi-bility) that other interpretations of authorial intention are also possible. The aim of this is to protect the effectiveness of decon-struction. If Derrida accepted, even potentially, that other inter-pretations of a text's *vouloir-dire* were possible, then he could not preclude the possibility that other, non-metaphysical determi-nations of a text's intentional meaning could be feasible, deter-

minations that would not thus be in dire need of deconstruction. In such a case, his whole "narrative" about "Western metaphysics", which is animated by the spirit of an *unequivocal* interpretation of the texts of the philosophical tradition, would lose much of its credibility. Moreover, if he allowed the possibility that other plausible interpretations could be equally possible, either metaphysical or not (although this is something that he could not know in advance), then the deconstruction of merely *one* interpretation out of this potential plethora of plausible interpretations would be only of limited significance and effectiveness.

The kind of certainty about a text's *vouloir-dire* that deconstruction requires is possible only if authorial meanings are pure, solid, "self-identical" facts that can be unimpeachably used to anchor the work. However, this way of conceiving meaning is in direct opposition to deconstruction, for which meanings are not stable and determinate; and the reason they are not is because they are the products of language, which is always elusive in some manner. An author's intention is itself a complex "text", which can be debated, translated and variously interpreted just like any other text ("Afterword" 143/"Postface" 265).

Derrida seems to share the prejudgment that philosophical texts, at least if *only* at an initial level, are integrated wholes, as if "the unity of the work resides in the author's all pervasive intention". However, there is, as Terry Eagleton remarks in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, "in fact, no reason why the author should not have had several mutually contradictory intentions, or why her intention may not have been somehow self-contradictory".[1] This is actually a possibility that Derrida does not consider at all. The way in which authorial intentions appear in texts does not necessarily form a consistent whole, and it may be unwise to rest upon this assumption too heavily, particularly if one speaks, as Derrida does, about intention as "only an effect". There is ab-

solutely no need to suppose that authorial or textual intention either does or should constitute harmonious wholes.

In this sense, Derrida's stance towards a text's authorial intention (i.e., its *vouloir-dire)* could be described as authoritarian and juridical: anything that cannot be herded inside the enclosure of 'probable' authorial meaning is brusquely expelled, and everything remaining within that enclosure is strictly subordinated to this single governing intention. Under such an approach, authorial "indeterminacies" are abolished to be replaced with a stable meaning. They must be "normalised". Such a "doubling commentary" of authorial or textual intention is obliged to render mutually coherent the greatest number of a work's elements. Hence, it would not be "exorbitant" to attribute to Derrida, in his treatment of authorial or textual intention, the same accusations he attributes to the metaphysical tradition concerning the way in which it treats texts as unified wholes.

In relation to the *second* motive or layer of deconstructive reading (i.e., the *critical* reading), Derrida's first move is to identify an interrelated set of binary oppositions in the metaphysical text. These seem to be genuinely exclusive oppositions, with a distinct, uncrossable boundary line between them. Regarding such linguistic oppositions, Derrida makes a radical claim: that the seeming boundary between each pair of these terms dissolves into what he calls an inevitable "structure of chiasmus"; that, as a result, there is a constant slipping of entities across borders into their opposites to effect a perpetual reversal of properties and that this "crossover" is forced on the reader by a "residue" of meaning within the text itself.

The differential "play" of meaning precludes, according to Derrida, the description of *equivocal* concepts (as the *pharmakon* in Plato or the *supplement* in Rousseau) or binary oppositions (as that of internal/external) from *only* one of their signifying poles. Every

time a metaphysical thinker attempts to use an *equivocal* term or a binary opposition in one of its two senses, sooner or later, due to the "differential" constitution of opposites, the other meaning also, paradoxically, comes to the fore despite the intentions of the writer. The principle of "différance" is presented as working by itself tirelessly in the texts of philosophical tradition against their author's explicit intentions. In this manner, a philosopher's views do not have to be refuted by another philosopher; they are refuted by language itself.

CHAPTER ONE
DECONSTRUCTIVE READING AS *DOUBLE* READING

A. Deconstructive Reading as a *Double* Reading in General

In "The Exorbitant. Question of Method", Derrida notes that deconstructive reading situates itself in the gap between what the author intends or wants to say (their "vouloir-dire"), that is, between what they "command" within their texts and what they do not "command", that is, what takes place in their text without their will. This distance, fissure or opening is something that deconstructive reading must "produce":

> [...] reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical reading should *produce*. (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227)

Such a structure or relation cannot be produced by a "respectful", reproductive, doubling or self-effacing commentary that follows the conscious choices of its author, since, this would concentrate, to the extent that it is feasible, solely on one side of the relation, that of the conscious intentionality:

> To produce this signifying structure [*structure signifiante*] obviously cannot consist of reproducing, by the effaced

> and respectful doubling of commentary, the conscious,
> voluntary, intentional relationship that the writer insti-
> tutes in his exchanges with the history to which he be-
> longs thanks to the element of language [*langue*]. (*OG*
> 172/*DLG* 227)

But, at this point, Derrida says, and this is the part that is over-
looked by his critics (and very often by his admirers):

> This moment of doubling commentary [*commentaire re-*
> *doublant*] should no doubt have its place in a critical read-
> ing. Without recognizing and respecting all its classical
> exigencies, which is not easy and requires all the instru-
> ments of traditional criticism, critical production would
> risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself
> to say almost anything. (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227)

Such a classical exigency, Derrida states, provides "guardrails", pa-
rameters, horizons within which interpretation takes its first step.
And this standard reading and understanding, though it consti-
tutes only an initial "stage", is indispensable for the deconstructive
process. We can establish the relation between what the author
commands and what she does not command if we first grasp
what the author says, or better, what is said in the text.

The traditional methods of textual exigency should not be set
aside, but, these methods have only a negative value; they are
"guardrails" that provide the basic parameters. If such "guardrails"
are enforced absolutely, they will paralyse reading and it will be
rendered a mere means of promoting ready-made results. It will
not lead us to a new area: "[...] this indispensable guardrail has al-
ways only *protected*, it has never *opened* a reading" (*OG* 172/*DLG*
227). Therefore, as John D. Caputo notes: "[...] the only way to be
really loyal to a tradition, that is, to keep it alive, is not to be too
loyal, too reproductive; the only way to conserve a tradition is not
to be a conservative."[2] Critical reading should really lead some-

where new; it must open new perspectives in the text which is being read, and not merely double or repeat it "respectfully". It must be "exorbitant" (*OG* 176/*DLG* 231-232); and in order to be "exorbitant", it must be, in a sense disrespectful. Therefore, the reading operation of deconstruction while it contains the recuperation of what is said in the text, it exceeds it in a certain way – but not in a purely arbitrary manner. In the case of deconstructive reading, to read otherwise means, going *through* the classical practice and never abandoning it, to discover what it omits, forgets, excludes, expels, marginalizes, rejects, ignores, dismisses, disregards, reduces, takes lightly, or does not consider seriously enough.

In this sense, the deconstructive "transgression" of traditional reading does not flow from contingent, accidental choice – as in the case of "great professors or representatives of prestigious institutions" who, when they refer to deconstruction, as Derrida complains,

> [...] lose all sense of proportion and control; on such occasions they forget the principles that they claim to defend in their work and suddenly begin to heap insults, to say whatever comes into their heads on the subject of texts that they obviously have never opened or that they have encountered through a mediocre journalism that in other circumstances they would pretend to scorn.[3]

The invention of the other requires, firstly, the conventions of the same. Transgression is a controlled contravention or invention which requires the discipline of an already existing frame or horizon to transgress, something that explains why Derrida describes deconstruction as "a double gesture, a double science, a double writing" (*MP* 329/*M* 329).

In the essay entitled "Khôra", Derrida distinguishes between the "philosophy" of Plato and the "text", a distinction that is equiv-

alent to the distinction between dominant-reproductive and transgressive-productive readings of Plato. The "philosophy" of Plato, Derrida says, is an "abstraction" and a simplification, while the "text" from which it has been excised is complex and heterogeneous, a multiplicity of innumerable threads and layers. The text produces numerous "effects" — semantic and syntactic, constantive and performative, stylistic and rhetorical, etc. — of which, only *one* is its "philosophical content". Platonism is an artifice — but not an arbitrary one — construed by cutting and pasting, trimming Plato's text neatly around the borders, creating the safe, sterilised, refined "effect" that is called the "philosophy" of Plato:

> This will be called Platonism or the philosophy of Plato, which is neither arbitrary nor illegitimate, since a certain force of thetic abstraction at work in the heterogeneous text of Plato can recommend one to do so. It works and presents itself precisely under the name of philosophy. [...] "Platonism" is thus certainly one of the effects of the text signed by Plato, for a long time, and for necessary reasons, the dominant effect, but this effect is always turned back against the text. (*ON* 120/*Khôra* 81-82)

The "philosophy" of Plato, "which one has extracted by artifice, misprision, and abstraction from the text, torn out of the written fiction of 'Plato'" and which is a sum total of "positions", "philosophemes", thematic philosophical assertions, "will be extended over all the folds of the text, of its ruses, overdeterminations, and reserves, which the abstraction will come to cover up and dissimulate" (*ON* 119-120/*Khôra* 81). Philosophy is turned thus into an instrument of surveillance and control, "dominating, according to a mode which is precisely all of philosophy, other motifs of thought which are also at work in the text" (*ON* 120/*Khôra* 82).

To privilege the "philosophy" of Plato is to make the logic of the argument, the demonstrable true or false claims, the centre

of reading, dismissing anything else to the periphery as mere rhetoric, letting, in this way, the logic guide the letter. In this "logocentric" hegemony of "philosophy", in this assemblance of "positions", the text is "neutralised", "numbed, self-destructed or dissimulated", though these heterogeneous forces still continue to resist and provoke in their repressed and curbed form:

> The forces that are thus inhibited continue to maintain a certain disorder, some potential incoherence, and some heterogeneity in the organization of the theses. They introduce parasitism into it, and clandestinely, ventriloquism, and, above all, a general tone of denial, which one can learn to perceive by exercising one's ear or one's eye on it. (*ON* 121/*Khôra* 84)

Yet, the idea behind deconstructive reading is not to let the first, dominant reading be determinate; that is, maintain and amplify the "tension" between the "dominant", classical reading and the anomalies that circulate inside the text which will eventually open up the system. Derrida thinks that "[e]ven among the philosophers associated with the most canonical tradition", as, for example, Plato, who in a certain sense, sets the scene for and defines the terms of the canon, "the possibilities of rupture are always waiting to be effected." A metaphysical text is *never* "homogeneous", "self-identical", or "never totally governed by 'metaphysical assumptions'". Radical motifs can always be detected and released:

> It can always be shown (I have tried to do so, for example, in relation to the *Khôra* of the *Timaeus)* that the most radically deconstructive motifs are at work "in", what is called the Platonic, Cartesian, Kantian text. A text is never totally governed by "metaphysical assumptions." [...] In "each case" (and the identification of the "case," of singularity, of the signature or corpus is already a problem)

> there is a domination, a dominant, of the metaphysical
> model, and then there are counterforces which threaten
> or undermine this authority. These forces of "ruin" are not
> negative, they participate in the productive or instituting
> force of the very thing they seem to be tormenting.[4]

Deconstructive reading enacts a *double* reading. It, therefore, contains both a "dominant", reproductive reading and a "transgressive", productive reading. These two readings are distinguishable, even if they are irreconcilable, sometimes concurrent and always interdependent. The *first*, classical, reading finds a passage "lisible" and understandable, and reconstructs, according to a procedure that the deconstructive reader shares with common readers, the *determinate* meaning of the passage read. The *second* reading, which Derrida calls a "critical reading" or an "active interpretation", goes on to *disseminate* the meanings it has already construed. In the *Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, Simon Critchley summarises the "double reading" of deconstructive reading, as follows:

> What takes place in deconstruction is reading; and I shall
> argue, what distinguishes deconstruction as a textual
> practice is *double reading* – that is to say, a reading that interlaces at least two motifs or layers of reading, most
> often by first repeating what Derrida calls "the dominant
> interpretation" (*LI* 265/*Litr* 143) of a text in the guise of a
> commentary and second, within and through this repetition, leaving the order of commentary and opening a
> text up to the blind spots or ellipses within the dominant
> interpretation.[5]

In an analogous way, Michael Naas describes deconstructive reading as *double* reading[6] in the following way:

> Already in some of his earliest texts from the 1960s, Derrida spoke of the necessity of a double reading of texts

> or of a double gesture with regard to them. To be brief
> and schematic, the first gesture would consist of reading
> within the rules and terms established by the text; it
> would consist of asking what the author means or meant
> in the most traditional and rigorous way possible [...]. The
> second reading in a deconstructive approach, which is
> carried out always in conjunction with the first, seeks
> what is not apparent in a text, what is not explicitly ar-
> gued for, what is at the limits of the text. One thus looks
> on the periphery of the text – sometimes, quite literally,
> in notes or margins, asides, examples, or slips – in an at-
> tempt to show that something else is at work in the text,
> something that was not and could not be captured by its
> logic, brought into its system, made present on the page
> or in the argument.[7]

Derrida accounts for the possibility of reading by attributing to
différance the production of an "effect" in language of a certain
presence – not a "real" presence or free standing existence, but
one which is simply a "function" of the differential play – as well
as the production of all the other "effects" on which the common
practice of reading depends including the "effects" of a conscious
intention and a determinate meaning or reference (see, for ex-
ample, *Ll* 19/*Llnc* 47). In this way, in his essay "Différance", Derrida
explains: "[...] the metaphysical text is *understood*; it is still read-
able, and remains to be read" (*MP* 25/*M* 24). This standard reading
and understanding, though only an initial "stage", is indispensa-
ble to the process of deconstruction.

The first reading, or the "doubling commentary" proceeds in
a way that is compatible with the theories of many current
philosophers that communication depends on our inheritance of
a shared language and shared linguistic practices or conventions,
and that when, by applying the practice we share with a writer,
we have recognised what they intended to say, then we have un-

derstood them correctly. Many of these philosophers also agree with Derrida that there is no extra-linguistic non-conventional foundation for our linguistic practice which certifies its rules and their application and guarantees the correctness of a reader's interpretation, when we have exhausted appeals to shared, though contingent, linguistic and social conventions and practices. Derrida's radical innovation does not, therefore, consist in his claim that no such foundation exists (i.e., "there is nothing outside the text" *OG* 172/*DLG* 227), but in his further claim that such a foundation, though non-existent, is nevertheless indispensable, and that in its absence the continuing "dissemination" of construed meanings into "undecidability" is endless.

In accordance with this view, Derrida designates this first reading – the determinate construal of the "legibility" of a text – as no more than a "strategic" phase which, though indispensable, remains "provisional" to a further "critical", or deconstructive reading (*OG* 108, 163/*DLG* 148, 214)[8]. One of Derrida's moves in this critical reading is to identify strata or "strands" in a text which, *when read determinately*, turn out to be mutually contradictory. It is a usual practice for commentators, of course, to find certain passages in a texts or a corpus of texts to be *incoherent* or *contradictory,* but this is taken as a logical flaw or else as assimilable to an overall direction of a philosopher's thinking, Derrida, however, regards such self-contradictions not as logical mistakes which an author could have avoided, but as *inescapable* features of *all* Western philosophical texts since all rely on a fixed logocentric ground, yet are purely conventional and differential in their economy. In his "critical" reading of texts, Derrida asserts that their *determinate* readings always leave an *inescapable* and *ungovernable* "excess" or "surplus" of signification, which is both the index and the result of the fact that "the writer writes *in* a language [*langue*] and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227).

In the process of his "critical" or "transgressive" reading, Derrida identifies certain features of a philosophical text that *inescapably* "exceed" the metaphysical conceptuality that the writer indented to assert. Some of those features are:

1. The use of key equivocations that cannot be used to specify one meaning without *necessarily* involving the opposed meaning. In Rousseau's theory of language, for example, the argument turns on the equivocal word "supplement" (which means *both* something added to what is itself complete *and* something required to complete what is insufficient). In reading other authors, Derrida identifies other *equivocal* words (words such as *pharmakon* and *hymen)* that display the same "disobedience" as the "supplement" in Rousseau.

2. The presumed reliance of a text on a logical argument which turns out to involve non-logical, "rhetorical" moves. In texts such as, for example, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy",[9] Derrida undertakes to show that metaphysics is inescapably metaphorics, and that the founding metaphors of philosophy are irreducible. All attempts to specify the literal meaning, in implicit opposition to which a metaphor is identified as a metaphoric, and all attempts to translate a metaphor into the literal meaning for which it is held to be a merely convenient substitute, are *incoherent* and *self-defeating*, especially since the very distinction between metaphoric and literal meaning is a product of the philosophical system it purports to found.

3. The unavoidable use in a text of what are presumed to be exclusive oppositions. Derrida undertakes to undermine such binary oppositions by showing that their boundaries are constantly transgressed, in that each of the terms crosses over into the domain of its opposite term. The most prominent of the unsustainable oppositions to which Derrida draws our attention is that of inside/outside, or internal/external, as applied to what is within or outside the mind, or the system of linguistic signs, or the text.

Derrida's view of the impossibility of the distinction between what is inside or outside a text has an especially important impact on the way he conceives a text and the practice of reading it. In "Living On: *Border Lines*", Derrida states that "what used to be called a text" has "boundaries", which were thought to demarcate "the supposed end and the beginning of a work, the unity of a corpus, the title, the margins, the signatures, the referential realm of the frame, and so forth." Such a designation of a text, however, applies only "if we accept the entire conventional system of legalities that organizes, in literature, the framed unity of the corpus (binding, frame, unity of the title, unity of the author's name, unity of the contract, registration of copyright, etc.)".[10] What has happened, "if it has happened," according to Derrida, is

> […] a sort of overrun [*debordement*] that spoils all these boundaries and divisions and forces us to extend the accredited concept, the dominant notion of a "text," of what I still call a "text," for strategic reasons, in part – a "text" that is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces.[11]

Derrida's deconstructive "double" reading actually incorporates both notions of the text, both the traditional and the transgressive one, thereby, producing two texts. One is the text, such as Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, which he reads by accepting, in a provisional way, the standard conventions and legalities that establish as its boundaries the opening and closing lines of its printed form. The second text "overruns all the limits assigned to" the first text, "all the limits, everything that was to be set up in opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not, every field of reference – to body or mind, conscious or unconscious, politics, economics, and so forth.)"[12]

This second text is no longer "a finished corpus of writing" by a particular author, but a text as an aspect of textuality in general. The second text, however, does not simply annul the constraints and borders that function in the reading of the first text, for though it transgresses all limits attached to the first text, it does so not by "submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex."[13]

This last quotation brings out what is overlooked by commentators who claim that Derrida's emphasis on "freeplay" in language is equivalent to "anything goes" in interpretation. Derrida repeatedly emphasises that a "critical" or deconstructive reading does not cancel the role of intention and of the other conventions and legalities that operate in a determinate reading of a limited text, but merely "reinscribes" them so as to reveal their status as no more than "effects" of the differential play. For example, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida says that Rousseau's "declared intention is not annulled [...] but rather *inscribed* within a system it no longer dominates" (*OG* 264/*DLG* 345). In a similar manner, in *Signature Event Context*, he notes: "In [a differential typology of forms of iteration], the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance [*l'énonciation*]" (*LI* 18/*LInc* 45-46).

The deliberate anomaly of Derrida's "double" interpretive procedure, however, is apparent. He cannot demonstrate the impossibility of a standard reading except by going through the stage of manifesting its possibility; a text must be read determinately in order to be disseminated into an "undecidability" that never breaks completely free of its initial determination; deconstruction can only subvert the meanings of a text that has always already been construed. Even if a reader has been persuaded that Derrida has truly discovered a force in language (seemingly un-

suspected, or at least unexploited, before Nietzsche) which forces him to pass beyond all the constraints and borders of standard reading, they have no option except to begin by construing a text, including Derrida's own text.

B. Description *Versus* Declaration

1. *Gesture Against Statement*

In his early texts, Derrida organises his deconstructive double readings around the distinction between a text's intended meaning (its *vouloir dire)* and the text itself. The text is stratified, according to Derrida, into *declarative* and *descriptive* layers: the *declarative* relates to "what the author wants to say", while the *descriptive* relates to what escapes authorial intention. This distinction can also be expressed in other critical languages as the distinction between *programmatic intention* (what the author sets out to say) and the *operative intention* (what the text finally says). This stratification then, in turn, relates to the deconstructive text itself, which is accordingly divided into an explicative, and a *deconstructive* phase, whereby a text's authorial intention or its dominant interpretation is first reconstructed and then deconstructed through what has escaped its control.

Of Grammatology is Derrida's text where the use of the opposition between what the author wanted to say and what the author actually says as a critical instrument plays the most important role. In this text, Derrida considered it necessary to incorporate authorial intention to his reading in the most visible way, and to widen the gap between *meaning-to-say* (*vouloir dire*) and *saying*. Rousseau *declares* something, but Rousseau *describes* something else: this pattern dominates the text from "The Place of the *Essay*" onwards. The inflexible insistence with which the distinction is used is constantly apparent. As Sean Burke remarks: "Every time Rousseau attempts to set up a priority, whether it is that of speech over writing, nature over culture, melody over harmony, literal over figural meaning, the languages of the South over those of the North – is seen to be expressly contradicted in

his text".[14] The most often strategy that Derrida uses in *Of Grammatology* to open the gap between *gesture* and *statement* is to show that the author's presuppositions logically entail conclusions at odds with the manifestly intended conclusion:

> *Articulation is the becoming-writing of language*. Rousseau, who *would like to say* [*voudrait dire*] that this becoming-writing *comes upon the origin unexpectedly*, relies on it, follows it, *describes in fact* [*décrits en fait*] the way in which that *becoming-writing comes upon the origin unexpectedly*, happens from the origin. The becoming-writing of language [*langage*] is the becoming-language of language. He *declares* [*déclare*] what he *wishes to say* [*veut dire*], that is to say that articulation and writing are a post-originary malady of language [*langue*]; he says or *describes* that which he *does not wish to say* [il dit ou *décrit* ce qu'il *ne veut pas dire*]: articulation and therefore the space of writing operates at the origin of language [*langage*]. (*OG* 249/*DLG* 325-326)

or

> Rousseau *wanted* [*voudrait*] the opposition between southern and northern to place a *natural* frontier between many types of languages. However, what he *describes* [*décrit*] forbids us to think this. [...] Thus the languages of the north are *on the whole* languages of need, the languages of the south, to which Rousseau devotes ten times the space in his description, are *on the whole* languages of passion. But this *description* does not prevent Rousseau from *declaring* that the one group is born of passion, the other of need [...]. (*OG* 236-237/*DLG* 310)

or

> We shall see that Rousseau's entire text *describes* origin as the beginning of the end, as inaugural decadence. Yet,

> in spite of that description, the text twists about in a sort
> of oblique effort to act *as if* degeneration were not al-
> ready prescribed in the genesis, and as if evil *happened*
> *upon* a good origin. (*OG* 216/*DLG* 284)

Despite the author's efforts to gain control, their text plunges into insoluble contradictions. The text escapes from its author's control: "contradictions and impasses emerge which problematise and finally overhaul its thesis".[15]

Derrida does not always adhere consistently to this model. In many instances, the procedure that his reading follows proposes to restore the first intention against reductive interpretations placed upon it by the critical tradition or even the author themselves. This is the form that Derrida's arguments take in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, when he accuses Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche of betraying the fertile counter-metaphysical directions of the Nietzschean project.[16] According to the same principle, Derrida also argues in *Violence and Metaphysics*, that Emmanuel Levinas' reading of Heidegger falsifies the original Heideggerian intent even, and especially as it claims to move beyond the Heideggerian destruction.[17] Similarly, Derrida's essay "The Ends of Man" does not constitute an opposition to the thought of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, but is rather a carefully executed liberation of their thought from the overly anthropological readings of both humanists like Sartre, who resorted to them in order to elicit a justification for his own existential humanism, and anti-humanists whose naive humanistic interpretations of their work made it all the easier to dismiss the phenomenological project.[18]

In other cases, as Sean Burke notes, when Derrida refers to thinkers whose aims are largely consistent with deconstruction – Nietzsche, Freud, Levinas or Heidegger – what is put forward "is not at all the deconstruction of the primary intent but its radicalisation, the interrogation not so much of what they wanted to say

as what they failed to say".[19] Deconstruction, in this case will lead the text beyond itself, not in the interest of transcending its authorial intent, but in order to show how it failed to pursue its most radical directions. As one example amongst many, Derrida writes of Freud's notion of the unconscious trace:

> Freud's notion of the trace must be radicalised and extracted from the metaphysics which still retains it. [...] Such a radicalisation of the thought of the trace [...] would be fruitful not only in the deconstruction of logo-centrism, but in a kind of reflection exercised more positively at different levels of writing in general.[20]

In such a case, Derrida's work is opposing Freud, Heidegger or Levinas in those places where Freud, Heidegger or Levinas are insufficiently Freudian, Heideggerian or Levinasian, taking the further step on the counter-metaphysical pathways opened by the Freudian, the Heideggerian or the Levinasian project.[21] For example, in "Violence and Metaphysics", Derrida argues that "Levinas is resigned to betraying his own intentions in his philosophical discourse" (*WD* 151/*ED* 224).

However, the division of the text into a *declarative* and a *descriptive* layer often seems forced, sometimes arbitrary, and even insecure. As Sean Burke critically remarks:

> Rather than allow the reading to progress at its own pace, Derrida takes every conceivable opportunity to remind us that Rousseau is not saying what he wants to say, that what the *Grammatology* is saying is entirely irreducible to the intentional structure of the *Essay*. And this reminder is obsessively italicised, well beyond the point at which it has become stupefying clear. Furthermore, there are times at which Derrida exaggerates the distinction, and not only by his critical inventiveness in teasing out hidden textual implications, but also via a

> somewhat rigid and constraining interpretation of what
> Rousseau actually means to say. [...] the text must always
> and everywhere be interpreted with an ungenerous and
> intractable literality. Rousseau's failure to perceive the
> supplementary threadwork in his texts must be absolute,
> never partial, and the *Grammatology* never once ques-
> tions the status of its ascription to Rousseau of such reg-
> imented and unilinear designs.[22]

In "No More Stories, Good or Bad; de Man's Criticisms of Derrida on Rousseau", Robert Bernasconi, an advocate of deconstruction, does not hesitate to adopt Paul de Man's characterisation of Derrida as an "ungracious" reader: "De Man is surely correct when he portrays Derrida as an ungenerous reader of Rousseau – or to use de Man's own term, an 'ungracious' reader."[23] For Bernasconi, in order to be able to support the distinction between "what Rousseau wants to say" and "what Rousseau actually says", Derrida "must refuse to attribute to 'what Rousseau wants to say' statements that Rousseau clearly meant. In other words, there are passages which express Rousseau's intentions, but which Derrida finds obliged to refer simply to what Rousseau's 'says without saying'".[24]

2. Derrida and Authorial Intention

Although Derrida has been viewed as denying the role of intention altogether, his view about intention is "more subtle, as it is evident from his exchange with the American Speech Act theorist, John Searle."[25] In his paper "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida" (1977),[26] Searle, as a consequence, possibly, of his absolutist position on intention, claimed that from Derrida's

text on Austin entitled "Signature Event Context" (1972)[27] we must infer that intentionality is "entirely absent from written communication".[28] However, if, as Derrida prompts us, we return to "Signature Event Context", we find something quite different. There, as David Couzens Hoy notes, "Derrida says that he does not wish to get rid of the concept of intention, but only to give it a different place, a less privileged one".[29] Intention will no longer dominate the meaning of a work:

> Rather than oppose citation or iteration to the non-iteration of an event, one ought to construct a differential typology of forms of iteration, assuming that such a project is tenable and can result in an exhaustive program [...]. In such a typology, the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance. (*LI* 18/*LInc* 45-46)

In the same text, Derrida also claims that:

> For a writing to be a writing it must continue to "act" and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written in his name. (*LI* 8/*LInc* 28-29)

In response, Searle attributes to Derrida the claim that *intentionality* is supposedly "absent" from writing:

> It seems to me quite plain that the argument that the author and indented receiver may be dead and the context unknown or forgotten does not in the least show that intentionality is absent from written communication; on

the contrary, intentionality plays exactly the same role in written as in spoken communication.[30]

Accusing Searle of misinterpretation, Derrida replied in "Limited Inc abc…" (1977)[31] that nowhere does "Signature Event Context" argued that "intentionality is absent from written communication". As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes, "Derrida's problem with classical concepts of intentionality is that they seek to actualize and totalize intentionality into self-presence and self-possession. It is this *telos* of the concept of intentionality that he is calling into question".[32] Against Searle, Derrida denies that he ever spoke in "Signature Event Context" against intentionality:

> I must first recall that *at no time* does *Sec* invoke the *absence*, pure and simple, of intentionality. Nor is there any break, simple or radical, with intentionality. What the text questions is not intention or intentionality but their *telos*, which orients and organizes the movement and the possibility of a fulfilment, realization, and *actualization* in a plenitude that would be *present* to identical with itself. (*LI* 56/*LInc* 110)

In his book *Derrida*, Christopher Norris explicates Derrida's position on the role of intention in reading as follows:

> Derrida is far from denying that we do require at least some *presumed* general grasp of an author's purpose in order to read any text whatsoever. Interpretation, as he puts it, "operates *a fortiori* within the hypothesis that I fully understand what the author meant to say, providing he said what he meant" (*LI* 61/*LInc* 119). But this is an empirical fact about the psychology of reader-response and *not* any kind of guarantee – such as speech-act theory would claim to provide – that understanding must indeed have taken place. Hence, Derrida's insistence that the "iterability" of speech acts is a function necessarily

> freed from all dependence on the truth of our intention-
> alist hypotheses. Any *theory* will have to get along in the
> end "without in itself implying either that I fully under-
> stand what the other says, writes, meant to say or write,
> or even that he intended to say or write *in full* what re-
> mains to be read, or above all that any adequation need
> obtain between what he consciously intended, what he
> did, and what I do while 'reading'" (*LI* 61/*LInc* 119).[33]

Derrida's critique of intentionality does not, however, mean that intentionality must be "effaced or denied" as Searle claims. As we have already seen, in "Signature Event Context", Derrida insisted that "the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance [*l'énonciation*]" (*LI* 18/*LInc* 45-46).

   This, rather than disputing the actuality or necessity of intention, places into question the absolutely determinative hegemony of intention over the communicative act. Intention is to be recognised, and respected, but on condition that we accept that its structures will not be fully and ideally identical with what is said or written, that it is not always and everywhere completely adequate to the communicative act. There will be times at which language resists, or wanders away from the speaker's or author's determined meaning. Consequently, though the dominion of intention over the textual process is to be rigorously refused, intention itself is not, thereby, cancelled but rather launched within a broader signifying process. Intention is within signification, a powerful and necessary agency, but it does not command it in the manner of an organising *telos*, or a transcendental subjectivity. That Searle should so misread Derrida on this issue is perhaps explicable in terms of the common mistake by which the denial of absolute authority to a category is confused with that category's total rejection.

Derrida's medial position on intention coincides with the practice of many of his deconstructive readings. In *Of Grammatology,* Derrida states that "Rousseau's discourse lets itself be constrained by a complexity which always has the form of the supplement of or from the origin. His declared intention is not annulled by this but rather *inscribed* within a system which it no longer dominates" (*OG* 264/*DLG* 345). Derrida is, thus, not opposing authorial intention in the classical manner of New Critics who assert that authorial intention is not only unknowable but irrelevant for reading. On the contrary, if authorial intentions are to be deconstructed, it must be accepted that they are of primary significance for deconstructive reading. It should also be assumed that authorial intentions are recognisable. The reader-critic must assume that they have the clearest picture of what the author wanted to say if the work of deconstruction is to get underway. It is only in terms of this reconstruction that the reader-critic can begin to separate what belongs to authorial control from what eludes or unsettles it. Accordingly, deconstructive reading is following authorial intention up to the point at which it encounters resistance within the text itself; from this position the resistance can then be timed back against the author to show that their text differs from itself, that what they wished to say does not dominate what the text says, but is rather inscribed within the larger signifying structure. This is stated in *Of Grammatology* with perfect transparency:

> [...] the writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not com-

mand of the patterns of the language that he uses. (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227)

3. From the Concept of Intention to "Intentional Effect"

Authorial Intention does not Govern Absolutely a Text's Meaning. Derrida thus represents an interesting compromise between intentionalist and anti-intentionalist views, since he neither identifies authorial intention with the entirety of textual effects (as the neopragmatists Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels[34]) nor moves to the other extreme of denying the necessity of authorial intention as a factor in generating and shaping what is written. Derrida's work cannot be construed as anti-intentionalist. However, the Derridian position can be seen as a practice of reading in which the critic sees as their responsibility to turn the text against its author's programmatic intentions, thus establishing an opposition between the text and its author, an opposition that can be extended to that between the reader and author. Moreover, as part of the same movement, the author is estranged from a specifically demarcated area of their text, for whilst the authority of the author is accepted over the *declarative* aspect of what they write, their intentions have no dominance over the *descriptions* they make.

Deconstruction, therefore, participates, in a certain sense, in the movement against the author, but no longer in the mode of their death or their disappearance. The author is opposed but not dismissed. This opposition is based on the condition that the critic can produce the text as a broader "signifying structure" within which the author's determining will is inscribed as only one factor amongst others. It is no longer a question of a reading seeking to

render itself adequate to the author's intentions, but of a reading in which their intentions will be secondary and subordinate to the text they are inscribed in. This is a profound reversal. The reader-critic establishes a constant priority over the author. In this peculiar scene of criticism the reader-critic establishes themselves as a better reader of the text than its author. They claim for themselves a better control over a text's language than its author. However, Derrida does not explain the reason for this perspicacity attributed to the reader-critic and denied to author. He keeps silent about his own mysterious powers, which allow him to retain the lucidity of his vision at those points at which the author remains totally "blind".

Authorial Intention is not Identical with the Intention of the Actual Historical Author. Authorial intention is not something prior to the text which determines its meaning, but rather, a significant organising structure that is identifiable in those readings in which it is possible to distinguish an explicitly articulated argument from its subversive other. In order to get rid of the undesirable consequences of the traditional concept of intention, Derrida, in *Limited Inc,* refers to the necessity of "the substitution of [...] intentional effect for intention" (*LI* 66/*LInc* 128). When Derrida refers to an intended argument he does not mean an intended meaning already formed in an author's consciousness, prior to any language, always faithfully transcribed into a text. Authorial intention is not used in Derrida's reading practices as something prior to or separable from the text in which it is inscribed. It is not exterior to the text. An author's intended meaning is unable to be distinguished from the language and the text in which they are formulated. For Derrida, this decentring of authorial intention flows from an insistence to prevent it from assuming the role of a "transcendental signified".

Authorial intention should be comprehended neither as a meta-interpretive condition of possibility for textual interpretation nor a meta-interpretive standard for judging truth in interpretation. Authorial intention is itself an interpretation. The interpretation of a text's authorial intention is itself the interpretation of an interpretation. It is the interpretation of what is interpreted to be a text's authorial intention. If we borrow Derrida's phenomenological language from his explication of a text's genealogical representation, it could be said that the self-representation of authorial intentions is itself already the representation of a self-representation; the representation of a self-constructed self-representation as its own source and its own presence. Derrida thus argues in "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion" that reading as a "'doubling commentary' is not a moment of simple reflexive recording that would transcribe the originary and true layer of a text's intentional meaning, a meaning that is univocal and self-identical, a layer upon which or after which active interpretation would finally begin" ("Afterword" 143/"Postface" 265).

As such, authorial intention does not escape the turbulence of language: "Intention is *a priori* (at once) *différante:* differing and deferring, in its inception" (*LI* 56/*LInc* 111). There is nothing original about this "self-representation of a representation". Its origin has always already been lost: "And if a text always gives itself a certain representation of its own roots, those roots live only by representation, by never touching the soil, so to speak." And although this is something, as Derrida adds, "which undoubtedly destroys their *radical essence*, but not the necessity of their *racinating function*" (*OG* 110/*DLG* 150). In this sense, authorial intention is a certain interpretative product or effect; it comes about as the quintessence of critical readings which, however, are always transcended by the text. In *Of Grammatology*, authorial intention is identified with a text's *explicit argument* as it discloses itself through "doubling

commentary". Authorial intention is, thus, just another name for a text's explicit argument.

Concentrating upon authorial intention is not, for Derrida, merely a procedural strategy of reading. It is also a very real constraint placed upon critical reading by its need to make intelligible *sense* of certain texts which undeniably ask to be read in certain ways:

> To recognize and respect all its [of doubling commentary's] classical exigencies is not easy and requires all the instruments of traditional criticism. Without this recognition and this respect, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything. (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227)

Therefore, what is at issue is not the refusal of a role for intention in reading, but the belief that texts must always point back to their source in a moment of pure, selfauthorised meaning: "*The security with which the commentary considers the self identity of the text [...] goes hand in hand with the tranquil assurance that leaps over the text toward its presumed content, in the direction of the pure signified*" (*OG* 173/*DLG* 228). Language is intentional through and through, but not in the sense that its meaning either could or should be totally confined to what the author (supposedly) intended.

Derrida has frequently protested that certain parts of his work have been misinterpreted, implying that there is in them an intended argument that has been misunderstood. When he accuses his fellow critics of showing disrespect for a text's intended argument, he obviously does not refer to what he intended when he was writing the text in question, but to "effects of intention" in the form of the text's explicit argument that comes forth through interpretation. If there was no possibility of recognising those "effects of intention", it would be absurd to talk about misinterpre-

tation, misunderstanding or even of understanding. From the perspective of such recognition playful reading alone would be inappropriate. In explaining his reading strategy in "Violence and Metaphysics", Derrida refuses to sacrifice the history of Levinas' thought and works to thematic criticism, but he also refuses to sacrifice "the self-coherent unity of intention [*l'unité fidèle à soi de l'intention*] to the becoming, which then would be no more than pure disorder" (*WD* 84/*ED* 125).

But how is such an intentional effect possible? No such intentional effect would be possible if the author did not command the language that they use at all. That "the writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate *absolutely*" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 221), does not preclude the writer from being able, to a certain extent, to say what they mean and, therefore, the reader from gaining some general grasp of their intention. He says "absolutely" and not "not at all". Derrida has defined the task of deconstructive reading as "always aim[ing] at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what *he commands* and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227). Derrida does not doubt that the writer has a certain "command", a certain *author*-ity over the language they use whose effects can be traced in reading.

The language of a text, by virtue of the ways it is constructed, provides its reader with certain "positions", certain vantage-points from which it can be interpreted. To understand a text, for Terry Eagleton, "means grasping its language as being 'oriented' towards the reader from a certain range of positions. In reading, we build a sense of what kind of effects this language is trying to achieve ('intention')."[35] This textual "author-position" is not identical with the intentions, attitudes and assumption of the actual historical author at the time of writing. Understanding these tex-

tual effects, assumptions, tactics and orientations is just to un-
derstand the intention of the work. Such tactics and assumptions
may not be mutually coherent: a text may offer several mutually
conflicting "author positions". And this is something that Derrida
seems not to take into consideration in his representation of a
text's intended meaning.

This operative notion of intention is also important to Derrida
for the description he offers of the logocentric era in general. He
initially detects an intentional affirmation of the priority of
speech over writing (a "phonologocentrism") in the totality of the
texts that comprise Western metaphysics in order then to subvert
their embeddedness in this background through the use of these
texts themselves.

4. The Unified Presence of an Absent Author

In "The Order of Discourse" (*L'ordre du discours*, 1970), Michel Fou-
cault treats the "author" as a point of control and delimitation of
discourse. By the notion of the "author", Foucault does not mean
the individual who has written a text, but a "principle of grouping
of discourses, conceived as the unity and origin of their meanings,
as the focus of their coherence."[36] The author's name is a form of
classification that groups together texts and differentiates these
texts from others. In addition to establishing certain relations be-
tween texts in an *oeuvre,* the author is posited as the guardian of
its conceptual coherence or its stylistic unity: "The author principle
limits this same element in chance [in discourse] by the play of an
identity which has the form of *individuality* and the *self* [*moi*]."[37]

Derrida seems to be in agreement with Foucault's critique of
the "author principle". In *Of Grammatology,* Derrida, for example,
maintains that

> The names of authors or of doctrines have here no sub-
> stantial value. They indicate neither identities nor causes.
> It would be frivolous to think that "Descartes," "Leibniz,"
> "Rousseau," "Hegel," etc., are names of authors, of the au-
> thors of movements or displacements that we thus des-
> ignate. The indicative value that we attribute to them is
> first the name of a problem. (*OG* 107/*DLG* 147-148)

The same statement is repeated in "The Double Session", where
Derrida argues: "*Inter Platonem et Mallarmatum,* between Plato
and Mallarme – whose proper names, it should be understood,
are not real references but indications for the sake of convenience
and initial analysis" (*D* 183/*DIS* 225).

However, not only in *Of Grammatology,* but in the vast majority
of his readings, Derrida patiently develops the pattern of an au-
thor's determinate meaning through full, unimpeded, access to
their *oeuvre.* In accordance with the deconstructive insistence that
no mode of writing has any necessary privilege over any other, the
oeuvre is extended to include letters, early manuscripts, notebook
entries, "immature" works, all of which inhabit the textual space
on an equal basis. Quite against his statements about the func-
tion of author names in his work, in a mode that seems to draw
its origin from the traditional function of the "author-principle"
that Foucault describes above, Derrida is to be found most often
arguing for the *continuity* and *inseparability* of an author's various
writings. For example, in "The Ends of Man", he resolutely resists
the idea that there is any "turn" in Heidegger's philosophy; while
he clears a continuous pathway between the two Freudian
topologies in "Freud and the Scene of Writing". The ascription of
continuous intentions to the authors he reads, together with the
ascription of a *determinable, univocal* meaning to those intentions,
is a general characteristic of Derrida's work.

5. Is Authorial Intention a Text's New Signifying Centre?

In "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", Derrida argues that metaphysics always attributed to structure a centre which was conceived as a "point of presence" or a "fixed origin":

> The function of this centre was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure - one cannot conceive of an unorganized structure — but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself. (*WD* 278-279/*ED* 409)

The metaphysical way of thinking structure is subject to the following paradox: the centre must be simultaneously *outside* structure — as its *arche* or its *sens transcendental* — to be able to ground it, and it must be *inside* structure, not only because the centre cannot be outside that of which is its centre, but also because otherwise this centre could not have any determinateness (i.e., a centre can have no determinateness outside a determinate structure). Derrida believes that this paradox is characteristic of a certain "desire", a desire which lurks behind all centralised systems:

> [...] it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurally. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong

> to the totality (is not a part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere.* The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure - although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the *episteme* as philosophy or science - is contradictorily coherent. And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire. (*WD* 279/*ED* 410)

But if there is no *arche,* or author-ity outside structure, and outside the play of "pure differences", then there is no meaning, no origin and, thus, also no purpose *beyond* what the structural context of certain assignments and references make possible. A centre is not in itself stable and independent of the process of structuring or textualising. A centre is woven of the same threads as the structure or the structured text. It is made of the same texture. Therefore, the centre as a principle or a woven pattern, which organises the texture of the structure/text, cannot be distinguished from the structure/text itself. As a consequence,

> it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse – provided we can agree on this word – that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or the transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of a transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (*WD* 280/*ED* 411)

Everything is structure or text; there is nothing outside structure or text (if structure and text is being taken in their generalised

sense) and every structure or text is an infinite play of differences. A structure or a text would be the totality of this differential play, but because this differential play knows no end, every structure or text is thus open. In Manfred Frank's words: "Every meaning, every signification, and every view of the world are in flux; nothing can escape the play of differences."[38] Therefore, there is no interpretation, whether it is an interpretation of Being, of the world or of a text, which would be universally and absolutely valid. In this sense, the process of a text's interpretation cannot be the attempt to find a self-contained and *absolutely* stable signification under the textual surface.[39] If the movement of a text's totalization no longer has any meaning,

> it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field – that is, language and a finite language – excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. [...] this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in absence – this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*. The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified. (*WD* 289/*ED* 423)

The idea of the text as a self-enclosed totality, as well as the idea of a binding or objective interpretation fails because structures are decentred, and a text without a centre cannot raise a "central meaning", namely, an interpretation which would go to the very heart of the text. If there is no centre in a text, then "the respective interpretation would have to *supplement* this lack of the text with something else, i.e., interpretation itself.[40] Describing Derrida's views on decentralised structure, Manfred Frank explains:

> Each interpretation, indeed, each use of signs, presents, as it were, a suggestion as to how one can replace the missing central meaning of the text and how one can determine it (provisionally, with reservations). Since the central meaning, however, is missing, interpretation is not so much a matter of *finding (Finden)* (finding presupposes the presence of something that can be found) as *inventing (Erfinden)*, i.e., a supplement, an addition to the text. This addition cannot be lasting, for it has no (objective) correlative in the text, it has no permanent place.[41]

Yet, if the effectiveness of deconstruction is, to a large extent, based on the attainment of valid and authoritative interpretations of a text's authorial intentions, then, what are the consequences for deconstruction itself from the non-existence of a transcendental centre which would secure the existence of such interpretations? If an interpretation "cannot be lasting", but is only "provisional" and "with reservations", since, as Manfred Frank remarks above, "it has no (objective) correlative in the text, it has no permanent place", then deconstruction cannot ignore the possibility of the existence of other interpretations of a text's *vouloir dire* which would claim the right to be considered on an equal base with those of deconstruction. This, in turn, would leave open the possibility of an non-metaphysical philosophical traditional which would not be in dire need of deconstruction.

However, the lack of a transcendental centre does not seem to preclude Derrida from believing in the existence of stable, valid and authoritarian interpretations. As we will see in the next chapter, the lack of a transcendental signified in signification as well as the lack of a transcendental centre in reading does not preclude someone from achieving a "relatively stable" interpretation of a text's authorial intentions. *In practice*, deconstruction treats these "relatively stable" interpretations as being conditioned by *cohesion* and *unequivocality*. It refuses implicitly the non-hierarchical co-existence of more than one interpretation of a text's authorial intentions (there is always a "dominant interpretation"), thus treating all other interpretations as "misinterpretations" of the one and only "right" interpretation; though, in the case of deconstruction, the existence of such interpretation is not justified through the recourse to a transcendental signified or centre but through the existence of certain "contracts" and "conventions" (see next chapter).

Hence, at this point, it is necessary to differentiate Derrida from Roland Barthes, for example, who although views the signifying process as an infinite play of differences too, he is led to a more radical conclusion around reading and interpretation since he treats a text as being fragmented to a plethora of voices participating each of them in reading on equal terms:

> Let us first posit the image of a triumphant plural, unimpoverished by any constraint of representation (of imitation). In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds.[42]

If we suppose that the deconstructive analogous of the above position would be that of the "dissemination" of meaning, however, the implications of such a position for deconstructive reading,

strangely enough, would not be made visible before the second level of deconstructive reading.

For deconstruction, since authorial intention does not occupy the position of a transcendental signified, it has to be constituted exclusively through the differential play of the textual structure itself. Moreover, if authorial intention receives any determinate content only through the text itself, then this distinct meaning cannot be treated as central since it belongs to a structure whose values are all *de-centred* and *disseminated*. The differential play of the textual structure disqualifies the existence of central meanings and, therefore, textual structure is decentred from the outset. Even if it is possible to determine a distinct meaning as the *vouloir dire* of a text, one cannot not attribute to this meaning a *central* place during the act of reading for the purpose of its deconstruction. Nevertheless, deconstruction concentrates its attention on a certain meaning of a text, i.e., its *vouloir dire,* thus attributing to it, in this way, a central role, although only to deconstruct it afterwards through that *excess* of textual meaning that cannot be incorporated into this central meaning.

Derrida does not treat the text as absolutely decentred, at least at an initial level. The centre (in the form of a text's *vouloir dire)* plays a certain role even for deconstruction. For Derrida, reading cannot ignore this centre of meaning; otherwise it runs the risk of pure arbitrariness. This centre is, however, neither transcendental (namely, a point of absolute presence or a "fixed origin") nor it can exhaust a text's meaning absolutely. It cannot place under its tutelage all that which challenges it. There can be no simple reduction of meaning to a signifying centre. While, on the one hand, there is the text's intentional meaning which functions as the guiding thread for the text's initial interpretation, its centre, on the other hand, is that situated at the margins, a centrifugal meaning, which decentralises the initial location of the

centre of meaning. For deconstruction, the centre is there and we have to "respect" it. It is there controlling a text's meaning even if it does control it absolutely. The deconstructive position is that of a decentralised centre, which presupposes the existence of a centre that the first level of deconstructive reading in the form of "doubling commentary" has, if not to reconstruct, at least, to invade.

Deconstruction finds itself in the uncomfortable position of having to justify, on the basis of its position with regard to language and meaning, both the existence of a (non-transcendental) centre in reading (that of a text's *vouloir dire*) and its subsequent decentralisation. The question which then arises is that of the possibility for the differential play of language to be responsible for two things that seem to exclude each other: the (re)construction of a centre and the de-construction or de-centralisation of this centre. How is it to be able to render possible that which it will immediately render impossible? How is it possible for the differential play of signs to produce both gathering and "dissemination" of meaning?

Notes

1. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Anniversary Edition (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2008, 1983[1]), 64.

2. John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 79.

3. Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils", trans. Catherine Porter and Edward P. Morris, in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 147. In the same text, Derrida himself cites Willis Bennet, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities in the States, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*: "A popular movement in literary criticism called 'Deconstruction' denies that there are any texts at all. If there are no texts, there are no great texts, and no argument for reading" (*Ibid.*, 293n.15).

4. Jacques Derrida and Derek Attridge, "'This Strange Institution Called Literature': An Interview with Jacques Derrida", trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, in *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 53 / "Cette étrange institution qu'on appelle la littérature", *Derrida d'ici, Derrida de là*, sous la direction de Thomas Dutoit et Philippe Romanski (Paris: Galilée, 2009), 272.

5. Simon Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 23.

6. Some other readers of Derrida who have also described deconstructive reading as "double reading" are Robert Bernasconi in "No More Stories, Good or Bad: de Man's Criticism of Derrida on Rousseau", in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 147; M. H. Abrams in "Construing and Deconstructing", in *Deconstruction: A Critique*, ed. Rajnath (London: Macmillan, 1989), 38, and Anais N. Spitzer in *Derrida, Myth and the Impossibility of Philosophy* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 30-38, 47.

7. Michael Naas, "Hospitality as an Open Question: Deconstruction's Welcome Politics", in *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 161.

8. In his reading of Husserl, Derrida, for example, notes: "[...] when we say *through (à travers)* Husserl's text we mean a reading that can be neither simple commentary nor simple interpretation" (*SP* 88/*VP* 88). As Rodolphe Gasché comments: "This is a reading that cuts across the text in order to go beyond it" (Rodolphe Gasché, "On Re-representation, or Zigzagging with Husserl and Derrida", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* XXXII, Supplement, 1993: 3). While Simon Critchley adds: "By opening up this textual space that is other to 'commentary' or interpretation, a certain distance is created between deconstructive reading and logocentric conceptuality" (Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction*, 26).

9. Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy", in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), 207-271/*Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 247-324.

10. Jacques Derrida, "Living On: *Border Lines*", in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 83.

11. *Ibid.*, 83-84.

12. *Ibid.*, 84.

13. *Ibid.*, 83-84.

14. *Sean Burke, The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 145.*

15. *Ibid*.

16. See Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles / Éperons Les Styles de Nietzsche*, trans. Barbara Harlow (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).

17. Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas", in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 1978), 79-153 / "Violence et métaphysique : Essai sur la pensée d'Emmanuel Levinas", in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, Collection «Essais», 1967), 117-228.

18. Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man", in *Margins of Philosophy*, 109-136 / "Les fins de l'homme", in *Marges de la philosophie*, 129-164.

19. Burke, *The Death & Return of the Author*, 143.

20. Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing", in *Writing and Difference*, 229-230 / "Freud et la scène de l'écriture", in *L'écriture et la différence*, 339.

21. Burke, *The Death & Return of the Author*, 143.

22. *Ibid.*, 146.

23. Bernasconi, "No More Stories, Good or Bad: de Man's Criticisms of Derrida on Rousseau", 148.

24. *Ibid.*

25. David Couzens Hoy, "Must We Say What We Mean", in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 410.

26. John Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida", *Glyph*, 1 (1977): 198-208.

27. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, in *Limited Inc*, 1-23 (first published in English in *Glyph*, 1, 1977) / "Signature événement context", in *Limited Inc.*, présentation et traductions par Elisabeth Weber (Paris: Galilée, 2000), 15-51 (Original date of publication in French, 1972).

28. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida", 201.

29. Hoy, "Must We Say What We Mean", 410.

30. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida", 201.

31. Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc abc…", trans. Samuel Weber, in *Limited Inc*, 29-110 (first published in English in *Glyph*, 2, 1977) / "Limited Inc, a b c", in *Limited Inc.*, 61-197.

32. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model: Derrida's Limited Inc." (1980), in *The Spivak Reader*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York & London: Routledge, 1996), 80.

33. Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (London: Fontana Press, 1987), 180.

34. For Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, there is no difference between meaning and authorial intention. A text means exactly what its author wanted to say: intention is meaning, meaning is intention (Steven Knapp & Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory", in *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, 11-30. "Against Theory" was originally published in *Critical Inquiry*, 8, no. 4, Summer 1982: 732-742).

35. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 104.

36. Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse", trans. Ian McLeod, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London and New York: Routledge, 1990, 1981¹), 58 / *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971), 28.

37. *Ibid.*, 59 / 31.

38. Manfred Frank, *What Is Neostructuralism?* trans. Sabine Wilke and Richard Gray (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 63.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*, 64.

42. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 5.

CHAPTER TWO
THE *FIRST* READING

1. The "Doubling Commentary"

Derrida's *initial* reading or interpretation of philosophical texts usually takes the most *traditional* and most *literal* form. The first level of deconstructive reading or the "doubling commentary" undertakes to reconstruct a text's authorial intention or its *vouloir dire.* In "The Exorbitant. Question of Method", Derrida remarks that though the production of a text's signifying structure cannot apparently consist in the redoubling of a text's authorial intentions, however, the "doubling commentary" *should* undoubtedly have its place in a critical reading:

> To recognize and respect all its classical exigencies is not easy and requires all the instruments of traditional criticism. Without this recognition and this respect, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything. (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227)

In one of his response to Gerald Graff in the "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion", Derrida undertakes to clarify that which he "perhaps clumsily" calls, in *Of Grammatology* as "doubling commentary". "Doubling commentary" is not supposed to be

> a moment of simple reflexive recording that would tran-
> scribe the originary and true layer of a text's intentional
> meaning, a meaning that is univocal and self-identical,
> a layer upon which or after which active interpretation
> would finally begin. ("Afterword" 143/"Postface" 265)

The commentary that this first layer of critical reading repeats or doubles, is always already an interpretation of the text commented upon. Derrida does not believe in the possibility of a pure and simple repetition of a text. The "doubling commentary" in critical production constitutes a necessary and indispensable layer or a moment of an interpretive, inventive and productive reading—that is, a reading that "does not create just any meaning *ex nihilo* and without prior rule or simply 'rendering explicit' (*producere* as setting forth or into the light that which is already there)" ("Afterword" 148/"Postface" 272). The repetition that the doubling commentary enacts "does not suppose the self-identity of meaning but a relative stability of the dominant interpretation (including the auto-interpretation) of the text being commented upon" ("Afterword" 143/"Postface" 265).

We should not think that the "doubling commentary" only paraphrases, unveils, reflects, reproduces a text without any other active or risky initiative. This is only an appearance, as Derrida remarks, since "this moment is already actively interpretive and can therefore open the way to all sorts of strategic ruses in order to have construction pass as evidences or as constantive observations" ("Afterword" 146/"Postface" 269). This can also hold for the doubling commentary of deconstructive reading (this is an issue that will be raised again in the second part of this book).

In the same essay, echoing structuralism, Derrida comments that the possibility of a "doubling commentary" does not appeal to an author's consciousness but to structures and systems of conventions operating within a certain discursive field: "[...] this *quasi-*

paraphrastic interpretation bases itself upon that which in a text [...] constitutes a very profound and very solid zone of implicit 'conventions' or 'contracts'" ("Afterword" 144/"Postface" 266). In another passage from the same text, he points out the following:

> [...] the concept that I was aiming at with the inadequate expression of "doubling commentary" is the concept of reading-writing that, counting on a very strong probability of consensus concerning the intelligibility of a text, itself the result of the stabilized solidity of numerous contracts [...]. ("Afterword" 146/"Postface" 265-266)

An example of such "conventions" and "contracts" would be

> the French language (its grammar and vocabulary), the rhetorical uses of this language in the society and in the literary code of the epoch, etc. but also a whole set of assurances that grant a minimum of intelligibility to whatever we can tell ourselves about these things today or to whatever part of them I can render intelligible, for example in *Of Grammatology*, with whatever limited success. At stake is always a set of determinate and finite possibilities. ("Afterword" 144/"Postface" 266)

Derrida is able to find Rousseau's text, for example, "readable" in this fashion because the language that he has inherited, despite some historical changes, is one that he possesses in common with Rousseau. As Derrida puts it: "Rousseau drew upon a language [*langue*] that was already there – and which is found to a certain extent to be ours, thus assuring us a certain minimum readability of French literature" (*OG* 175/*DLG* 230).

Hence, our encounter with texts takes always place through "interpretive contexts" which are "relatively stable, sometimes apparently almost unshakeable" ("Afterword" 146/"Postface" 270) and which are "the momentary result of a whole history of relations of force (intra- and extrasemantic, intra- and extradiscursive,

intra- and extraliterary or - philosophical, intra- and extraacademic, etc.)" ("Afterword" 145/"Postface" 267). This is another way to say that the relationship between a reader and a text is not immediate, but always mediated not only by language but also by socio-institutional conditions that are relatively stable. Language is not a mere communicative instrument, an autonomous and self-sufficient system cut off from its practical and political uses.[1] Philosophy, which was traditionally thought as being answerable only to the "disinterested exercise of reason", has claimed to pursue its own interests without fear of external interference. However, it was always a fiction, Derrida maintains, this belief in keeping philosophy pure and preventing it from any admixture of (with) practico-political interests. In an answer to Gerald Graft, Derrida notes that "it is opportune to dissociate questions of 'power relations' or of 'rhetorical coercion' from questions of the determinacy or indeterminacy of 'meaning'" ("Afterword" 145/"Postface" 267).

Therefore, even though there is no transcendental signified which could immobilise the play of signification and thus render language capable of guarantying stable and determinant meanings, this is not reason to suppose that the deconstructive view of linguistic meaning leaves us confronted (contrary to our own everyday experiences) with *interpretive chaos*: it is still possible to gain a certain (though only *relative)* stability or determinateness in linguistic meaning thanks to semantic "conventions" and "contracts" which are not themselves but only *relatively* stable too. Neither the grammar of French language, for example, nor its lexicon, nor its rhetorical uses and its literary code are "a-historical", "transtextual, monolithic or self-identical" and therefore absolutely stable or immobile.

Yet, the existence of certain "conventions" and "contracts" in interpretation presupposes some "competence" on the part of the

reader. That is, the reader should be able to follow them adequately:

> Without a solid competence in this domain, the most venturesome interpretations of *Of Grammatology* would have been neither possible nor intelligible nor even subject to discussion. ("Afterword" 144/"Postface" 266)

or

> This paraphrastic moment [...] appeals to a minimal competence (which is less common than is generally believed: for example, familiarity with French, with a certain French, in order to read Rousseau in the original text) ("Afterword" 144/"Postface" 265).

All reading, all research (academic or not) must fulfill some "minimal requirements" in order to be intelligible and subject to discussion. Its successful execution presupposes its subjection to certain rules. In order to read Rousseau well, for example, one must learn French, learn as much as possible about his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors, about his religious, social, political, and historical presuppositions, understand the complex history of subsequent interpretations of his works, etc. This is "not easy"; indeed, it is an infinite task, and deconstruction, for Derrida, should not be a license to circumvent it. In Derrida's own words:

> [...] one must be armed, one must understand and write, even translate French as well as possible, know the corpus of Rousseau as well as possible, including all the contexts that determine it (the literary, philosophical, rhetorical traditions, the history of the French language, society, history, which is to say, so many other things as well). Otherwise, one could indeed say just anything at all and I have never accepted saying, or encouraging oth-

> ers to say, just anything at all, nor have I argued for inde-
> terminacy as such. ("Afterword" 144-145/"Postface" 267)

For otherwise, if this reading does not take place, then "anything goes", and readers may say of a text whatever comes into their heads: "Without recognizing and respecting all its classical exigencies, which is not easy and requires all the instruments of traditional criticism, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227).

Any failure to meet these "minimal requirements" ineluctably leads to an inadequate understanding or even misunderstanding of a text. For example, commenting on John Searle's supposed misunderstanding of his writings, Derrida attributes it partly to an insufficiency on the part of the former to meet certain requirements imposed by the text commented upon (i.e., Derrida's "Signature Event Context"):

> [...] if Searle had been familiar enough with the work of Descartes to recognize the parodic reference to a Cartesian title in my text (cf. what I say about this in **t**), he would have been led to complicate his reading considerably. Had he been attentive to the neological character of the French word *restance - remains -* which in my text does not signify permanence, he would have been on the right track and well on the way [*sur la bonne voie*] to reading me, etc. For of course there is a "right track" [*une "bonne voie"*], a better way [...]. ("Afterword" 146/"Postface" 269)

The deconstructive thesis has often been construed, because of its insistence on the free play of signs in signifying process, as if a text is capable of an infinite variety of interpretations. Moreover, viewed in such a way, deconstruction is often said to leave no room for any kind of discrimination between different interpre-

tations: it is impossible in principle to decide whether one or the other interpretation might be more or less enlightening or that one or the other might be paradoxical or even irrelevant to the text's actual words and composition.

The above view of deconstruction is often shared by both proponents and opponents of it. Hence, for Eugenio Donato, who seems to countenance deconstruction, since criticism is also literature, it involves an act of *creation* not subject to any controls:

> Literature can only be a denunciation of literature, and is not therefore different in essence from criticism [...]. If, as Derrida puts it, linguistic signs refer themselves only to other linguistic signs, if the linguistic reference of words is words, if texts refer to nothing but other texts, then, in Foucault's words, "If interpretation can never accomplish itself, it is simply because there is nothing to interpret."[2]

For others, as John M. Ellis, deconstruction propagandise a "terrorist hermeneutics" that views interpretation as functioning free beyond any kind of constraints or limitations:

> Deconstruction is not wrong to say that the critic is creative; where it is disastrously wrong, however, is in its assumption that creativity means freedom from constraints or from standards of judgment operating on its results. Creativity is nor simply achieved by letting the mind wander with complete freedom into thoughts never previously recorded; in any sphere of activity, we judge someone to have been creative only if he produces an idea that is *both* original *and* valuable. A new idea in a business concern that results in a highly successful new venture is called creative; one that results in bankruptcy is called a piece of folly. Creativity is surely needed in criticism and is to be valued there – but that cannot mean

that the critic is free to say what he will and that we can-
not evaluate whether what he has said makes any sense.
To be creative is not to let one's imagination run free: it
is to use the imagination *productively.* The very notion of
creativity is degraded when it is thought of as operating
randomly, without being responsive to the entire situa-
tion in which it operates.[3]

In the following passage, Derrida gives the answer to approaches
to deconstruction as those of Donato and Ellis:

I take advantage of the occasion to specify that the word
"productive," which I use frequently in this passage in *Of
Grammatology* to characterize a reading that is "pro-
tected" but not "opened" by the "guardrails," can remain
equivocal. Such "productivity" ought not signify either
"creativity" (for this interpretive reading does not create
just any meaning *ex nihilo* and without prior rule) [...].
("Afterword" 147-148/"Postface" 272).

All these commentators, who claim that Derrida's emphasis on
"free play" in language is equivalent to "anything goes in inter-
pretation", overlook his repeated remarks that a deconstructive
reading does not cancel the role of intention and of the other con-
ventions and legalities that operate in a determinate reading of
a limited text, but merely "reinscribes" them, as he puts it, so as
to reveal their status as no more than "effects" of the differential
play.

Indeed, it is a great temptation for someone to infer from
what Derrida says about the production of meaning and the for-
mation of concepts that a text is subject to an unlimited semiosis,
something that seems to render the attainment of stable and le-
gitimate interpretations of a text's meaning, chimerical. Yet, ac-
cording to Derrida, the fact that meaning is produced only
through the differential play of language, that there is no subse-

quently a transcendental signified that would guaranty absolutely stable or absolutely immutable identities in language, does not seem to preclude language from possessing meanings that can have a "relative stability". The way that linguistic meaning is produced does not seem to exclude the possibility of the existence of certain semantic "conventions" and "contracts" which could ensure a "minimum" of stability to the linguistic medium. What seems to be excluded by the non-existence of a transcendental signified is not the possibility of the existence of relatively stable linguistic identities but the possibility of the existence of self-identical meanings that would be oases of absolute, infinite and immutable presences. We can recall that in Heraclitus and Nietzsche, for example, the state of things in an eternal flux does not exclude the existence of relatively stable identities too. Certainly, objections can possibly be raised against deconstruction's view of the way that linguistic identities are produced as well as whether this particular way of meaning constitution can ultimately guarantee the kind of stability (although only relative) that Derrida attributes to language and meaning when he explains the "doubling commentary". That is, what has to be ascertained is whether the particular type of linguistic identity gained by the differential play of language can *really* have that degree of stability required by the first level of deconstructive reading or "doubling commentary".

For Stanley Fish, we cannot appeal to the text to see which interpretation works better, because that would ignore the fact that it was the text itself which produced the different interpretations:

> What we have here then are two critics with opposing interpretations, each of whom claims the same word as internal and confirming evidence. Clearly they cannot both be right, but just as clearly there is no basis for deciding between them. One cannot appeal to the text, because

> the text has become an extension of the interpretive dis-
> agreement that divides them; and in fact, the text as it is
> variously characterized is a *consequence* of the interpreta-
> tion for which it is supposedly evidence."[4]

Contrary to Stanley Fish, Derrida thinks that there is always the
possibility to judge whether an interpretation is "right" or "wrong"
by examining how well the critic has used, in reading a text, the
"conventions" and "contracts" that condition the use of a certain
language. Derrida himself chides, in an angry tone, all those who
present deconstructive reading as subjecting itself to no "rules"
at all:

> [...] and let it be said in passing how surprised I have often
> been, how amused or discouraged, depending on my
> humor, by the use or abuse of the following argument:
> Since the deconstructionist (which is to say, isn't it, the
> skeptic- relativist-nihilist!) is supposed not to believe in
> truth, stability, or the unity of meaning, in intention or
> "meaning-to-say," how can he demand of us that we read
> him with pertinence, precision, rigor? How can he de-
> mand that his own text be interpreted correctly? How can
> he accuse anyone else of having misunderstood, simpli-
> fied, deformed it, etc.? In other words, how can he dis-
> cuss, and discuss the reading of what he writes? The
> answer is simple enough: this definition of the decon-
> structionist is false (that's right: false, not true) and fee-
> ble; it supposes a bad (that's right: bad, not good) and
> feeble reading of numerous texts, first of all mine, which
> therefore must finally be read or reread. Then perhaps it
> will be understood that the value of truth (and all those
> values associated with it) is never contested or destroyed
> in my writings, but only reinscribed in more powerful,
> larger, more stratified contexts. And that within inter-
> pretive contexts (that is, within relations of force that are

> always differential - for example, socio-political institu-
> tions – but even beyond these determinations) that are
> relatively stable, sometimes apparently almost unshake-
> able, it should be possible to invoke rules of competence,
> criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucid-
> ity, rigor, criticism, and pedagogy. ("Afterword" 146/"Post-
> face" 269-270)

Deconstruction implies that there are certain readings which are legitimate and certain readings which are not. There is a *right* and a *wrong* way to read texts. Yet, for Derrida, misreading is not explicated on the basis of the divergence of understanding or interpretation from a transcendental truth or meaning, but through a certain "incompetence" on the part of the reader to follow certain semantic "conventions" and "contracts" (as when a reader, for example, has a deficient knowledge of the linguistic code of a text, namely, the grammatical and syntactical rules of a text's language or its lexicon) or certain rules about how critical reading should be executed (e.g. the inadequate preoccupation with a text's context, the non-recourse to secondary literature, etc.). Therefore, as Derrida assures us:

> I should thus be able to claim and to demonstrate, with-
> out the slightest "pragmatic contradiction," that Searle,
> for example, as I have already demonstrated, was not on
> the right track toward understanding what I wanted to
> say, etc. May I henceforth however be granted this: he
> could have been on the wrong track or may still be on it;
> I am making considerable pedagogical efforts here to
> correct his errors and that certainly proves that all the
> positive values to which I have just referred are contex-
> tual, essentially limited, unstable, and endangered. And
> therefore that the essential and irreducible *possibility* of
> misunderstanding or of "infelicity" must be taken into ac-

count in the description of those values said to be posi-
tive. ("Afterword" 146-147/"Postface" 270)

2. The "Dominant Interpretation"

The existence of "interpretive contexts", which are "relatively sta-
ble, sometimes apparently almost unshakeable" ("Afterword"
146/"Postface" 270), and which are the result of a series of "con-
ventions" and "contracts" common to a community of readers,
makes possible the existence of, at least, a "minimum consensus"
around the intelligibility of a text:

> [...] the concept that I was aiming at with the inadequate
> expression of doubling "commentary" is the concept of a
> reading-writing that, counting on a very strong probabil-
> ity of consensus concerning the intelligibility of a text, it-
> self the result of the stabilized solidity of numerous
> contracts [...]. ("Afterword" 146/"Postface" 268-269)

According to Derrida, no research, no participation or interven-
tion in "a community (for example, academic)" is possible "with-
out the prior search for this minimal consensus and without
discussion around this minimal consensus" ("Afterword"
146/"Postface" 269). As Derrida underlines: "Whatever the dis-
agreements between Searle and myself may have been, for in-
stance, no one doubted that I had understood at least the English
grammar and vocabulary of his sentence. Without that no debate
would have begun" ("Afterword" 146/"Postface" 269).

Hence, one aspect of the "doubling commentary" would con-
sist in the "search for th[e] minimal consensus" around the "intel-
ligibility" of a certain text. For example, in the case, of Rousseau,

we should try to find out what Rousseau's readership thinks in general that he says. In Derrida's own words, the role of the "doubling commentary" is, at least partly, to understand,

> [...] what interpretations are probabilistically dominant and conventionally acknowledged to grant access to what Rousseau thought he meant and what readers for the most part thought they could understand in order, second, to analyze the play or relative indetermination that was able to open the space of my interpretation, for example, that of the world *supplement*. ("Afterword" 144/"Postface" 266)

Or, as he claims in a further definition of "doubling commentary":

> In short, what I sought to designate under the title of "doubling commentary" is the "minimal" deciphering of the 'first' pertinent or competent access to structures that are relatively stable (and hence destabilizable!), and from which the most venturesome questions and interpretations have to start ("Afterword" 145/"Postface" 268).

Yet, Derrida thinks that it is *not* possible to determine this "minimal" and "first" in advance:

> On the other hand, if I have just prudently placed quotation marks around "minimal" and "first," it is because I do not believe in the possibility of an absolute determination of the 'minimal' and of the "first." According to contexts (according to this or that national culture, in the university or outside the university, in school or elsewhere, at one level of competence or at another, on television, in the press, or in a specialized colloquium), the conditions of minimal pertinence and of initial access will change. You know that I am thus alluding, in passing, to concrete problems of curriculum, for example, or to the level of requirements in our profession, whether we

> are talking of students or of teachers. ("Afterword"
> 145/"Postface" 268)

To the question, which are the interpretations that would grant
a "'first' pertinent or competent access" to certain structures that,
are "relatively stable", we find Derrida replying that these are
"conventionally acknowledged". Yet, we should add that the de-
termination about which of a text's possible interpretations are
those that are "conventionally acknowledged to grant access to"
it, is itself subject to interpretation.

Yet, at the above quoted passages, Derrida seems oddly
enough to equate "doubling commentary" with the "'minimal' de-
ciphering", *not of the text itself,* but of the "dominant interpreta-
tions" which are "conventionally acknowledged" to grant a "'first'
pertinent or competent access" to a certain text. Such a supposed
equation of the "doubling commentary" with a text's "dominant
interpretation" has being attacked by Paul de Man, who, in "The
Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau"
(1971), claims that "he [Derrida] actually misreads Rousseau, pos-
sibly because he substitutes Rousseau's interpreters for the au-
thor himself".[5] Therefore, de Man proposes that "whenever
Derrida writes 'Rousseau,' we should read 'Starobinski' or 'Ray-
mond' or 'Poulet'". In order to conclude a bit further down that
"[t]here is no need to deconstruct Rousseau; the established tra-
dition of Rousseau interpretation, however, stands in dire need
of deconstruction".[6] Derrida commits, according to de Man, an im-
propriety because, "instead of having Rousseau deconstruct his
critics, we have Derrida deconstructing a pseudo-Rousseau by
means of insights that could have been gained from the 'real'
Rousseau".[7]

Nevertheless, on the base of what Derrida himself declares
above, despite the way he states it, there is no reason to suppose
that the "doubling commentary" substitutes a text's "dominant

interpretation" for the text itself; rather a text's dominant inter-
pretation is used only in order to *"grant access"* to it. Moreover, in
explicating in "Afterword" what he meant in *Of Grammatology* by
"doubling commentary", we find Derrida also incorporating to the
"relative stability of the dominant interpretation" the "'self'-
interpretation of the text being commented upon" ("Afterword"
143/"Postface" 265).

   That Derrida, in the doubling of a text's authorial intentions,
does not necessarily follow its "dominant interpretation" is made
apparent by the fact that, in practice, while he accepts as accurate
some interpretations of Rousseau's text by earlier commentators,
he corrects others which he describes, politely, as the result of
"hasty reading": "We cannot read the *Essay* as Hobbes might have
hastily interpreted it" (*OG* 205/*DLG* 268) or "To speak of origin and
zero degree in fact comments on Rousseau's declared intention
and it corrects on that point more than one classical or hasty read-
ing" (*OG* 264/*DLG* 345). Also, in the "Force of Law: The 'Mystical
Foundation of Authority'", Derrida proposes an "active and any-
thing but nonviolent interpretation" of one of Pascal's "pensées",
which, as himself states, "*run[s]* [...] *counter to tradition* and to its
most obvious context".[8] Or, in the next page, he also points out:
"It is true that Montaigne also wrote the following, which must,
again, be *interpreted* by going beyond its simply *conventional* and
conventionalist surface" (italics added).[9]

   Moreover, there are, indeed, cases in which this "dominant in-
terpretation" does not exist, as, for example, when Derrida reads
authors who are contemporaneous with him, and thus there is
no "dominant interpretation" of their work, as in the case of his
readings of Levi-Strauss and Foucault. Here, the interpretation of
a text's *vouloir dire* should be attributed exclusively to Derrida
himself.

Yet, we should wonder if there is, in fact, a "dominant inter-pretation" even in the case of classical philosophical texts. Indeed, the objections of John M. Ellis as to the possibility of the existence of such a "dominant interpretation" seem to be justifiable:

> Does the single, traditional view of a literary work really exist? [...] All that is really needed is to point to the mul-ticolored content of critical journals today, to the extraor-dinary diversity of critical schools, and the chaos of conflicting interpretations. To anyone who surveys the present critical scene, with its countless different methodologies and ideological commitments, its diver-gent readings that are Marxist or Freudian, semiotic or stylistic, historical or New Critical, biographical *or* femi-nist-to anyone who surveys this extraordinary scene, the notion that there exists a single, privileged reading is un-real. The very ease with which deconstruction could be-come one more critical position in American criticism shows clearly enough that pluralism is its watchword. What then will deconstructionists do if they cannot lo-cate the much needed universal reading of repressive conformity and superficiality?[10]

Therefore, does the interpretive "consensus" that deconstructive reading invokes really exist? What happens in cases when this "consensus" is not so homogeneous? Moreover, if there is such an apparent "consensus" about a text's interpretation that decon-struction can rely on for the doubling of a text, why has Derrida been so often accused of misreading?

It is true that deconstruction requires the existence of a "dom-inant interpretation" because otherwise what it deconstructs would be nothing more than just one of the many possible inter-pretations of a text's *vouloir dire* and as such the work of decon-struction would be of a limited efficiency. That is, it would leave open the possibility of the existence of other interpretations that

would be equally plausible as the deconstructed one. But such a possibility would also create problems for Derrida's interpretation of the entire history of Western philosophy as metaphysics of presence. For if there could be other plausible interpretations of the philosophical traditional, then nobody could exclude the possibility that a non-metaphysical or a partly non-metaphysical philosophical tradition could emerge; a non-metaphysical tradition that it would not be in need of deconstruction. Therefore, in order to exclude, minimise, or undermine such a possibility, deconstruction needs to implicitly presuppose that there is always an apparent, dominant interpretation of a text's *vouloir dire* whose plausibility is guaranteed by a certain interpretive "consensus" surrounding it. Hence, in order to support its own initial interpretation of a certain text as the most plausible and valid one, deconstruction requires to claim the existence of a certain hierarchy between a text's different interpretations, a hierarchy which is based not on the text itself, but on the apparent existence of a certain "consensus" concerning a text's "intelligibility".

We thus suspect that the role that the "dominant interpretation" plays for deconstruction is not limited to a granting access to a text: it also protects the efficacy of deconstruction. Deconstruction finds itself in the curious position that it has to account not only for the deconstructive reading proper, but also for the initial reading (the "doubling commentary") that the deconstructive reading enacts itself upon. It is therefore susceptible to accusation of deconstructing a reading that lacks any objectivity at all since it has been produced by deconstruction itself. And it has been possibly produced in such a way as to be deconstructable. Or, it can be also argued that deconstruction has chosen, between a plethora of a text's possible interpretations, that one which is more vulnerable to deconstruction. Therefore, here, Derrida needs to claim the existence of a "dominant interpretation" that

would be grounded on a certain interpretive "consensus" between a community of readers, in order to demonstrate that the "doubling commentary" that he deconstructs is not arbitrary or even a piece of perfidy.

The insistence on the existence of the "dominant interpretation" is, therefore, the smallest portion of objectivity that deconstruction is needed in order to support its generalised efficiency. Thus, Derrida finds himself needing to persuade his readers not only about his deconstructive manoeuvres, but also about his starting point (the "doubling commentary"). For those who disagree with this initial reading, the whole work of deconstruction looses all its significance.

Yet, as Stephen Adam Schwartz wonders, "what force the deconstructive operation would have for those who *do not* participate in this 'consensus' (viz. those potentially marginalized readers whose readings the deconstructive operation itself — and not the traditional, 'repressive' 'doubling commentary' is supposed to vindicate?"[11] For Andy McGee, Derrida's recourse to "dominant interpretation" constitutes an antidote to his belief that language is unable to provide us with "stable meanings", something that deconstruction requires for the reconstitution of a text's authorial intentions:

> Because Derrida is keen to overthrow the idea that words and concepts can have a fixed meaning, he recognises that if he is himself going to identify stable meanings, then these meanings cannot have the permanence and rigidity it is precisely his intention to deny that *any* word can have. Thus he attributes the stability any word has to its dominant interpretation — the meaning that is dominant, or the meaning about which most people are in consensus.[12]

Yet, for Derrida, as we have already seen, the non-existence of a transcendental signified or the impossibility of an absolute, ex-

haustive determination of textual contexts does not render the existence of a *relatively stable* determination of a text's meaning impossible. While Derrida challenges the idea that words have *absolutely* stable meanings, he does *not* refuse that words can have *relatively stable* meanings. If there is a "dominant interpretation", if there can be a certain "consensus" about a text's meaning, this is because certain "conventions" and "contracts" are able to guarantee some relative stability to language (to its grammar, syntax, lexicon or rhetoric). If words have no stability in their own, if Derrida takes refuge in "dominant interpretation" in order to secure this lacking stability for them, and if the "dominant interpretation" is "the meaning about which most people are in consensus," then, how does McGee explain the existence of such a "consensus"? If words have no stability at all, if they can say nothing about themselves, how is such a "consensus" possible?

However, there is a problem with the "double" use Derrida makes of the position that there is no foundation for linguistic meaning. On the one hand, the lack of a foundation in language does not constitute an obstacle that would prevent us from making *relatively stable* determinations regarding a text's meaning. *Différance,* we are told, is the condition of possibility and impossibility of meaning: while it makes meaning present, it excludes it from being *absolutely* present. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the same lack is invoked in order to render the relative stability of a text's initial determination deconstructable. After having reconstructed, in a rather unequivocal way, a text's intended meaning, Derrida will invoke some of the supposed decentral and disruptive properties of *différance* in order to justify its deconstruction. Since every identity is split by what it is not, thus meaning *disseminates*: "[...] the semantic horizon that habitually governs the notion of communication is exceeded or split by the intervention of writing, that is, by a *dissemination* irreducible to *polysemy*" (*LI* 20/*LIinc* 50). Yet, Derrida needs to decide whether *différance*

favours stability in meaning, (even a relative one) *or* "dissemination". He cannot have available *both* possibilities just because deconstruction needs them both.

3. The Self-Coherent Unity of Intention

Hence, according to the first reading, that of "doubling commentary", it seems possible that texts can be *unequivocally* identified, so that evidence of authorial intention can somehow be found directly in them. Contrary to the text, which is, according to Derrida, heterogeneous or fissured, authorial intention is treated as being always coherent. In Derrida's *univocal* reading of a text's *vouloir dire*, successfully *contradictory* intentions are ruled out. While deconstructive reading concentrates on the existence of contradictory statements, there is nowhere any reference to the possibility of the existence of contradictory intentions. And this is due to the necessary prerequisites of deconstruction. It has already been argued that deconstruction is installed between authorial intention and description. If a text's authorial intention was not fixed and univocal, then it would be not easy for deconstruction to juxtapose to it descriptions found in the same text which would be contradictory to it. The possibility of the existence of heterogeneous intentions in a text could absorb all those descriptions which, now, cannot be incorporated to a single, homogeneous intention.

We have already referred to Derrida's statement that the "'doubling commentary' is not a moment of simple reflexive recording that would transcribe the originary and true layer of a text's *intentional meaning*, a meaning that is *univocal* and self-identical" (italics added) ("Afterword" 143/"Postface" 265). However, in practice, Derrida treats the "doubling" of a text's authorial inten-

tions according to those terms that he denounces above. Indicative of this attitude is the fact that from his multiple readings, hesitation is completely absent.

Derrida has made various statements that attempt to explain the dissent existing between what the author *declares* and what they finally *describe,* statements such as the following: "[...] the writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, in a certain way and up to a point, be governed by the system" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227). Yet, these statements are not entirely consistent with the deconstructive practice of the reconstitution and treatment of a text's authorial intention as *unequivocal* and *homogeneous.* Although, for deconstruction, the author does not "command" the language they use absolutely, although they use it "only by letting [themselves] [...] be governed by the system", however, they succeed in communicating their intentions in a rather *unequivocal* manner (the way deconstruction treats authorial intentions confirms it). If the author does not "command" absolutely the language that they use, we suppose that this should also have certain consequences for the way deconstruction constructs a text's authorial intention. However, in order to have a concrete target to deconstruct, Derrida has to remain silent about the prospect of the author not commanding absolutely the language within which they express their intentions. Yet, when he will later need to justify the deconstruction of this construction, Derrida will refer to inability of the author to command the linguistic medium absolutely, and the subsequent failure to be consistent with their declared intentions.

In another passage, Derrida refers to a certain "play or relative indetermination that was able to open the space of my interpretation" ("Afterword" 144/"Postface" 266). Yet this "play" or "relative

indetermination" is characteristically absent from the construction of a text's authorial intentions or the "doubling commentary". In addition, Derrida, in practice, fails to take into consideration, for his reading practice of "doubling commentary", the consequences of his claim that the repetition that the doubling commentary enacts "does not suppose the self-identity of 'meaning,' [....] a meaning that is *univocal*" ("Afterword" 143/"Postface" 265).

In other words, Derrida seems to fall into *contradiction* when, on the one hand, he argues that "this process of intentions and meaning differing from themselves does not negate the possibility of 'doubling commentary'" ("Afterword" 147/"Postface" 270), while, on the other hand, he invokes exactly "this process of intentions and meaning differing from themselves" that "does not negate the possibility of 'doubling commentary'" in order to explain and justify the deconstruction of this "doubling commentary".

We would like finally to raise another question: does the "doubling commentary", in practice, really differ from other traditional reconstructions of a text's authorial intentions? Our answer is rather no. Derrida seems paradoxically to agree with us: "And you are right in saying that these 'practical implications for interpretation' are 'not so threatening to conventional modes of reading'" ("Afterword" 147/"Postface" 265).

4. Is a Text Equivocal or Unequivocal?

In his "Introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*", Derrida juxtaposes the textual ideals of *equivocity* and *univocity*, connecting the first with the work of James Joyce, and the second with that of Edmund Husserl. While, for Derrida, Joyce favours equivocity,

Husserl strives, "to purge language of its equivocity because he believed that univocity was essential to philosophical discourse".[13] Yet, as Andrew Cutrofello points out, for Derrida, "the desire for textual univocity pervades the entire Western philosophical tradition. Philosophy presupposes the ideal of a purely univocal form of expression because '[p]hilosophical discourse cannot master a word meaning two things at the same time.'"[14] In "Roundtable on Translation", in the context of a discussion on the issue of translation, Derrida emphatically explains philosophy's direction towards the ideal of univocity:

> What does philosophy say? Let's imagine that it's possible to ask such a question: What does philosophy say? What does the philosopher say when he is being a philosopher? He says: What matters is truth or meaning, and since meaning is before or beyond language, it follows that it is translatable. Meaning has the commanding role, and consequently one must be able to fix its univocality or, in any case, to master its plurivocality.[15]

Yet, what about Derridian deconstruction itself? Does it treat a text as equivocal or unequivocal? Indeed, deconstruction's aim is to show that every supposedly unequivocal language, every supposedly unequivocal text is fissured by "an entire world of ambiguities, and ambivalences". It is also true that deconstruction refuses to equate a text's meaning with an unequivocal central meaning that would be that of its author's intentions. In this sense, it could be argued that deconstruction considers a text as being equivocal. Exploiting "an entire world of ambiguities, and ambivalences" present in a text, deconstruction drives it to say something other than its authorial intent. Or, in order to put it in a better way, not anything else whatever, but exactly the opposite from what its author wanted to say. And in this sense, the character of this kind of equivocality is quite peculiar. Something that

differentiates its function from the way William Desmond, for example, describes it when he states that "[e]quivocity scatters [...] this one central meaning into a multiplicity without center or unity."[16] It is wrong to believe that after the deconstruction of a text's authorial intent, meaning *disseminates* into a "multiplicity without center or unity." Even after its deconstruction, a text continues to mean one *single* thing, though now it means something else from its initial "doubling" intention. Hence, for deconstruction, a text is equivocal to the point that it can mean something other than its *vouloir dire*. Derrida does not believe in the simultaneous existence of a *plethora* of meanings in a text. Every text seems to say only *two* things: what its author wanted it to say and what the text eventually says notwithstanding its author. With reference to authorial intention, we have already said that it is treated as if it is governed by unity and unequivocity. And no matter if we refer to a text's authorial intentions or to those passages in a text that contradict it, they both are treated as to convey their separate meanings in a clear and unambiguous way.

Notes

1. See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu's, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

2. Eugenio Donato, "The Two Languages of Criticism", in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Science of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 96-97.

3. John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 134.

4. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 340.

5. de Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau", 139.

6. *Ibid*.

7. *Ibid.*, 139-140.

8. Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'", trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Acts of Religion: Jacques Derrida*, edited and with an introduction by Gil Anidjar (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 239 / *Force de loi: Le "Fondement mystique de l'autorité"* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1994-2005), 28.

9. *Ibid.*, 240 / 30.

10. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction*, 74-75.

11. Stephen Adam Schwartz, "The Deconstructive Imperative", *MLN* 105, no. 4, French Issue (September 1990): 857-874.

12. Andy J. McGee, *Derrida and the Necessity of Metaphysics* (PhD Thesis, University of Essex, 2000), 85.

13. Andrew Cutrofello, "Derrida's Deconstruction of the Ideal of Legitimation", *Man and World* 23 (1990): 157.

14. *Ibid*.

15. Jacques Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation", in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie V. McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 120.

16. William Desmond, *Art & the Absolute: A study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 91.

CHAPTER THREE
THE *SECOND* READING

A. The Critical or Deconstructive Reading

1. *Incoherence and Contradiction*

In the previous chapter, we attempted to outline the first level of deconstructive reading, from which, the "critical" or the deconstructive reading *proper* then takes place. This first reading, which is that of the "doubling commentary", is followed by a more "productive" reading, a reading that explores the tensions, the fretted threads, the little "openings" in the text which the classical reading tends to overlook.

Therefore, the "critical" or deconstructive reading *presupposes* this more reproductive and classical reading. It is only in combination with it that the deconstructive reading can render visible the deadlocks and aporias in the argumentation of a text. It could be said that the deconstructive reading constitutes a modification – with the help of the text – of the classical reading. The deconstructive reading does not abandon the classical reading, but destabilises it through the exploration of what it systematically fails to incorporate, thereby, opening it up. The "critical" or deconstructive reading should not be conceived as a radical rejection of the "classical" reading.

The philosophical "text" is traditionally considered to constitute a singular, identifiable entity. The work of the critic or the commentator is conceived as the harmonisation of any inconsistencies and the explication of any incoherencies or obscurities found in the text in such a way as to reveal its essential unity, fundamental coherence, immanent form or its essential point. In "Preface to the Second Edition" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant explains the need for elimination of any inconsistencies in a text, in the following way:

> If we take single passages, torn from their contexts, and compare them with one another, apparent contradictions are not likely to be lacking, especially in a work that is written with any freedom of expression. In the eyes of those who rely on the judgments of others, such contradictions have the effect of placing the work in an unfavourable light; but they are easily resolved by those who have mastered the idea of the whole.
>
> If a theory has in itself stability, the stresses and strains which may at first have seemed very threatening to it serve only, in the course of time, to smooth away its inequalities; and if men of impartiality, insight, and true popularity devote themselves to its exposition, it may also, in a short time, secure for itself the necessary elegance of statement.[1]

Derrida deconstructs this idea of the text — as a unique, coherent and identifiable entity – by searching for inconsistencies, incoherencies, or obscurities and developing them into more serious contradictions. These contradictions each have an irreducible identity, and this is maintained in order to force the text into "undecidability", since it cannot finally decide between the two opposite things it simultaneously says.

The deconstructive reading does not seek to capture a unified content or theme, and does not evaluate positions with the ulti-

mate aim of accepting or rejecting them. Deconstructive reading attempts to capture the specific movement that is enacted every time thought tries to determine some "literal" ground whereon it will build its superior claim to truth. Therefore, a deconstructive reading aims to seize those moments in a text where writing resists this seductive process, in such a way as to leave a "remainder" which escapes, exceeds or perplexes the dominion of logocentrism.

The deconstructive reading does not initiate its engagement with philosophical discourse through the form of a falsification or invalidation. Its reading of philosophical discourse does not rest upon the logical evaluation of its concepts through the application of the criteria of coherence and non-contradiction. However, the problem of coherence and contradiction retains a central place in a deconstructive reading: a deconstructive reading commences with the systematic disclosure and exploration of contradictions, inconsistencies and aporias that are proved to be fundamental for the conceptuality, the argumentation and the discursiveness of philosophy. A deconstructive reading does not organise these elements in accordance with the requirement of non-contradiction. These elements are considered as other than logical faults, possible mistakes, which are essentially contingent and reversible. A mere policing of coherence, a simple recording of the non-logical is not what is at stake. There is in the deconstructive operation no *simple* appeal to external criteria of incoherence. Since philosophical discourse accommodates these contradictions and aporias without difficulty, deconstructive reading produces incoherence in a text by the strategy of attending to them and utilising them in order to interrupt its representation of coherence.

The contradictions that deconstructive reading attempts to specify in philosophical texts have, as Mark Cousins points out in

The *Logic of Deconstruction*, existed in a form that is "unconscious" to the text and its classical protocols of reading:

> It is "unconscious," in the sense that Freud argued that one of the properties of the unconscious was that it permitted contradictions to persist side by side without contradicting each other. Deconstruction entails both the production and the partial unsaying of that which has been repressed in this fashion.[2]

The contradictions in question are held to elude the conventional definitions offered by logic and metaphysics. Logical criteria are unable to explicate the role that such incoherence plays within metaphysical texts, while "metaphysics merely promises to resolve the problem by reference to more philosophy".[3]

The history of philosophy is, for Derrida, the expression of the need to think basic concepts, again and again, in a satisfying and desired way, that is, according to the principle of non-contradiction. Yet, what Derrida sets out here, as Rodolphe Gasché points out, is "an inconsistency on the level of philosophical argumentation that cannot be mended", that is not liable to "a (dialectical) solution", since it is that which makes possible the attainment of the "desired, authoritative" results of philosophy. The success of the philosophical operation itself is grounded on the suppression of such contradictions.[4]

Deconstructive reading, thus, concentrates its attention on a series of incoherencies and contradictions within philosophical discourse which philosophy has refused to thematise, thus remaining "blind" towards them. Derrida's rather unusual claim is that this omission or "blindness" of philosophy towards certain contradictions or incoherencies that penetrate its textual corpus is not accidental but essential; it is a function of the logical consistency sought by philosophical discourse itself. The existence of such undetected or neglected contradictions, incoherencies or in-

consistencies in philosophical discourse is not something that would prevent the solution of traditional philosophical problems; on the contrary, without them, there would be no hope for them ever to be solved.

In "Qual Quelle: Valery's Sources", Derrida describes the task of deconstruction's occupation with all those strategies that philosophy employs for the repression of the aporias in which traditional concept formation always results, as follows:

> A task is then prescribed: to study the philosophical text in its formal structure, in its rhetorical organization, in the specificity and diversity of its textual types, in its models of exposition and production – beyond what previously were called genres – and also in the space of its mises en scène, in a syntax which would be not only the articulation of its signifieds, its references to Being or to truth, but also the handling of its proceedings, and of everything invested in them. *(MP* 293/*M* 348-349)

Hence, deconstructive reading starts with the detection of a contradiction, a "blind spot" ("*tache aveugle*") (*OG* 178/*DLG* 234), within the philosophical text which is used as a means of granting access to the law, structure or the textuality of the text read. However, the disclosure of the existence of such omissions or oversights in philosophical discourse and the exploration of the role they play for its successful execution does not constitute the deconstruction of the philosophical text, but its preparatory stage. Rodolphe Gasché describes this stage as the "propadeutics of deconstruction".[5] Deconstructive reading is, therefore, not limited to a mere study of the argumentative (logical, rhetorical or morphological) structure of a text.

2. The Formation of Contradictions

Derrida's inquiry into a text's argumentative structure leads to the discovery of a whole new field of "contradictions" and "aporias", which, rather than simply failing to meet certain requirements of the philosophical quest, are constitutive of its successful completion.[6] As expressions of certain *desires*, for Derrida, all philosophical concepts are, in a fashion, "utopian and a-topic" (*OG* 151/*DLG* 201); they represent "ethico-teleological" and "ethico-ontological" values of unattainable plenitude and presence (*LI* 76, 92/*LInc* 144, 172). They represent values not of what they actually are but what they *ought to be*. What characterises these concepts is that they live from their disrespect for their opposite, to which they refuse a value similar to their own:[7]

> The ethic of the living word would be perfectly respectable, completely utopian and a-topic [*utopique et atopique*] as it is (unconnected to *spacing* and to differance as writing), it would be as respectable as respect itself if it did not live on a lure and a nonrespect for its own condition of origin, if it did not dream in speech of a presence denied to writing, denied by writing. The ethic of speech is the *lure* of presence mastered. (*OG* 151-152/*DLG* 201)

Derrida is, thus, not merely concerned with pointing out certain contradictions within a philosophical text or a series of texts; he also refers, in detail, to certain "ethico-theoretical" decisions which are responsible for the actual discursive state of a particular philosophy, as well as philosophy in general. The location of contradictions in the texts of Rousseau or Plato, for example, is not undertaken with a view to establishing a greater coherence in the discourse of their philosophy, or philosophy *in general*, but in order to demonstrate that they constitute a function of the "ethico-theoretical" decisions that permeate philosophy in general. Thus, the

contradictions, Derrida points out, are not simple contradictions but, on the contrary, contradictions that are *constitutive* of a particular philosophy or the philosophical discourse *in general*. They represent inevitable contradictions, contradictions that cannot be overcome as long as the "ethico-theoretical" decisions, which they stem from, privilege the idea of presence, *logos,* and so forth.

Hence, as Gasché notes in "Deconstruction as Criticism", the conflicts between different strata of a philosophical discourse do not represent a certain weakness on the part of a specific thinker. They cannot be annulled through "an attempt at a greater logical coherence. They are functions of the ethico-theoretical decisions of philosophy itself."[8] If Rousseau, Plato or Husserl, for example, sacrifice the coherence of their discourse in order to be able to advance certain distinctions they make, this is due to what Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena* describes as an "ethico-theoretical act that revives the decision that founded philosophy in its Platonic form" (*SP* 53/*VP* 59). As Gasché notes: "This decision is the theme of full presence."[9] It is "the obstinate desire to save presence" (*SP* 51/*VP* 57) and to reduce or derive the sign, which forces, not only Rousseau, Plato or Husserl, but the entirety of the metaphysical tradition, to maintain the differences between speech and writing, presence and supplement, representation and reality, etc.[10]

3. *Some Examples of Non-Homogeneity and Incoherence between Different Strata of a Text's Argumentation and Description*

Derrida's reading of philosophical texts brings into view a multiplicity of inconsistencies, dissimilarities and disparities between their different argumentative and descriptive layers. These in-

consistencies, dissimilarities and disparities are not, however, treated as logical or rhetorical errors. Deconstructive reading utilises them to demonstrate how philosophy regulates itself through the reproduction and maintenance of the metaphysical desire for homogeneity and coherence.

In *The Tain of the Mirror*, Rodolphe Gasché describes a series of what he calls "discursive inequalities or dissimilarities, which are due to these conflicting strata within the coherence of texts or works."[11] One of the most obvious examples of a certain lack of homogeneity and coherence in philosophical discourse is the tension between *gesture* and *declaration* as, for instance, in Rousseau's discussion of the origin of language in the *Essay*. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida distinguishes between Rousseau's explicit declarations about how he desires the origin of language to be and how he eventually describes it in reality.

The deconstructive analysis of philosophical discourse also stresses a lexicological inconsistency that is produced by the different and repeated uses of a certain key word or key-signification in a text or in a corpus of texts. The different citations of the same word within a text or context can be *opposed* to one another, but they can also be dissimilar and irreducible to one another, so, in that case, they resist any hermeneutical solution. The way Plato uses the word *pharmakon* in the *Phaedrus* is an example of such a lexicological inconsistency. In the Platonic textual corpus in general, and in the *Phaedrus* in particular, the word *pharmakon* (or writing as *pharmakon*) is used sometimes to mean *remedy* and at other times to mean *poison*.

The sort of discrepancies in philosophical discourse that Derrida analyses, and which are produced by the combination of heterogeneous elements, are multiple, multiform, multifarious and different in status. The specification of the different heterogeneous layers of the philosophical discourse, as well as the differ-

ent heterogeneous elements that are combined together in these layers, is not undertaken by deconstructive reading with the ultimate aim of the valuation and the subsequent rejection as erroneous of certain declarations, claims, or positions within philosophical discourse. Nor is such an analysis undertaken with the aim of eliminating or reducing these differences, inconsistencies and dissimilarities through philosophy's traditional methods and procedures. As Gasché notes: "What is at stake is the assessment of the generality, irreducibility and inevitability of these various inequalities."[12] It is on this precondition that the next stage of deconstructive reading, that of *inversion* and *displacement*, can take place. Therefore, as its first step, deconstructive reading presupposes a systematic demonstration of the fact that concepts and discursive totalities are already cracked and fissured by *necessary* contradictions and heterogeneities which traditionally philosophy fails to take into account either because it does not consider them typical logical contradictions, or because it must avoid or regulate them (as in the case of Rousseau through the use of the conditional mood) in order to safeguard the "ethicotheoretical" decisions that orient its discourse. These fissures become visible when reading follows to its logical end that which in the process of conceptualisation or argumentation is only in a certain manner said.

Deconstructive reading commences with a demonstration and an explication of contradictions, paradoxes, inconsistencies and aporias which are found to play a constitutive role in the formation of concepts, arguments, and the discourse of a philosophy or philosophy in general. These textual inconsistencies and discrepancies are not typical logical contradictions – that is, inconsistencies and discrepancies with which philosophy traditionally engages. These contradictions are finally accounted for, by deconstruction, through another "logic" – the "logic of supplemen-

tarity", which inverts and displaces the logic of identity and non-contradiction – according to which, they are not contradictions or oppositions any longer. Consequently, to the extent that they eventually seem to elude the logic of identity and non-contradiction, they should not be treated as contradictions *proper*.

4. *The Two Movements of Deconstruction*: Inversion *and* Displacement

The disclosure of certain contradictions and aporias in philosophical discourse, and their fundamental contribution to the success of the philosophical project, is simultaneously the revelation that the contradictions, oppositions and binary structures of concepts, and their multiple argumentative strata are "never symmetrical".[13] They do not co-exist within an enunciation on equal terms. As Derrida himself notes, "in classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis a vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has 'the upper hand'" (*P* 41/*POS* 56-57). In "Signature Event Context", Derrida also maintains that "an opposition of metaphysical concepts (e.g., speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the confrontation of two terms, but a hierarchy and the order of subordination" (*LI* 21/*LInc* 50).

For Derrida, in the history of metaphysics, a certain privilege is attributed to one side of a conceptual opposition, while the other side is depreciated. One of the two terms occupies the structurally dominant position, having undertaken the definition of its opposite or its other. To the dominant term is given the privilege of self-determination and of relegating its opposite to that

which is *not*. In this way, the second term appears to be derivative, secondary, inferior, subordinate, inevitably dependent for its existence on the first term. In spite of being a pale imitation and reflection of the superior first term, the second term is often presented, in a rather paradoxical way, as a threat to the purity of the first term.[14]

No simple collapse of the opposites is thus possible. Therefore, deconstruction, as Derrida maintains, "cannot be restricted or immediately pass to neutralization" (*LI* 21/*LInc* 50). By ignoring the conflictual structure of opposites, such an abolition or *neutralisation* of conceptual or textual inconsistencies would "leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of *intervening* in the field effectively" (*P* 41/*POS* 57).

A mere neutralisation of binary oppositions would not only preclude any *active* intervention in the philosophical text, but would also "serve the purposes and interests of traditional interpretation",[15] including its "ethico-theoretical" orientation. For, as Derrida remarks in "The Double Session", just

> as the motif of neutrality, in its negative form paves the way for the most classical and suspect attempts at reappropriation, it would be imprudent just to cancel out the pairs of metaphysical oppositions, simply to *mark off* from them any text (assuming this to be possible). (*D* 207n.24/*DIS* 255n.18)

A deconstructive reading, in the sense of an annulment or a neutralisation of a text's oppositional dyads would "serve the interests invested in its prevailing traditional interpretation" (*D* 207n.24/*DIS* 255n.18). Indeed, such an operation, "in its annulment and equalization of any discourse in the mode of *pro et contra*", would not only balance these forces into an economy of unquestionable polarities – "would have stabilized its undecid-

able" –, but would also be a "free shot which aims nonetheless to collect its interests".[16] Therefore, a reading that would aim at the neutralisation or the annulment of a text's oppositional dyads would leave completely intact an existing regime of thinking. Such a reading would be unable to intervene actively in the structural field that gave rise to such binary oppositions. Thus, "a [...] *general strategy of deconstruction* [...] is to avoid both simply *neutralizing* the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply *residing* with the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it" (*P* 41/*POS* 56). Derrida, therefore, insists on a "strategic dissymmetry" intending to "counterbalance the neutralizing moments of any deconstruction" (*D* 207n.24/*DIS* 256n.18). Such a "dissymmetry" has "to be minutely calculated, taking into account all the analyzable differences within the topography of the field in which it operates" (*D* 207n.24/*DIS* 256n.18). In this sense, deconstructive reading should not be neutral. Neutrality, as Derrida underlines, "has a negative essence *(ne-uter)*, is the negative side of transgression" (*WD* 274/*ED* 402).

Against any neutralisation or dialectical transgression of oppositional dyads, deconstructive reading proceeds through two movements: that of the *inversion* or the *reversal* of traditional hierarchies of binary oppositions (as, those, for example, of presence/absence, speech/writing, origin/supplement), and that of the *displacement* of the system that nourished the binary opposition, through the *reinsription* of the newly privileged term into the body of the system. During deconstructive reading, a classical opposition is taken, and the excluded term is used as a means for the *undoing* and the *displacement* of a certain "conceptual order": "Deconstruction does not consist in moving from one concept to another, but in reversing and displacing a conceptual order as well as the nonconceptual order with which it is articulated" (*LI* 21/*LInc* 50). The first movement of the deconstructive operation,

that of the *inversion* of a hierarchical opposition, is often executed, as for example in the case of Rousseau, through the *inversion* of the hierarchically structured differential layers of argumentation within the text that accommodates the particular conceptual opposition under deconstruction (the *declarative* and the *descriptive* strata of a text). For Derrida, within the history of metaphysics, it was always *declaration* – as the expression of a unified and unequivocal authorial intention – that constituted the foundation of the interpretive process. All those elements in a text which resisted were forced into silence.

The demonstration that in the case of binary oppositions, for example, "presence" and "absence", the entire history of Western philosophy always privileged the first term of the opposition, that of "presence" – by using it as its cornerstone and either excluding absence or treating it as a negative form of presence – leads Derrida to assert that absence (in the form of spatio-temporal difference) is a prerequisite for both presence and absence (in the ordinary sense). Or, in the demonstration that Western metaphysics's privileging of speech over writing – by identifying speech with breath *(anapnoe)* and breath with spirit (*(pneuma)* (in Ancient Greek, *anapnoe* and *pneuma* have the same etymology; they both stem from the noun *pnoe* and the verb *pneo*) or consciousness, and limiting writing to an inadequate transcription of speech, Derrida will allege that writing – as a universal system of differences – is a precondition for both speech and that form of writing, which is traditionally taken as merely a transcription of it.

Deconstructive reading reveals that the positive term of a binary opposition gains its privilege through the negation of its inner dependence on its negative double: not only does the privileged term not produce its opposite, inferior term through negation, but it itself essentially depends on it in ways that it cannot

accept. In *Critical Difference*, Barbara Johnson describes deconstructive reading as decisively dependent on difference:

> The starting point is often a binary difference that is subsequently shown to be an illusion created by the working of differences much harder to pin down. The differences between entities [...] are shown to be based on a repression of differences within entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself. [...] The "deconstruction" of a binary opposition is thus not annihilation of all values or differences; it is an attempt to follow the subtle, powerful effects of differences already at work within the illusion of a binary opposition.[17]

The realisation that the identity of a term is grounded on its difference from the other term, such that the idea of identity would ultimately based on difference, leads to the creation of instability within the structure of the philosophical knowledge itself. Western metaphysics is based, according to Derrida, on certain assumptions concerning self-presence and the transparency of concepts, such as those of truth, knowledge, reality, identity, etc. The fantasy of a self-contained and internally guaranteed truth, a truth unmediated by anything foreign, is something that constantly animates Western knowledge.

The double process of deconstruction discloses the interdependence of apparently opposite terms, and that their significance is related to a certain history. It shows that they are not natural, but fabricated oppositions, invented for particular purposes, serving certain interests, and as such, functioning in certain contexts.

5. *The Phase of* Inversion

In the first phase, Derrida overturns the established hierarchy through recourse to those elements of the philosophical text which are traditionally considered (as) inferior. This operation is made not only possible but also *necessary* by the fact that both the conceptual dyads that are fundamental for the discourse of philosophy, and the various argumentative strata that support them, constitute a "dissymmetric, hierarchically ordered space whose closure is transversed by the forces, and worked by the exteriority, that it represses" (*D* 5/*DIS* 11-12).

In "Letter on Humanism", Martin Heidegger claims that "the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement".[18] Derrida recognises, as Heidegger before him, that the process of overturning of a metaphysical hierarchy must avoid re-appropriating the hierarchical structure under deconstruction. This overturning cannot be effected by simply reordering these elements into another hierarchy. For, it is the hierarchical oppositional structure itself that is metaphysical; therefore, in lingering in the binary logic of metaphysical thinking one inevitably reproduces and maintains the closed field of those oppositions.

Moreover, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues that it is exactly such a inversion of values – the elevation of a certain kind of writing, even above speech – that has characterised the mystical discourse of "the writing of truth in the soul" (*OG* 15/*DLG* 26): "There is [...] a good and a bad writing: the good and natural, divine inscription in the heart and the soul; the perverse and deceitful, technique exiled in the exteriority of the body" (*OG* 18-19/*DLG* 30). Nevertheless, such a "metaphorical" elevation of writing takes place within "the system of signified truth" that also founds the "literal" meaning given to writing: "[...] sign signifying a signifier itself signifying an eternal verity, eternally thought and spoken

in the proximity of the present logos" (*OG* 15/*DLG* 27). Therefore, if someone merely accepted such an inversion, then there would be no hope of any exit from the vicious circle of a sublimated meaning. Deconstructive reading is not an inversion through which writing would be recognised as primary, non-derivative, etc. As Derrida maintains: "Deconstructing this tradition will therefore not consist of reversing it, of making writing innocent" (*OG* 40/*DLG* 55). For him, "[i]t is not, therefore, a matter of inverting the proper meaning and the figurative meaning but of determining the 'proper' meaning of writing as metaphoricity itself" (*OG* 16/*DLG* 27). What deconstructive reading aims at demonstrating is the ultimate "undecidability" of all those deeply rooted conceptual binary oppositions. It can accomplish this only by refusing to be content with the mere elevation of writing in relation to previous order. As John Llewelyn points out, "[a]ny study which reverses the phonologism of Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger or Saussure and simply asserts the prior or equal rights of writing is no less logocentric. This holds quite generally for all the oppositions within the logocentric tradition."[19]

For deconstructive reading, when the repressed term of the binary opposition *extends* its sphere of influence in such a way as to eventually include the privileged term itself, the impact of such an operation is not just limited to the way in which the two opposed terms are hierarchised, but, more essentially, it is extended to the possibility of the existence of the hierarchical opposition itself, and consequently, to the possibility of the existence of the terms which constitute it. Derrida discusses this issue in "Structure, Sign and the Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in the context of his deconstructive reading of the binary opposition that Claude Levi-Strauss installs between the *bricoleur* and the *engineer*:

> As soon as we cease to believe in such an engineer […] as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain *bricolage* and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of *bricoleurs*, then the very idea of *bricolage* is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down. (*WD* 285/*ED* 418)

In the above quoted passage, it is obvious the presence of Nietzsche who, in his deconstruction of the distinction between the real and the apparent world, asserts: "We have abolished the real world: what world is left? The apparent world perhaps?... But no! *with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!*"[20]

The mere inversion of the hierarchical opposites is the confirmation of the old regime. It is the same danger that lurks when someone attempts to break suddenly and radically with the language of the old order, hoping to abandon it through neologisms. Only by maintaining the language of the system under deconstruction and re-inscribing within it what has been repressed, can one entertain the possibility of some change.

In "The Ends of Man", Derrida refers to the existence of two prevalent "strategies" of deconstruction – yet, neither of them is declared to be that of his own deconstruction(s):

> a. To attempt an exit and a deconstruction without changing terrain, by repeating what is implicit in the founding concepts and the original problematic, by using against the edifice the instruments or stones available in the house, that is, equally, in language. Here, one risks ceaselessly confirming, consolidating, *relifting (relever)*, at an always more certain depth that which one allegently deconstructs. The continuous process of making explicit, moving toward an opening, risks sinking into the autism of the closure. b. To decide to change terrain, in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion, by brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break

> and difference. Without mentioning all the other forms
> of *trompe-l'oeil* perspective in which such a displacement
> can be caught, thereby inhabiting more naively and
> more strictly than ever the inside one declares one has
> deserted, the simple practice of language ceaselessly re-
> instatement or of such a blindness could be shown in nu-
> merous precise instances. (*M* 135/*MP* 162-163)

Derrida connects the first of these two different styles of decon-
struction with the "Heideggerian questions", while "the other is
mostly the one which dominates in France today". Yet while the
first strategy rightly recognises that someone is obliged to draw
the means of the deconstruction of a certain conceptual edifice
from the edifice itself – something that the second "strategy" friv-
olously ignores – it fails to perceive "the necessity for a 'change of
terrain'", something that is rightly presented as an imperative by
the second strategy. Therefore, "the choice between these two
forms of deconstruction cannot be simple and unique". Derrida
propounds "[a] new writing" that "must weave and interlace these
two motifs of deconstruction". Something "[w]hich amounts to
saying that one must speak several languages and produce sev-
eral texts at once". In order to add right after: "[...] what we need,
perhaps, as Nietzsche said, is a change of 'style'; and if there is
style, Nietzsche reminded us it must be *plural*" (*M* 135/*MP* 163)
(See, also, *D* 4-6/*DIS* 10-12).

Deconstructive reading is not defined by an inferior term's
seizure of the privileged position within a hierarchically ordered
opposition, and the rendering inferior of the other, previously su-
perior term. The inferior term is elevated to a privileged position
through the *extension* of basic characteristics – traditionally at-
tributed to it as constitutive of its secondariness – to the privi-
leged term. This extension moves beyond the logic of a
complementary downgrading and elevation to reveal itself as a

condition of possibility of both poles of the opposition. Deconstructing reading is not coterminous with the inversion of binary oppositions. Its effect is to set out the radically unstable, strictly "undecidable" character of any metaphysical opposition.

Writing, for example, in its limited, conventional sense, that is, as the phono-alphabetical transcription of a pre-existed oral language, can be really seen as a "poor relation of speech". But, from the moment, we start attending how writing slips away from the closed system of the linear and phonetical notation, then this hierarchical binary opposition collapses and its terms start a series of vertiginous substitutions and deviations from the origin of language, an origin that thus remains far beyond any possibility of recovery. What Derrida makes apparent is the *impossibility* of the maintenance of the metaphysical value-system which would "confine writing to any such restricted definition".[21]

6. *The Phase of* Displacement

Deconstructive reading does not end with the abolition of the hierarchical opposition through this peculiar "inversion". Deconstructive reading's reversal of a certain hierarchical opposition aims to effect an *intervention* in the field of the system that generated it. This intervention takes place through a process of *(re-)inscription* in which that which was repressed, but existant, is made apparent again through the undermining of the binary opposition and is resituated within the system. Deconstructive reading creates an endless oscillation between the *undoing* of a certain binary opposition, through this peculiar inversion, and the *preservation* of what this inversion brought to the surface, through its *re-inscription* within the system that previously nourished this op-

position.[22] The *re-inscription* is no less important than the *undoing*, since without it, the mechanism, which produces the hierarchical oppositions, would remain intact. To remain, as Derrida maintains, "in this *phase* [*of the reversal*] *is still* to operate on the terrain of and from within the deconstructed system" (*P* 42/*POS* 57).

The phase of the *reversal* of a certain hierarchy of predicates or concepts demands the phase of *re-inscription*, *displacement* or *reconstruction*. Re-inscription is necessary, because, "[f]or the reversal, if it is not accompanied by a discrete parody, a strategy of writing, or difference or deviation in quills, if there is no style, no grand style, this is finally but the same thing, nothing more than a clamorous declaration of the antithesis".[23] For Alan D. Schrift, the conception of deconstructive reading "as a simple inversion of these classical philosophical oppositions ignores the second phase of deconstruction's 'double writing.'"[24] As Derrida insists in *Positions*, "we must also mark the interval between inversion, which brings low what has high, and the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,' a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime" (*P* 42/*POS* 57).

The inferior and derivative term of the binary opposition, which was privileged through the inversion of the given hierarchy, is not yet the deconstructive term, this "new 'concept'". The newly privileged, and previously inferior term of the binary opposition constitutes, in the deconstructive process, merely "its negative atheistic face (the insufficient but indispensable phase of reversal)" (*D* 54/*DIS* 71). The re-inscription of the "negative image" of the *outside* of the philosophical system, through what Derrida terms "displacement" or "intervention", prevents this "new" or deconstructive term from remaining identical with the inferior term of the initial dyad. Although it uses the same name with its negative image, the "new" or deconstructive term is unable to be comprehended within the system that nourished the binary op-

position under deconstruction. It escapes "the specular nature of philosophical reflection" which is "incapable of inscribing (comprehending) what is outside it otherwise than through the appropriating assimilation of a negative image" (*D* 33/*DIS* 44).

These "new 'concepts,'" which Derrida terms "undecidables" (*indécidables*), such as "différance", "supplement", "pharmakon", or "hymen", are marks that, somehow or other, resist the symmetrical ("formal") structure imposed by the binary logic of philosophical conceptualization, while also making apparent the *contingent* character of "those choices that the tradition has privileged as dominant":[25]

> Henceforth, in order better to mark this interval [...] it has been necessary to analyze, to set to work, *within* the text of the history of philosophy, as well as *within* the so-called literary text [...] certain marks, shall we say [...], that *by analogy* (I underline) I have called undecidables, that is, unities of simulacrum, "false" verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for solution in the form of speculative dialectics [...]. (*P* 42-43/*POS* 58)

If Derrida refers to these "new 'concepts'", the "undecidables", as "unities of simulacrum", or "'false' verbal properties (nominal or semantic)", this is because, by extending the field of their significance beyond that of the binary oppositions, they are able to mean a plurality of things, while they mean nothing *in congreto*:

> [...] the *pharmakon* is neither remedy nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing; the *supplement* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an in-

> side, neither accident nor essence, etc.; the *hymen* is nei-
> ther confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor dif-
> ference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the
> veil nor unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, etc.;
> the *gram* is neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a
> sign nor a thing, neither a presence nor an absence, nei-
> ther a position nor a negation, etc.; *spacing* is neither
> space nor time; the *incision* is neither the incised integrity
> of a beginning, or of a simple cutting into, nor simple sec-
> ondarity. Neither/nor, that is, *simultaneously* either *or*
> [*Ni/ni, c'est* à la fois *ou bien* ou bien] (*P* 43/*POS* 58-59).

These "new undecidable concepts" resist the symmetrical, formal
structure imposed by the hierarchical binary logic of philosophi-
cal opposition, demonstrating another "logic", which "has been
repressed and excluded from the history of metaphysics",[26] and
which Derrida names "logic of supplementarity" (*logique de la sup-
plémentarité*) (*OG* 144-5, 215/*DLG* 207-8, 308). Whereas, for Alan
D. Schrift,

> binary logic operates within the limits of a disjunctive
> "either... or..." Derrida's undecidable logic of supplemen-
> tarity is a conjunctive logic of "both... and..." that resists
> and disorganizes classical binary thinking. The funda-
> mental laws of binary logic are the principles of identity
> (A=A) and non-contradiction (not [A and not-A]). The
> movement of the undecidables exhibits a different prin-
> ciple: *both* A *and* not-A.[27]

The *pharmakon*, for example, "acts as both remedy and poison,
[...] [it] can be – alternatively or simultaneously – beneficent or
maleficent" (*D* 70/*DIS* 87). *Pharmakon* "plays" between the poles
of remedy and poison and, therefore, its rendering as *either* rem-
edy *or* poison, as metaphysical binary thought ordains, prevents
the revelation of the essential ambiguity of the word. Derrida re-

fuses to determine a categorical, unambiguous meaning for *pharmakon*, or for the other undecidables. On the contrary, he stresses the tension and the oscillation that direct their usage. Yet, the "undecidables" do not constitute an opening onto "an inexhaustible wealth of meaning or the transcendence of a semantic excess" (*P* 46/*POS* 63).

For Derrida, the strategy of "double reading" or "double writing" situates itself upon the boundary which the philosophical tradition has constructed in order to constitute its identity. Through this strategy, Derrida seeks to make apparent that the installation of this boundary is the product of a process in which its very constitution entails the repression, exclusion or marginalisation of certain elements. This is effected by marking the movement of those concepts that this tradition both authorises and excludes. Deconstructive reading is enabled to introduce itself into the closed field of binary thinking in a manner which avoids the reaffirmation of these structures and the process of their formation. In *Positions,* Derrida reveals his critical strategy as follows:

> To "deconstruct" philosophy, thus, would be to think – in the most faithful, interior way – the structured genealogy of philosophy's concepts, but at the same time to determine – from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable or unnameable by philosophy – what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this somewhere motivated repression. (*P* 6/*POS* 15)

The deconstruction of philosophy, thus, consists in tracing of the evolution of certain key-oppositions of metaphysical binary thinking *as* the "history of metaphysics" and the elaboration of other possibilities which the institution and institutionalisation of metaphysical binary thinking has repressed.

Deconstructive reading takes place through a "double gesture", a "double science", a "double writing", that consists of a phase of "inversion" or "overturning" and a phase of general "displacement". During the phase of "inversion", the inferior term of the opposition is elevated through the rehabilitation of those of its "predicates that have been subordinated, excluded, or held in abeyance by forces and according to necessities to be analyzed" (*LI* 21/*LInc* 50). During the phase of *re-inscription* or *displacement*,

> [i]t is those predicates [...] whose force of generality, generalization, and generativity is liberated, grafted onto a "new" concept of writing that corresponds as well to what has always *resisted* the prior organization of forces, always constituted the *residue* irreducible to the dominant force organizing the hierarchy that we may refer to, in brief, as logocentric. (*LI* 21/*LInc* 50-51)

Derrida explicates the maintenance of the old name ("the logic of *paleonymy*") as follows:

> To leave to this new concept the old name of writing is tantamount to maintaining the structure of the *graft*, the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective *intervention* in the constituted historical field. It is to give to everything at stake in the operations of deconstruction the chance and the force, the power of *communication*. (*LI* 21/*LInc* 51)

The "double gesture" that characterises deconstructive reading is a systematic operation which is also marked by the irreducible difference of its two gestures: "[...] we must proceed using a double gesture, according to a unity that is both systematic and in and of itself divided, a double writing, that is, a writing that is in and of itself multiple, what I called, in 'La double séance,' a *double science*" (*P* 41/*POS* 56). Derrida describes the "double gesture" of

deconstructive reading in terms of a chiasmatic doubling or cross-ing:

> The form of the chiasm, of the *X*, interests me a great deal, not as the symbol of the unknown, but because there is in it, as I underline in "*La dissemination,*" a kind of fork (the series *crossroads, quadrifurcum, grid, trellis, key,* etc.) that is, moreover, unequal, one of the points extend-ing its range further than the other: this is the figure of the double gesture, the intersection, of which we were speaking earlier." (*P* 70/*POS* 95).

The two gestures of deconstructive reading are unequal, irre-ducible and heterogeneous. The first is inscribed within the limits or the closure of metaphysics, while the other tries to open a pas-sage which leads beyond these limits. These "new 'concepts'" or "quasi-concepts", which are produced through this *other* gesture, cannot be comprehended within the limits of metaphysics de-marcated by the first gesture. A structural dissymmetry, or chias-mus characterises the relation of the two heterogeneous gestures of deconstructive reading. This enables the avoidance of any neu-tralisation of binary oppositions, aporias and other contradictions that emanate from the dissimilarities and disparities of philo-sophical discourse, and the *reinscription* or "regrounding" of con-cepts within another non-metaphysical *topos*.

Notes

1. Immanuel Kant, "Preface to the Second Edition", in *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan, 1993), 37.

2. Mark Cousins, "The Logic of Deconstruction", *The Oxford Literary Review* 3, no. 2 (1978): 71.

3. *Ibid*.

4. Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 126.

5. *Ibid.*, 124.

6. As Gasché maintains, these "contradictions" and "aporias" have never been thematised by philosophy itself and are, in some way, external to the traditional and codified problems of philosophy. Hence, they cannot be interpreted as contradictions or aporias proper. Derrida does not limit the notions of "contradiction" and "aporia" to the errors of philosophical description and predication. "Contradiction" and "aporia" should be comprehended, in Derrida, as referring to the general dissimilarity between different constituent materials of philosophical discourse as such (*Ibid.*, 128).

7. *Ibid.*

8. Rodolphe Gasché "Deconstruction as Criticism", in *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 37.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 131.

12. *Ibid.*, 135.

13. *Ibid.*, 137.

14. In order to explicate the hierarchical structure of an opposition better, we can leave the domain of philosophical concepts for a moment and refer to the example of Adam and Eve from the *Old Testament*, according to which, Adam, the male, is created first and in full. Eve, who comes from his rib, is under his law. Yet, quite paradoxically, despite her secondariness and subordination to Adam, Eve is charged as drugging him along to evil, the outcome of which was their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

15. Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 137-138.

16. Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, 63: "Yes - (Si-) had it ever taken place, castration will have been a sort of syntax which, in its annulment and equalization of any discourse in the mode of *pro et contra*, would have stabilized its undecidable. Castration's syntax is the free shot which aims nonetheless to collect its interests."

17. Barbara Johnson, *Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), x-xi.

18. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," trans. Frank A. Capuzzi in collaboration with J. Glenn Gray & David Farell Krell, in *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farell Krell, revised and expanded edition (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 232. See, also, Heidegger's discussion of Nietzsche's inversion of Platonism in *Nietzsche Vol. I: The Will to Power as Art*, in Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, trans. David Farell Krell (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1979), 1- 263.

19. John Llewelyn, *Derrida on the Threshold of Sense* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 54.

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, "How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth", in *Twilight of Idols,* trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Penguin Books, 1983), 41.

21. Norris, *Derrida*, 133.

22. Eugene Goodheart distinguishes the deconstruction of a hierarchical opposition from its mere demystification as follows: "Unlike demystification, deconstruction is an assault on stable hierarchical notions of reality. To demystify is to reduce *a* to *b* or to evaporate illusion *a* in favor of reality b. Deconstruction, on the other hand, ambiguously preserves everything and makes everything the object of suspicion. Nothing disappears, but nothing is stable" (Eugene Goodheart, *The Failure of Criticism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978, 3).

23. Derrida, *Spurs : Nietzsche's Styles*, 95.

24. Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), 16-17.

25. *Ibid.*, 17.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

SECOND PART
DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTIVE *DOUBLE* READING
IN PRACTICE:
THE CASE OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

A General Overview of Part Two

The second part of the present study is centred on the description and critical examination of an "example" of deconstructive reading: Derrida's deconstructive "double" reading of Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Language* and the *Confessions*. In this examination, I shall first list some of the significations into which (forced, he asserts, by an "inassimilable residue" in the text itself) Derrida disperses the meaning that he has already construed as apparently simple during the first moment of deconstructive reading; I shall then go on to enquire into the operations which enable him to arrive at these multiplex and self-conflicting significations. The main aim of the second part of this thesis is to demonstrate that it is not language alone that disables the philosophy of Rousseau and enables the philosophy of Derrida. Deconstruction is itself effected through presuppositions which determine the manner in which it reads and fixes itself upon a text.

When Derrida attempts to support his philosophy[1] through an analysis of Rousseau's theory of language and the alleged contradictions in Rousseau's texts, he misinterprets basic tenets of these texts in order to make them conform to these presuppositions of the deconstructive approach. Derrida's reading of Rousseau is effected in a manner in which what is read is a reading into Rousseau of what has already been decided must be in the text. He simply forces Rousseau's text into the mould of deconstruction.

Derrida's demonstrations of the "cross-overs" and "reversals" found in Rousseau's text, are not engendered by a "residue" of meaning in the sentences of the *Essay* and the *Confessions,* but by an extensive misreading of their basic tenets. In addition, the "reversal" and "displacement" of metaphysical conceptuality in Rousseau's text is made possible after the text has had meanings transposed into it from a plurality of other texts. This transposition dissolves the "unifying boundaries" of the text as a linguistic entity in order to merge it into the textuality constituted by the corpus of Rousseau's texts or beyond this, to other texts which are held in some way connected with his work. This manoeuvre frees the text from the limitations involved in the linguistic practice by which Derrida himself had already read the text as a specific *parole* by a specified speaker. Derrida is now licensed, for example, to attribute to the text any further significations he discovers by construing, explicating and over-reading passages that occur elsewhere in Rousseau's total *oeuvre,* or even outside it.

Beyond the actual practice or mode of reading itself, Derrida aims to produce a wider destabilisation of the philosophical tradition. This is predicated, in turn, upon a certain construction of this philosophical tradition, as that of Western metaphysics, and, in relation to it, the "exemplary" position that Rousseau is accorded within it.

A. Deconstructing the *Confessions*

1. *The Presence of the Supplement in Rousseau*

Derrida claims that Rousseau's texts, specifically the *Confessions* and the *Essay on the Origin of Languages,* are organised according to a series of binary oppositions such as speech and writing, presence and absence or nature and culture. Repeating the overall pattern of Western metaphysics, Rousseau attributes the superior and dominant function to that series of terms which bear the mark of presence. These binary oppositions are interconnected, but this interconnection is not based upon an essential similarity in their operation within Rousseau's text.

Derrida's deconstructive reading of Rousseau is centered on the word "supplement" which is a *blind spot* (*tache aveugle*) in Rousseau's texts (in the same way that in Plato's *Phaedrus,* the blind spot is the word *pharmakon),* a word which, despite its frequent use by Rousseau, contains a logic which eludes him: "The concept of the supplement is a sort of blind spot in Rousseau's text, the not-seen that opens and limits visibility" (*OG* 178/*DLG* 234). Exceeding the semantic limits of its intended use, the word "supplement" has the power to say something different from that

which Rousseau *meant to say*. Derrida's reading of Rousseau traces the logic of this "supplement", a logic that allows Rousseau's text to differ from its intended meaning, and to take a different position in relation to its apparent logocentric conceptuality that its author intended to affirm.

In the *Confessions* and the *Essay,* one of the binary oppositions that Rousseau reproduces is that between speech and writing. Speech is elevated as the immediate, natural medium of linguistic expression par excellence, while writing is relegated to a mere supplement of speech. According to Derrida, such a move is determined by the same logocentric gesture which has characterised the entirety of Western philosophical discourse from Plato through Rousseau to Saussure and Levi-Strauss. As in the case of Saussure, who claims that "[a] language and its written form constitute two separate systems of signs. The sole reason for the existence of the latter is to represent the former",[2] Rousseau evaluates writing as an unproductive representation of speech, which is less desirable because it lacks immediacy. In this context, Rousseau attributes priority to speech as a more immediate expression of the self.

When Rousseau, on Derrida's reading, attempts to justify his authorial activity, it becomes clear immediately, without the need for Rousseau's own admission, that speech is not always successfully related to the positivity of full presence. He then is obliged to take refuge in writing which provides him with an absence, and a type of calculated effacement, in an attempt to create a symbolic reappropriation of a certain presence lacking in speech. Rousseau thinks that he is able to express himself less successfully through the immediacy of his voice than when he is writing. When he talks, he is often obliged to say things that he does not mean, which results in the generation of a false image of who he actually is:

> I would love society like others, if I were not sure of show-
> ing myself not only at a disadvantage, but quite other
> than what I am. My decision to *write and to hide myself* is
> precisely the one that suits me. With me present, one
> would never have known what I was worth. (quoted in
> *OG* 154/*DLG* 205)

Rousseau resists the presence guaranteed by speech in order, through the absence created by this resistance, to be recognized within the ideality of truth and value guaranteed by writing. He attempts to master the absent presence of speech through his own absence. Such an absence is possible only through the absence ensured by writing. Consequently, it is writing which is closer to the mark of presence than speech.

Although, in a sense, Rousseau is obliged to rehabilitate writing to the extent that it promises the reappropriation of that presence which speech allowed to be dissembled, it is a re-establishment of a presence in speech as it *should* be, or such as it *should have* been that is his ultimate goal. Rousseau, thereby, simultaneously valorises and disqualifies writing. He must eventually exorcise all those features in writing which could undermine this effort of reappropriation:

> He wishes on the one hand to *affirm*, by giving it a posi-
> tive value, everything of which articulation is the princi-
> ple or everything with which it constructs a system
> (passion, language, society, man, etc.). But he intends to
> affirm simultaneously all that is crossed out by articula-
> tion (accent, life, energy, passion yet again, and so on).
> The supplement being the articulated structure of these
> two possibilities, Rousseau can only decompose it and
> dissociate it into two simple units, logically contradictory
> yet allowing an intact purity to both the negative and the
> positive." (*OG* 268/*DLG* 349)

Having thus dissociated the two possibilities into two conflicting units, Rousseau will define the supplement as mere external addition, a simple exteriority:

> From then on, metaphysics consists of excluding non-presence by determining the supplement as *simple exteriority,* as pure addition or pure absence. It is within the structure of supplementarity that the work of exclusion is operated. The paradox is that one annuls addition by considering it a pure addition. *What is added is nothing because it is added to a full presence to which it is exterior.* Speech comes to added to intuitive presence (of the being [étant], of *essence,* of the *eidos,* of *ousia,* etc.); writing comes to be added to living self-present speech; masturbation comes to be added to so-called normal sexual experience; culture comes to be added to nature, evil to innocence, history to origin, etc. (*OG* 181/*DLG* 237-8)

Although Rousseau's declared intention is to think speech as unique, and remaining intact by the exteriority of writing, "in spite of that declared intention, Rousseau's discourse lets itself be constrained by a complexity which always has the form of the supplement of or from origin" (*OG* 264/*DLG* 345). The notion of the supplement – determining here the notion of writing as descriptive image – shelters another meaning whose cohabitation with the first is both strange and necessary. The supplement is added in order to complete, to compensate for a lack in that which was deemed self-sufficient, complete in itself. The possibility of the addition of the supplement indicates that that which is supplemented is incomplete or absent:

> But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of* ; if it fills to the brim [*comble*], it is as if one fills [*comble*] a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior de-

> fault of a presence. Supplementing and and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it does not simply added itself to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something cannot fill itself up *by itself*, cannot accomplish itself, if not by allowing itself to be filled [*combler*] through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself. (*OG* 157/*DLG* 208)

From his own description of speech, Rousseau should have concluded that writing has corrupted speech from outside. However, Rousseau prefers to believe that "[t]here *will (would) have* been plenitude there [in speech] and not lack, presence without difference" (*OG* 233/*DLG* 308). As a result of this conclusion, which valorises speech as a desideratum, writing is described as something secondary, *"com[ing] to add itself from the outside as evil and lack* to happy and innocent plenitude. It would come from an outside which would be simply the outside" (*OG* 233-234/*DLG* 308).

Hence, Rousseau conceives writing as a dangerous medium, a threatening assistance, a critical answer to a distressing situation. When speech fails to protect presence, writing reveals its necessity. Since speech is the natural expression of thought, writing adds to it; it is joined to speech as a representation or an image; and to that effect, as something unnatural. Within representation, it provokes the appearance of an immediate presence of thought in speech. The addition of writing to speech constitutes a kind of artificial and ingenious deceit in order to render speech present when in fact it is not. Writing is dangerous from the moment when representation presents itself as presence, taking the place of speech. Writing inevitably makes its status as a supplement be forgotten, and presents itself as synonymous with the completeness of speech.

Although writing is external to the interiority of speech, it can, however, affect it in its interiority. Rousseau's remarks on the exteriority of writing to speech, and the threat that writing poses to full speech despite its declared exteriority, are conditioned by the same contradictory logic exhibited in Plato and Saussure. In the *Phaedrus*, although Plato thinks writing as external to memory, writing remains capable of affecting memory profoundly. In the *Courses in General Linguistics*, Saussure describes writing as foreign to the internal system of language, an external "image" and "depiction", while, at the same time, he treats it as a threat that affects language and modifies it. But, "[i]f it was purely external, writing would leave the intimacy or integrity" of this Platonic (internal) memory or Saussurian language untouched. Responding to the same necessity, Rousseau maintains *both* the exteriority of writing *and* the power of its noxious infiltration, "its ability to affect or infect" (*D* 110/*DIS* 137). Thus, writing is that "dangerous supplement that breaks into the very thing that would have liked to do without it yet lets itself *at once* be breached, roughed up, fulfilled, and replaced, completed by the very trace through which the present increases itself in the act of disappearing" (*D* 110/*DIS* 137).

Yet, "[i]t does not suffice to say", as Derrida observes, "that Rousseau thinks the supplement without thinking it, that he does not match his saying and his meaning, his descriptions and his declarations" (*OG* 267/*DLG* 348). Rather, the tension between the gesture and the statement, the description and the declaration, instead of leading up to their mutual annihilation, contributes to the cohesion of the text through the "ought to be" or the conditional mood:

> *Should* [*devrait*]: it is the mode and tense of a teleological and eschatological anticipation that oversees Rousseau's entire discourse. Thinking differance and supplementar-

> ity in this mode and tense, Rousseau would like to an-
> nounce them from the horizon of their final effacement.
> (*OG* 321/*DLG* 416)

Through this form, Rousseau can think both incompatible possi-
bilities, presence and supplement, together. As the conditional
mood reveals, this contradictory coherence is itself the fulfilment
of a desire. Derrida views this kind of contradictory logic as anal-
ogous to that which Freud, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Jokes
and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, calls the sophistry of the bor-
rowed kettle.[3] As Derrida explains:

> If, instead of meditating on the structure that makes
> such supplementarity possible, if above all instead of
> meditating on the reduction by which "Plato- Rousseau-
> Saussure" try in vain to master it with an odd kind of "rea-
> soning," one were to content oneself with pointing to the
> "logical contradiction," one would have to recognise here
> an instance of that kind of "kettle-logic" to which Freud
> turns in the *Traumdeutung* in order to illustrate the logic
> of dreams. In his attempt to arrange everything in his
> favor, the defendant piles up contradictory arguments:
> 1. The kettle I am returning to you is brand new; 2. The
> holes were already in it when you lent it to me; 3. You
> never lent me a kettle, anyway. (*D* 110-111/*DIS* 137)

Rousseau, Plato and Saussure organise their various arguments
referring to presence and supplement, speech and writing, in an
analogous way: 1. The supplement and writing are rigorously ex-
terior and inferior to presence and speech, which are thus not af-
fected by them and remain intact. 2. They are harmful because
they are separate from presence and thereby affect and infect liv-
ing speech which would otherwise remain intact. 3. Anyway, if
one needed to resort to supplement and writing at all, it is not for
their intrinsic value, but because presence is already deficient, it

already has holes in it before writing ever comes to supplement it. Hence, supplement and writing has no effect in presence or speech at all.[4]

The "logic of supplementarity" is Derrida's attempt to tie all these contradictory declarations and propositions about presence and supplement, or speech and writing together into a structure in such a way as not only to avoid obliterating them, but also, to explicitly account for their possibility, and the limits of their scope. Supplementarity, as the act of addition and vicarious substitution of an absent presence, is the minimal structure required to explain the contradictions that result from assuming both the simple exteriority of the supplement and its threat to absent presence. This structure is composed of a field of relations that inscribes within itself the function and value of the philosophical notion of original presence or presence in general; it shows how the myth of an unbreached original presence, or presence in general, depends upon the annihilation of the logic of supplementarity:

> The concept of origin [...] is nothing but the myth of addition, of supplementarity annulled by being purely additive. It is the myth of the effacement of the trace, that is to say of an originary differance that is neither absence nor presence, neither negative nor positive. Originary differance is supplementarity as *structure*. Here structure means the irreducible complexity within which one can only inflect or displace the play of presence or absence: that within which metaphysics can be produced but which metaphysics cannot think. (*OG* 181/*DLG* 238)

What follows from the law of supplementarity is that the origin is always already an addition or a supplement compensating for a more original absent plenitude. An origin is the result produced by an act of initial substitution where an initial origin, which re-

vealed its inoperability, was replaced. Only under this condition can one explain how the origin *can* have supplements, and, also, why it *has* simultaneously to call upon them and to repel them. Only as a supplement for another origin already impaired does an origin need a substitute. If the danger of the supplement stems from its structural ability to substitute and to take the position of that which it is added to, then this danger is a pure function of the belatedness of the latter.

2. *Supplementarity and Desire*

Appropriation is animated not by presence, but by the desire for presence. As Barbara Johnson remarks, "[i]t is not possible to desire that with which one coincides".[5] In other words, the loss of presence has "always already" commenced. It is a lack in the core of presence which gives birth to and maintains the desire for presence. This desire, which is articulated as a "metaphysics of presence", has, as a condition of its existence, the lack that is constitutive of the trace. The trace is always shadowed by what it is not, by lack. Thus, the discourse on presence always reveals another discourse, a discourse on lack. As a result, the double register of a common condition, the desire for presence, conditions both the movement and the failure of logocentrism. The movement that philosophical discourse follows is from an originary presence that never existed towards a future plenitude of presence, which cannot be reached. To logocentrism, then, there could correspond a definite topology of desire. This desire carries with it, as the condition of its movement, and of the regulation of its economy, a destiny of non-satisfaction. There is no reappropriation of presence, because there was no original presence in

the first place. Presence itself stems from an alienation or *dif-férance* which has the structure of supplement. The initial point is not presence but *différance*:

> Without the possibility of differance, the desire for presence as such would not find its breathing-space. That means by the same token that this desire carries in itself the destiny of its non-satisfaction. Differance produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible. (*OG* 143/*DLG* 206)

It could be said that *différance* never ceases to refute whatever it promises and never ceases to promise whatever it is going to refute in the future.

In "Roundtable on Translation", Derrida points out that the desire for an already absent original presence, for an archi-original intactness is "irreducible", because this desire is not constituted around an object prior to it, since such an originary presence does not exist, but both desire and its object are constituted simultaneously by their interrelationship. Desire is generated at the moment when it constitutes the object it desires. Neither desire nor presence is prior to the other. Prior to them, there is only *dif-férance*. Derrida opposes *necessity (ananke)* to desire:

> The *ananke* is that there is no intact kernel and there never has been one. That's what one wants to forget, and to forget that one has forgotten it. It's not that something has been forgotten; rather, one wants to forget that there is nothing to forget, that there has been nothing to forget. But one can only forget that there has never been an intact kernel. This phantasm, this desire for the intact kernel sets in motion every kind of desire, every kind of tongue, appeal, address. This is the necessity and it's a hard one, a terrible necessity. But just as without the desire for the intact kernel which doesn't exist, the desire

> for the untouchable, for virginity (the taboo on virginity
> has an essential relation to all this) – just as without this
> desire for virginity no desire whatever would be set mov-
> ing, likewise without Necessity and without what comes
> along to interrupt and thwart that desire itself would not
> unfold. I don't know what else to call this but Necessity
> with a capital *N*, something that no one can do anything
> about and that is not a law instituted by any subject [...].
> This *ananke*, no less than the desire for virginity, is what
> makes possible the kernel desire itself – the intact desire
> for intactness.[6]

Writing about the privilege of presence in philosophy, Derrida
uses terms as "security", "reduction of anxiety", and so forth. The
desire for presence is the desire for such "security", which is ex-
pressed in various ways:

> And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the
> force of a desire. The concept of centered structure is in
> fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental
> ground, a play structured on the basis of a fundamental
> immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is be-
> yond the reach of play. And on the basis of this certitude
> anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the re-
> sult of a certain mode of being implicated in the game,
> of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake
> in the game from the outset. (*WD* 279/*ED* 410)

For Derrida, as Geoffrey Bennington points out in "Derridabase",
"[t]he point is not at all to disapprove of or to attempt to destroy
this type of desire, we cannot but share it, for it is desire itself".[7]
In "Envois", Derrida confesses: "I write exactly the opposite, as con-
cerns axiomatics, of what I desire, what I know my desire to be,
in other words you: living speech, presence itself, proximity, the
proper, the guard, etc."[8] For Bennington, what matters is "to show

how this desire is possible only to the extent of the radical impossibility of its accomplishment".[9]

According to Mark Cousins, this position, however, assumes the very thing which is to be demonstrated:

> For the problem of logocentrism to be in some sense ineffaceable requires that the couple lack/desire be assumed. Now although this topology is constructed outside the domain of psychoanalysis it clearly makes analogous moves. Yet, it is precisely the articulation of general instances of lack and desire which is made vulnerable by the term *differance*, which disrupts the controlling finality of an "instance". The assumption of a general economy, which appears to be required in order to provide a certain unity and necessity for the concept of logocentrism is made paradoxical by the deconstruction which would unhinge the concept of a general economy.[10]

As David Wood indicates, Derrida's totalising treatment of philosophy could itself be understood as a "hermeneutics of desire". Derrida interprets philosophy as the desire for a first point or *arche*. It seems that for Derrida, "the real meaning of philosophy is this Desire. But there are no *real meanings* for Derrida, and if there were, to privilege such Desire would be an interference with play."[11]

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to a similar danger that lurks in the "desire for deconstruction". Although deconstruction ought to try to avoid the interpretive mastery or closure imported into the text in the form of a transcendental truth or significance, outside the play of differences, there is always the danger, that,

> the desire of deconstruction may become a desire to reappropriate the text actively through mastery, to show the text what it "does not know." And as she deconstructs,

> all protestations to the contrary, the critic necessarily assumes that she at least, and for the time being, means what she says. Even the declaration of her vulnerability must come, after all, in the controlling language of demonstration and reference. In other words, the critic provisionally forgets that her own text is necessarily self-deconstructed, always already a palimpsest.[12]

Derrida tells us that a "desire for presence" – i.e., pure meaning, pure signification without the material support of the sign or the empirical, total undivided, transparent, naked, present, and self-identical truth – inhabits logocentric metaphysics. But such is the impossible demand which sets up the condition of possibility for logocentric metaphysics itself, and *a fortiori*, the infinity of its existence. Therefore, it is the very impossibility of logocentric metaphysics that guarantees its *immortality*. If Derrida has managed to render the success of the metaphysical project impossible, at the same time, for exactly the same reasons, despite his intentions, he has been obliged to accord immortality to metaphysics.

3. The Chain of Supplementarity

Writing stands as a supplement to speech, but speech is already a supplement: Children, as Rousseau's *Emile* says, learn soon to use speech in order "to *supplement* their own weakness. [...] for it does not need much experience to realize how pleasant it is to act through the hands of others and to move the world by simply moving the tongue" (quoted in *OG* 160/*DLG* 211).

In the absence of Madam de Wrens, his beloved "Mamma", Rousseau had, as the *Confessions* reveal, recourse to a chain of surrogates:

> I should never have done, if I were to enter into details of all the follies which the remembrance of this dear mamma caused me to commit when I was no longer under her eyes. How often have I kissed my bed, thinking of the fact that she had slept in it; my curtains, all the furniture of my room, thinking of the fact that they belonged to her, that her beautiful hand had touched them; even the floor, on which I prostrated myself, thinking of the fact that she had walked upon it. (quoted in *OG* 165/*DLG* 217)

These supplements functioned, during her absence, as substitutes for her presence. However, as the text immediately reads, even "Mamma's" presence was not enough to stop this chain of supplements:

> Sometimes, even in her presence, extravagances escaped from me, which only the most violent love seemed capable of inspiring. At table one day, just when she had put a piece of food into her mouth, I exclaimed that I saw a hair in it; she put back the morsel on her plate, and I eagerly seized and swallowed it. (quoted in *OG* 165/*DLG* 217)

In his relationship with Thérèse, which is itself supplemented via the dangerous vice of masturbation, Rousseau also discovers the supplement of his adoptive mother who is herself the supplement of a "true" mother. And yet, even this natural mother is not outside the chain of supplementary substitutions. As Derrida maintains:

> Jean-Jacques could thus look for a supplement to Thérèse only on one condition: that the system of supplementarity in general be already open in its possibility, that the play of substitutions be already operative for a long time and that *in a certain way Thérèse herself was already a supplement.* As Mama was already the supple-

> ment of an unknown mother, and as the "true mother"
> herself, at whom the known "psychoanalyses" of the case
> of Jean-Jacques Rousseau stop, was also in a certain way
> a supplement, from the first trace, and even if she had
> not "truly" died in giving birth. (*OG* 170/*DLG* 225)

The attempt to retrace this chain to any "natural" or "first" mother is, therefore, condemned in advance to a vain regress. The beginning of the chain will always confront another beginning, a pre-originary substitution, a further supplement of a presence irremediably absent like the lost mother. The thought of an originary presence is destined to discover a supplement at the origin, the supplement of an origin itself supplementary, a presencing absence, an absenting presence. Therefore, it would be more adequate to talk about a generalised substitute, because, for Derrida, that which Rousseau's supplements reveal is an endless chain of substitutions:

> Across this sequence of supplements a necessity is announced: that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary perception. Immediacy is derived. That all begins through the intermediary is what is indeed "inconceivable to reason." (*OG* 171/*DLG* 226)

The "logic of supplementarity" undermines any reference back to a primordial "presence" which would be taken as an origin:

> The supplement, which is neither simply the signifier nor simply the representant, does not take the place of a signified or a represented, as is prescribed by the concepts of signification or representation or by the syntax of the words "signifier" or "representant." The supplement comes in the place of a lapse, of a nonsignified or a non-

> represented, a nonpresence. There is no present before
> it, it is not therefore preceded by anything but itself, that
> is to say by another supplement. The supplement is al-
> ways the supplement of a supplement. One wishes to go
> back *from the supplement to the source:* one must recognize
> that there is *a supplement at the source*. (*OG* 330/*DLG* 429)

An origin is just a substitute for a more original absence of plen-
itude. The "logic of supplementarity" indicates that the "first" is
simply a shadow thrown by the "second", or, that which "comes
first" is the movement from the first to the second, or that pleni-
tude was not there from the beginning, but it is constituted by
that which appears to point somewhere else.

From the moment that an origin can take on supplements, "it
is already inhabited by their negativity, and is not simply an origin
but a substitutive supplement for a lack".[13] In its positivity, al-
though the origin comes to compensate for a deficiency, it is also
inhabited *ab intra* by this deficiency due to which it can act as a
supplement to a primordial nonself-presence.[14] Thereupon, sup-
plementarity is more originary than both the substitutes or the
supplements and for all that which they substitute, compensate
for, or supplement:

> The question is of an originary supplement, then, if this
> absurd expression may be risked, totally unacceptable
> as it is within classical logic. Rather the supplement of
> origin: which supplements the failing origin and which
> is however not derived; this supplement is, as one says
> of a spare part [*une pièce*], of the original make [*d'origine*]
> [or a document, establishing the origin.] (*OG* 341/*DLG*
> 442)

Rendering the constitution of an origin dependent upon an orig-
inal substitution of another absent origin, the structure of sup-
plementarity does not only account for the interiority of what

Rousseau would have believed as exterior, but more importantly, it also exhibits "the power of exteriority as constitutive of interiority" (*OG* 341/*DLG* 442). The inside has never existed; it has never been intact and untouched by the outside; it has itself always been an outside. For example, writing can be compensatory for speech, only because speech is already marked by the qualities generally predicated of writing: absence and misunderstanding. Moreover, to show the interiority of the exteriority, and the exteriority of the interiority, amounts to the effacement of their metaphysical opposition, which, in turn, "amounts to annulling the ethical qualification and to thinking writing beyond good and evil" (*OG* 342/*DLG* 442). Rousseau could not think the structure of supplementarity that takes place *before* and *within* the opposition between the supplement and the origin, the inside and the outside, speech and writing, good and evil:

> To the extent that he belonged to the metaphysics of presence, he *dreamed* of the simple exteriority of death to life, evil to good, representation to presence, signifier to signified, representer to represented, mask to face, writing to speech. But all such oppositions are irreducibly rooted in that metaphysics. Using them, one can only operate by reversals, that is to say by confirmations. The supplement is none of these terms. It is especially not more a signifier than a signified, a representer than a presence, no more a writing than a speech. None of the terms of this series can, being contained within it, dominate the economy of differance or supplementarity. Rousseau's *dream* consisted of making the supplement enter metaphysics by force. (*OG* 343/*DLG* 444)

4. "...That Dangerous Supplement..."

The same "paradoxical" logic of the supplement reappears when Rousseau discusses his "'secret vice', the habit of substituting solitary pleasures for the experience of a 'natural' eroticism defined according to heterosexual norms".[15] Rousseau condemns masturbation as a perverse, pernicious and overpowering addition. Masturbation is a way of "cheating nature" through the substitution of the presence of a sexual partner with a simple image (absence):

> Soon reassured, I learned that dangerous supplement [*ce dangereux supplément*] which cheats nature and saves up for young men of my temperament many forms of disorders at the expense of their health, of their vigor, and, sometimes, their life. (quoted in *OG* 150/*DLG 215*)

Rousseau considers self-eroticism as a "dangerous supplement" because, as Christopher Norris indicates, "it 'summons up absent beauties,' enabling the fantasist to multiply imaginary experiences beyond all the limits of a wise, self-regulated nature".[16] According to Derrida:

> The dangerous supplement, which Rousseau also calls a "fateful advantage," is properly *seductive*; it leads desire away from the good path, makes it err far from natural ways, leads it towards its loss or fall and therefore it is a sort of lapse or scandal *(scandalon)*. It thus destroys nature. (*OG* 164/*DLG* 216)

For Norris, "Rousseau is unwilling to admit that the supplement may be there at the source, or that such undoubted 'perversions' of nature may infect every order of natural morality".[17] Therefore, he proceeds to describe these dangerous facts (masturbation, sexual fantasy, any type of auto-erotic desire) as "accidental defects due to some fault in the child's upbringing or perhaps some

wider, distinctively modern cultural malaise".[18] Nevertheless, despite his insistence on their pure exteriority to an (interior) nature, he does not miss the opportunity to underline – falling into the same contradictory logic as he describes for the relationship between writing and speech – their destructive impact on the latter. But, how is it possible for masturbation, or sexual fantasy, which is foreign, completely exterior to the interiority of a self-sufficient nature, to be capable of altering it, thus making it deviate from itself? As Derrida notes: "Rousseau neither wishes to nor can think that this alteration does not come upon the self, that it is its very origin. He must consider it a contingent evil coming from without to affect the integrity of the subject" (*OG* 167/*DLG* 221).

But despite Rousseau's declared intentions, the *Confessions* presents, according to Derrida, another Rousseau, one who, in Norris' formulation, is

> inescapably dependent upon fantasy – as indeed upon writing – to compensate for a lack which was always there, [...] at the heart of sexual desire. For it is Rousseau's complaint [...] that his experience with women has never lived up to those images of passionate fulfillment that thronged his sleeping and waking fantasy-life. Always the reality comes to represent a certain falling-short, a failure of desire in the very act of attaining its wished-for object.[19]

Rousseau reveals that his desire arises in inverse proportion to the natural proximity of the woman he desires: "I only felt the full strength of my attachment for her when I no longer saw her" (quoted in *OG* 166/*DLG* 218). Hence, the desire for the possession of a "real" woman, a desire founded and generated by distance, repeats "the fundamental structure of masturbation"[20] – desire of an imagined object that one can never "possess" except in their fantasy. In this sense, sexual activity in general can be seen, as

Jonathan Culler elegantly describes in *On Deconstruction*, "as moments of a generalized masturbation" in the same way that language is a generalized writing. In order for something "to function as substitute it must resemble in some essential way what it replaces".[21]

It is not merely the fact that a desire's fulfilment appears, in Rousseau, to be impossible, it is also devastating: "If I had ever in my life tasted the delights of love even once in their plenitude, I do not imagine that my frail existence could have endured it, I would have been dead in the act" (quoted in *OG* 169/*DLG* 223). Thus, according to Norris, "Rousseau will explain how he has resorted to the pleasures of a guilty, unnatural practice only on account of his extreme susceptibility towards women".[22] He feared that such a possible excess of passion could overwhelm his nature:

> And this is to imply that what is "natural" for Rousseau –
> what obeys the dictates of prudence, good sense and
> measure – is a principled avoidance of that sexual activity
> which others (those enjoying a normal, healthy consti-
> tution) can presumably indulge without fear. But
> Rousseau cannot explain this defect in himself without
> suggesting that its effects reach beyond his own [...] pe-
> culiar case history to the nature of sexual relationships
> in general.[23]

Yet, it is not simply, as Norris notes, "Rousseau's 'frail existence', or his psychopathology of aberrant desire", that renders him helpless in relation to this "dangerous overstimulation".[24] As Derrida observes:

> If one abides by universal evidence, by the necessary and
> a priori value of this proposition in the form of a sigh, one
> must immediately recognize that "cohabitation with
> women," hetero-eroticism, can be lived (effectively, re-

ally, as one believes it can be said) only through the abil-
ity to accommodate within itself its proper supplemen-
tary protection. This is to say that, between
autoeroticism and hetero-eroticism, there is not a fron-
tier but an economic distribution. It is within this general
rule that differences stand out. Thus those of Rousseau's.
(*OG* 169/*DLG* 223)

Rousseau's declared intention is to explain this weakness through
the "accidental features of his own upbringing, his maternal fix-
ation and – worst of all – his compulsion to *write* as a substitute
for genuine, lived experience". Yet, "in the process of describing
this (supposedly untypical) series of accidents", Rousseau's text
deviates from its author's declared intentions ending up with a
presentation in which "human sexuality is always and everywhere
a kind of 'supplementary' experience, one that can never be
traced back to source in a moment of pure, natural fulfillment."[25]

B. Against a Trans-Textual Reading of the *Confessions*

1. "*There is Nothing Outside of the Text*"

In "The Exorbitant. Question of Method" – the extended methodological note that accompanies his reading of Rousseau's *Confessions* – Derrida claims that although reading "must not be content with doubling the text", it cannot however "legitimately" ("*legitimement*") endorse a trans-textual reading, a reading which would transgress the text towards something other than itself: either to a *referent*, "a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc" or to "a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of the language [*langue*], that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227).

The rejection of a trans-textual reading as *illegitimate* stems, as Derrida notes, from the general propositions which he elaborates in the first part of *Of Grammatology* "as regards the absence of the referent or the transcendental signified" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227). In making this remark, Derrida thus renders clear that the most appropriate way to elucidate the meaning of his famous pronouncement that "*there is nothing outside of the text*" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227) is in relation to the non-existence of the "transcendental signified". Moreover, according to Derrida, in this so-called transgression of the text toward an external referent or signified, "[i]t has moreover only ever believed it was doing so by illusion" (*OG* 178/*DLG* 234). For Derrida, reading "must be intrinsic and remain within the text" (*OG* 173/*DLG* 228). It must not move in the direction of the discovery of a supposed signified content. Reading must not transgress the text toward a pre-linguistic, unhistorical, unintepretive reality, which in Kantian terminology would be named the thing-in-itself (das *ding-an-sich)*.

So, we view here Derrida naming provisionally his way of reading as "intrinsic", without, however, ceasing to oppose the conventional choices of intrinsic and extrinsic criticism. Derrida argues that all those critical gestures which aim outwardly at a text's referent, or inwards at an author's intention (inwardly, because the text, in this case, is taken as a successful expression of meaning that only needs to be mirrored or reproduced in the act of reading), are equally inappropriate to the complex and self-conflictual nature of the text.

Critical reading, in Derrida's view, must attempt to articulate a text's complex details without assuming either clarity or consistency of authorial intention (which would obviate the need for external supplements or keys for *interpretation)* or the existence of authoritative *contexts* (which would dissolve concrete textual tensions and ambiguities). For Derrida, no act of reading or interpretation should structurally *negate* or *exclude* certain parts of a text, allowing us in effect to treat one part of the text as uniquely, structurally representative of the whole. However, this is precisely what extrinsic criticism and criticism-as-doubling commentary (i.e., respectful paraphrase) produce. Both these models of criticism imply the interior/exterior distinction, and attempt to represent the entire text synecdochically, by way of textual details that are pictured as either connecting the text to its authoritative context or synthesising and ordering the text from within. The rush to represent the text in its own terms, and the rush to connect it to something else, are in many ways mirror images of one another, both being critical evasions.

There are, of course, ironies and paradoxes entailed in Derrida's criticism. Deconstructive reading itself *always* proceeds according to some formula of reduction and representation. Moreover, Derrida chooses to name his own programme of reading as "intrinsic", recognising the inevitability of the hermeneutic

model that he inveighs against. Derrida's answer to both these ironies is the same: we cannot get rid of the deeply figurative and critical notions of our culture; yet in tracing the persistence of their appearance in our writings, we can attempt to refuse their claims to *naturalness* and, thus, to *rightness*:

> As Saussure will do, so does Rousseau wish at once to maintain the exteriority of the system of writing and the maleficent efficiency with which one singles out its symptoms on the body of the language [*langue*]. But are we saying anything else? Yes, to the extent that we show the interiority of exteriority, which amounts to annulling the ethical qualification and to thinking writing beyond good and evil. (*OG* 342/*DLG* 442)

Nevertheless, if everything can be considered a text, if "there is nothing outside of the text", then, why "must [reading] be intrinsic and remain within the text" (*OG* 173/*DLG* 228), as Derrida suggests? If reading "has moreover only believed it was doing so [leaving the text] by illusion" (*OG* 178/*DLG* 234), why should we insist on the existence of a danger in regard to which nobody is in danger? We are thus faced with the following paradox: While, on the one hand, Derrida declares, "[t]here is nothing outside of the text", he, on the other hand, still insists that reading "must be intrinsic and remain within the text".

In claiming that a text's "outside" is another text, it is deconstruction itself which provides a passage for the transcendence of a particular text toward its "outside". If we accept that the transcendence of the empirical text toward its "outside" is hitherto made in the name of a transcendental signified, in the case of deconstruction, the transcendence of the empirical text toward its outside is now justified by the claim that everything is "text." Therefore, if a text's "outside" is another text, why must reading avoid moving toward this "outside"? Why must it remain "intrinsic"?

The generalisation of the text only precludes the "illusion" that this "outside" can function as a transcendental signified mastering the meaning of the text. If the text's "outside" cannot be distinguished from its "inside", if the "inside" contains its "outside" and vice-versa, then Derrida's exhortation that reading "must be intrinsic and remain within the text" is rather incongruous. Moreover, it is Derrida himself who grounds his notion of "intertextuality" in the deconstruction of the opposition between a text's "inside" and "outside." As he has stated in several occasions, the written text "circulat[es] through other texts, leading back to it constantly [*circulant à travers d'autres textes, y renvoyant sans cesse*]" (*OG* 163/*DLG* 214). Yet, there are other reasons which can explain why for deconstruction a reading "must be intrinsic and remain within the text," reasons which are not, however, commanded by Derrida's claim that "*[i]l n'y a pas de hors-texte*" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227).

2. Beyond A Psychoanalytical Reading

In reading Rousseau's life-history, as he narrates it himself in the *Confessions*, there is a great temptation to endorse a type of psychoanalytic reading which would "take us outside of writing toward a psychobiographical signified, or even toward a general psychological structure that could rightly be separated from the signifier" (*OG* 173/*DLG* 228).[26] Yet, as we have already noted, since this "psychobiographical signified" is itself a text, even if the psychoanalytic critic thinks otherwise, why must we object to such interpretations, even though they have been stripped of their pseudo-absolute, "illusionary", character? Why should not we accept them as mere interpretations among other plausible interpretations? Why is not enough to point out that they are not absolute?

Yet, there is no doubt that there can be other reasons for someone to be critical of such a type of reading or interpretation. For Nietzsche, who claims that a good book "is harmed by its living author if he is celebrated and much is known about him",[27] any reference to an author's life "thwarts the object of the book".[28] Nevertheless, it should be emphasised again that when Derrida claims that reading "must be intrinsic and remain within the text", his motives are of a different kind. Deconstructive reading must be "intrinsic" since it must produce the "signified structure" of the text under deconstruction. Yet, this exhortation exceeds the limits of a mere description of the technical necessities of the deconstructive process in order to be incorporated into Derrida's "quasi-transcendental" argument about the conditions of possibility and impossibility of the distinction between a text's "inside" and "outside". And as such, it is deconstructed by the same argument to which it alludes.

Certainly, a disproportionate engagement with the "extra-textual" conditions of a text's production, even when it is made in the knowledge that these "extra-textual" conditions are themselves "writing", can function against the text itself. In the effort to elucidate a text's relationship with its "outside", there is always the danger of "losing" the former in the latter. That is, a text's particularity (and this is not necessarily limited to its thematic content) can be "absorbed" by its "outside". Therefore, we should not substitute the biography of the author of a text or the socio-historico-political conditions of its production for the text itself. In "Cogito and the History of Madness", Derrida remarks that prior to our decision to cross the threshold of a text's historical context, there must be an "internal, rigorous and exhaustive analysis" of the discourse of the text itself (of the "sign itself" as he says) in order for the text not to be falsified by its contextual determination.

> I do not know to what extent Foucault would agree that
> the prerequisite for a response to such questions is first
> of all the internal and autonomous analysis of the philo-
> sophical content of philosophical discourse. Only when
> the totality of this concept will have become manifest in
> its meaning for me (but this is impossible) will I rigor-
> ously be able to situate it in its total historical form. It is
> only then that its reinsertion will not do it violence, that
> there will be a legitimate reinscription of *this* philosoph-
> ical meaning *itself*. As to Descartes in particular, no his-
> torical question about him – about the latent historical
> meaning of his discourse, about its place in a total struc-
> ture – can be answered before a rigorous and exhaustive
> internal analysis of his manifest intentions, of the man-
> ifest meaning of his philosophical discourse has been
> made. (*WD* 44-45/*ED* 70)

Returning to *Of Grammatology*, it could be said that, behind his
"quasi- transcendental" argument about a text's "outside" ("there
is nothing outside of the text"), Derrida's opposition to a transcen-
dental type of reading, such as the psychoanalytic one, a reading
that is totally directed toward a psychopathological signified, is
determined by the fact that such a reading treats the bond of the
psychopathological signified with its graphic signifier as entirely
external and symptomatic. Hence, a deconstructive reading dif-
ferentiates itself through its aim to grasp the "production" of a
text's "signifying structure" (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227). It must avoid, ac-
cording to Derrida, the lure of treating the text as a mere "symp-
tom", as an additional "expression" of an individual psyche, and, as
a consequence, to remain blind "to the very tissue of the 'symp-
tom,' to its proper texture" (*OG* 173/*DLG* 228).[29] For Derrida, "the ha-
bitual psychoanalysis of literature begins by putting the literary
signifier as such within parentheses" (*OG* 174/*DLG* 230).[30] More-
over, for Derrida, in the case of the examination of Rousseau's

texts, a reading of a psychoanalytic type would be unable to locate "all the structures of appurtenance within Rousseau's text, all that is not unique to it — by reason of the overarching power and the already-thereness of the language [*langue*] or of the culture — inhabited rather than produced by writing" (*OG* 175/*DLG* 230). Namely, it would be unable "to elucidate the law of its own appurtenance to Western metaphysics and culture" (*OG* 175/*DLG* 231).

While Derrida remains critical in general to any type of psychoanalytic textual reading or interpretation,[31] he does not omit to remark that deconstructive reading cannot entirely break its bonds with psychoanalytic theory because

> psychoanalytic theory itself is for us a collection of texts belonging to our history and our culture. To that extent, if it marks our reading and the writing of our interpretation, it does not do so as a principle or a truth that one could abstract from the textual system that we inhabit in order to illuminate it with complete neutrality. In a certain way, we are *in* the history of psychoanalysis as we are *in* Rousseau's text. Just as Rousseau drew upon a language [*langue*] that was already there — and which is found to a certain extent to be ours, thus assuring us a certain minimal readability of French literature — in the same way we circulate today within a certain network of significations marked by psychoanalytic theory, even if we do not master it and even if we are assured of never being able to master it perfectly. (*OG* 174-175/*DLG* 230)

3. *Life as Writing*

In the most well known part of the chapter entitled "...That Dangerous Supplement...", Derrida declares:

> *There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text;
> *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]. And that is neither because Jean-
> Jacques' life, or the existence of Mamma or Thérèse *them-
> selves*, is not of interest to us in the first place, nor because
> we have access to their so-called "real" existence only in
> the text and we have neither any means of altering this,
> nor any right to neglect this limitation. All reasons of this
> type would already be sufficient, to be sure, but there are
> more radical reasons. (*OG* 172/*DLG* 227)

In declaring that there is nothing behind Rousseau's text, Derrida, as Sean Burke correctly notes, is not saying "that Mamma and Thérèse never existed except as textual figures even when they were alive", or that, "for Rousseau, they were supplements, and never presences, never more than textual figures even as he walked in their midst".[32] Derrida does not contest the reality of those differences which are undoubtedly important and "play a powerful role" in that which is called "experience".[33] Derrida has, on several occasions, objected to frivolous misinterpretations of his statement "*There is nothing outside of the text*", as meaning that "there is nothing beyond language, that we are submerged in words – and other stupidities of that sort."[34] Derrida explains himself these "more radical reasons", right after the passage quoted above, as follows:

> What we have tried to show by following the guiding line
> of the "dangerous supplement," is that in what one calls
> the real life of these existences "of flesh and bone," be-
> yond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed
> as Rousseau's text [*l'oeuvre de Rousseau*], there has never
> been anything but writing; there have never been any-
> thing but supplements, substitutive significations which
> could only emerge in a chain of differential references,
> the "real" supervening, and adding itself only by taking
> on meaning from a trace and from an appeal to the sup-

> plement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, *in the text*, that the absolute present, nature, that which words like "real mother" name, are always already hidden, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language [*langage*] is writing as the disappearance of natural presence. (*OG* 172-173/*DLG* 228)

The "guiding line of the 'dangerous supplement'" leads to recognition that the so-called "reality", life itself, in its materiality, even as it is lived, all that which lies outside the empirical text, functions as *writing*. Derrida's claim is that even Rousseau's life is determined by the structure of "supplementarity" or *différance*. What could be named as Rousseau's "life" is nothing but a endless series of supplements: The presence of Thérèse is, for example, a supplement for the absence of "Mamma"; the presence of "Mamma" is a supplement for the absence of a "natural" mother; while the presence of a "natural" mother is the supplement of that absent mother who Rousseau invokes in *Emile*. Presence, in Rousseau's life, as in his theory of language, is but the supplement of an absence. In this sense, presence is some kind of absence; as an absence is, in turn, a deferred presence. Presence is always deferred; supplementarity is possible because there is an original lack. Therefore, "presence is not original but reconstituted"[35]:

> Everything begins with reproduction. [...] The call of the supplement is primary, [...] and it hollows out that which will be reconstituted by deferral as the present. The supplement, which seems to be added as a plenitude to a plenitude, is equally that which compensates for a lack *(qui supplée)*. "*Suppléer*: 1. To add what is missing, to supply a necessary surplus," says Littré, respecting, like a sleepwalker, the strange logic of that word. It is within its logic that the possibility of deferred action should be conceived, as well as, no doubt, the relationship between the primary and the secondary on all levels. [...] That the

> present in general is not primal but, rather, reconsti-
> tuted, that it is not the absolute, wholly living form which
> constitutes experience, that there is no purity of the liv-
> ing present [...]. (*WD* 211-212/*ED* 314)

For Culler, "Rousseau's texts, like many others, teach that presence
is always deferred, that supplementation is possible only because
of an original lack". Actually, "what we call Rousseau's life, with its
socioeconomic conditions and public events, its private sexual ex-
periences and its acts of writing, would prove on examination to
be constituted by the logic of supplementarity".[36] If Derrida
prompts us to perceive "real" life on the base of the model of the
text, if he claims that there is nothing outside the text, is because
this "outside" (whether we call it reality, experience, etc.) is con-
stituted of further *supplements* or chains of *supplements.* Both the
"outside" and the "inside" are constituted by the multiplying re-
sults of supplementarity, something that puts into question the
accuracy of a rigid opposition between "inside" and "outside".[37]
According to Barbara Johnson,

> [f]or what Rousseau's text tells us is that our very relation
> to "reality" already functions like a text. Rousseau's ac-
> count of his life is not only itself a text, but it is a text that
> speaks only about the textuality of life. Rousseau's life
> does not *become* a text through his writing: it always al-
> ready *was* one. Nothing indeed, can be said to be *not* a
> text.[38]

What one calls "reality", or "life", all that which is conventionally
opposed to the text as its "outside", as that which is prior to and
thus determines it, seems to have the same characteristics as its
downgraded "other". In this way, the binary opposition
"outside/inside", "reality/text", "presence/absence", is "overturned"
in order to become visible that the excluded other is not only con-
tained in, but also determines the privileged term: the "outside"

is an "inside", "reality" is a "text", or "presence" is a "supplement". The result of this deconstruction is the "displacement" of the binary oppositions with the generalised "concept" of the "inside", "text", "supplement", or "writing". Therefore, that "there is nothing outside of the text" should be interpreted "beyond" the opposition between "outside" and "inside", "reality" and "text", or "presence" and "supplement".

In this sense, Derrida's position is not limited to the ascertaining that Rousseau's "real life", as well as anything else which we call "reality", is presented to our perception only through concepts. In "...That Dangerous Supplement...", Derrida attempts to show that his views on the constitution of concepts presented in the first part of *Of Grammatology* are confirmed by a text that is not of a similar subject-matter. Derrida wants to demonstrate that his theory of signification that he describes in the first part of *Of Grammatology*, and all that which it has excluded (as, for example, the existence of an absolute or natural presence) is confirmed by looking at what is called "real life". Hence, looking at "real life", through Rousseau, he finds that, for example, "that the absolute present, nature, that which words like 'real mother' name, are always already hidden, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language [*langage*] is writing as the disappearance of natural presence" (*OG* 173/*DLG* 228).

But how is it possible for Derrida to justify the kind of correspondence that he establishes between a theory of signification and that which he would call real life "under erasure" (*sous rature*)? Why should Rousseau's "real life", in its materiality, obey the "logic of supplementarity" or *différance*? It is true that both reality and the text, or the text and what lies "outside" it, are *immersed* in language. Yet, Derrida wants to make a wider claim without explaining or justifying it sufficiently, if he actually explains or justifies it at all: that "in what one calls real life [...] 'of flesh and bone,' [...]

there has never been anything but writing" (*OG* 172-173/*DLG* 228). But, claiming that the "world", "reality," "experience", or "life" cannot be thought outside the *supplement* of language is not the same as turning the "world", "reality", "experience", or "life", as they are lived, into a labyrinth of *supplements*. Nevertheless, if Derrida wants to take this further step, that is, to turn the world into a series of *supplements*, he has to offer reasons as a means of justifying why it is so: *description* is not *explanation* or *justification*. Is it, thus, possible for Derrida to exclude the possibility that the presence of the *supplement*, both in Rousseau's effort to retrace an origin for language, and his narration of his life, is not *accidental*? Derrida needs to explain whether the presence of the *supplement* in Rousseau's "life" is due to his peculiar psychopathology or whether there is some other *necessity* that makes its presence inescapable. Moreover, is this to be taken as peculiar to Rousseau, or as a principle that conditions lived experience in general? If it is a principle that conditions lived experience in general, how can the claim that "in what one calls real life [...] 'of flesh and bone,' [...] there has never been anything but writing" be extended beyond Rousseau's *Confessions* in order to gain a general force?

C. Is Derrida's Reading of the *Confessions* Accurate?

1. *Mis-Reading the* Confessions

In the beginning of the chapter entitled "…That Dangerous Supplement…", Derrida urges us to

> think Rousseau's experience and his theory of writing together, the accord and the discord that, under the name of writing, relate Jean-Jacques to Rousseau, uniting and dividing his proper name. On the side of experience, a recourse to literature as reappropriation of presence, that is to say, as we shall see, of nature; on the side of theory, an indictment against the negativity of the letter, in which must be read the degeneracy of culture and the disruption of the community. (*OG* 156/*DLG* 207)

In practice, this means, that, "we must therefore think […] together" the *Confessions* and the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. If we compare these two texts, one finds, according to Derrida, that, while in the *Confessions*, writing is used as a means to re-establish a lost presence, in the *Essay,* writing is blamed as a "destruction of presence". Even when Rousseau accepts its necessity and takes refuge in it, he still feels uncomfortable with it since he would prefer the primary presence guaranteed by a "full speech [*parole dite pleine*]" to the dangerous assistance of writing:

> Rousseau is nevertheless more pressed to exorcise [*conjurer*] it than to assume its necessity. That is why, straining toward the reconstruction of presence, he valorizes and disqualifies writing at the same time. At the same time; that is to say, in one divided but coherent movement. We must try not to lose sight of its strange unity. Rousseau condemns writing as destruction of presence and as disease of speech. He rehabilitates it to the extent that it promises the reappropriation of that of which

> speech allowed itself to be dispossessed. [...] The first movement of this desire is formulated as a theory of language. The other governs the experience of the writer. (*OG* 154/*DLG* 204)

Yet, this simultaneous "valorization" and "disqualification" of writing is not so "strange" as it is declared above, since Derrida adds that "the strange unity of these two gestures" is accounted for by the word "supplement" (*OG* 156/*DLG* 207).

Derrida has already made clear that "[t]he names of authors or of doctrines have here no substantial value. They indicate neither identities nor causes. [...] The indicative value that we attribute to them is first the name of a problem" (*OG* 107/*DLG* 147-148). Thus, the exhortation to "think [...] together" the *Confessions* and the *Essay*, that which joins together Rousseau's life and his theory of writing, is not related to the proper name "Rousseau" – the unificatory consciousness of a writer – but it is based on the similar and supplementary way in which these two different texts treat the supplement of writing or supplementarity in general. Hence, the unity of the *Confessions* and the *Essay* seems to be explained by the fact that

> [i]n both cases, [...] Rousseau considers writing as a dangerous means, a menacing aid, the critical response to a situation of distress. When nature, as self-proximity, comes to be forbidden or interrupted, when speech fails to protect presence, writing becomes necessary. It must be *added* to the word urgently. (*OG* 156/*DLG* 207)

Despite Derrida's exhortation to "think [...] together" these two texts, we ought to distinguish carefully between what belongs to the *Confessions* and what belongs to the *Essay*. In such a placing together of two different texts, there is always the danger of an interpretive overdetermination of one text by the other. Here, Derrida's interpretation of the *Essay* also comes to determine his

interpretation of the *Confessions*. This is because the accusation against writing that Derrida attributes to Rousseau finds no support if one concentrates solely upon a reading of the *Confessions*. Assertions of the type "[t]his recourse [to writing] is not only 'bizarre,' but dangerous. [...] It is a violence done to the natural destiny of the language" (*OG* 157/*DLG* 207), which can be supported by an interpretation (which is itself a misinterpretation, as will shall see in the next chapter) of the *Essay*, find no place within the *Confessions*. Nowhere in the *Confessions* does Rousseau put forward any kind of valuation concerning writing. Nowhere does he characterise writing as a "dangerous means", or a "menacing aid", as Derrida claims. In order to make the *Confessions* say what he wants it to say, Derrida is obliged to refer constantly and disproportionately to other texts by Rousseau, particularly to the *Essay*. Thus, Derrida exhorts us to "think [...] together" the *Confessions* and the *Essay*, because without this jointure, the *Confessions* would be unable to offer by themselves an indictment of writing.

The supposed condemnation of writing, in the *Confessions*, is based solely on a few lines. In this way, Derrida's pursuit of the theme of writing in this particular text is "exorbitant". Rousseau's *sole* reference to writing is in the form of a short explanation of the reasons which leads him to the writing of his autobiography:

> I would love society [*J'aimerais la societé*] like others, if I were not sure of showing myself not only at a disadvantage, but as completely different from what I am. The part that I have taken of writing and hiding myself is precisely the one that suits me. If I were present, one would never know what I was worth. (quoted in *OG* 154/*DLG* 205) (*Confessions* 115-116)

The first interpretive impropriety, on Derrida's part, is the neglect of the section within which this passage is set. Immediately prior to the passage, Rousseau confesses:

> I think that I have sufficiently explained why, though I am not a fool, I am very often taken for one, even by people in a good position to judge. Unfortunately for me too, my face and my eyes seem to promise otherwise, and people find my stupidity all the more shocking because it disappoints their expectations. This fact, which explains one situation in particular, is not irrelevant to what follows. It presents the key to a great number of my strange actions, which witnesses have attributed to morose disposition that I do not possess. I should enjoy society as much as anyone, if [...] . (*Confessions* 115-116)

While even earlier, Rousseau has undertaken to explain the reasons for this uncomfortable position in which he finds himself. In moments of heightened emotion, he loses his ability to think and to express himself adequately:

> [...] if I want to think I must be cool. The astonishing thing is, though, that I have considerable tact, some understanding, and a certain skill with people so long as they will wait for me. I can make excellent replies impromptu, if I have a moment to think, but on the spur of the moment I can never say or do anything right. I could conduct a most delightful conversation by post, as they say the Spaniards. (*Confessions* 113)

Or, even worse:

> But what is even more fatal is that, instead of keeping quiet when I have nothing to say, it is at just those times that I have a furious desire to chatter. In my anxiety to fulfill my obligations as quickly as possible I hastily gabble a few ill-considered words, and am only too glad if they mean nothing at all. So anxious am I to conquer or hide my ineptitude that I rarely fail to make it apparent. (*Confessions* 115)

Rousseau explains that the fact that he *hides* himself through writing is not due to *misanthropy*. He tells us that he loves society like others. Hence, we are not confronted here with the manifestation of any preference for speech over writing. In the paragraph under examination, Rousseau's main aim is to explain the reasons for which he is forced to write his autobiography. If he writes his *Confessions* – thus Rousseau does not speak about writing in general as Derrida attempts to show – it is in order to repair the false picture that others have about him, since, when he is present, for the reasons he explains above, he gives an impression about himself different from what he really is. Writing in the safety of his shelter, he finds easier to produce a picture of him that conforms to the view which he has of himself.

Derrida's argument that Rousseau installs a binary opposition between speech and writing at the heart of the *Confessions* only functions through the detachment of this controversial passage and its isolation from its wider context. According to Derrida, Rousseau would prefer the presence guaranteed by the living speech of the face to face relation to the deferred, impersonal presence guaranteed by writing. That Rousseau eventually turns and chooses the "menacing aid" of the supplement of writing, is due to a certain feeling of inferiority on his part. Yet, nowhere in the *Confessions* does Rousseau *declare* that writing is inferior to speech, or that the supplement of writing is "dangerous", or that he generally prefers the presence guaranteed by speech to the one guaranteed by writing. Rousseau explicitly and clearly explains the reasons why he writes his autobiography. Nowhere does he say or imply that he would prefer not to write. Neither does he declare that writing is a "dangerous" form of expression that one should attempt to avoid.

This does not prevent Derrida from asserting that, for Rousseau, "when speech fails to protect presence, writing be-

comes necessary" (*OG* 156/*DLG* 207). But only then? Rousseau does not say that if he could express himself sufficiently through speech, then he would not take recourse to writing at all. Of course, one can suppose that if Rousseau had not suffered from this particular feeling of inferiority, he might not have written his autobiography. Yet, this tells us nothing about Rousseau's general position regarding writing. Rousseau's stated reasons for the writing of the *Confessions* are related to the failure of speech to protect truth, but this does not imply that the role of writing is limited, or ought to be limited, to these exceptional cases, namely, when and insofar as speech has failed. Nevertheless, Derrida carries on his interpretation as follows:

> It [*writing*] must *be added* to the word urgently. we have already recognized in advance one of the forms of this *addition*; speech being natural or at least the natural expression of thought, the most natural form of institution or convention for signifying thought, writing is added to it, is adjoined, as an image or representation. In that sense, it is not natural. It makes the immediate presence of thought to speech into representation and the imagination. This recourse is not only "bizarre," but also dangerous. It is the addition of a technique, a sort of artificial and artful ruse to make speech present when it is in truth absent. It is a violence done to the natural destiny of the language [...]. (*OG* 156-157/*DLG* 207)

This is indicative of the misreading of Rousseau's position on writing in the *Confessions*. In the sole passage devoted to writing, and, more specifically, to the reasons governing the writing of the *Confessions*, the recourse to writing is not characterized as "bizarre" and "dangerous", nor is a single negative judgment against writing made. There is no "indictment against the negativity of the letter" (*OG* 156/*DLG* 207) put forward, but, on the contrary, writing

is praised for its ability to answer to an uncomfortable position which Rousseau confronts. The passage, which Derrida cites, does not trace a binary opposition between speech and writing, nor attribute any priority to speech in relation to writing, nor provide any explicit or implicit reference to writing as a "dangerous supplement," a "menacing aid" or an "artificial and artful ruse".

Writing is *nowhere* explicitly named as a *supplement* in the *Confessions*. Yet, this is something, which is, as Derrida claims, implied by the way writing is implicitly described. But what is exactly the nature of the supplementation that writing performs? It has already been mentioned that Rousseau's aim is to replace the misrepresentation of himself with a true picture of himself acquired through writing. This kind of supplementation enacted by writing is radically different from the classical kind of supplementation described in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, according to which, writing is held up as the consolidation of language through the substitution of its oral signs by written ones.

While writing maybe added to speech in order to restore the distorting effects of the latter, this does not necessarily entail that it is, therefore, the depiction or the representation of speech through writing. It is not that Rousseau, due to his specific disability, is forced to entrust all that he would prefer to express through speech to writing. Rousseau does not decide to write simply and exclusively about what he would have otherwise preferred to speak about. One is not confronted here with the duplication of a spoken discourse in writing. Rousseau makes recourse to writing, or he prefers to "hide himself in writing", in order to explicate why he "messes it up" every time he tries to speak in front of others; he wants to state the effects that this strange disability has on his public image, and to repair it by substituting it for the one he tries to create through a written portrayal of his life. Hence, in this case, writing does not constitute a supplement of

speech in a classical sense. Therefore, Derrida's analogy between the supplement of writing described in the *Confessions* and the supplement of writing described in the *Essay* or Rousseau's other texts seems problematic.

Derrida does not limit his description of what is said about the "supplement" of writing in the *Confessions* to the sole passage that explicitly refers to it. Derrida attempts to re-establish the function of the concept of the "supplement" in general, even beyond the specific "supplement" of writing, and even beyond the text of the *Confessions*. Derrida's reading of the function of "supplementarity" in Rousseau's sexual life and its correlation with the "supplement" of writing has already been alluded to. Derrida's final conclusion is that in all these cases of supplementarity, the "way" in which Rousseau "determines" the concept of the "supplement" and "in so doing, lets himself be determined by that very thing that he excludes from it, the sense in which he inflects it, here as addition, there as substitute, sometimes as the positivity and exteriority of evil, sometimes as a happy auxiliary", "tricks" with the same "gesture of effacement" (*OG* 177-178/*DLG* 234). Hence, when, for example, one compares the way in which the supplement of writing is described in reference to the experience of Rousseau as an author with his autoerotic experience, one is led to the conclusion that "[t]hose two supplements have in common at least being dangerous" (*OG* 179/*DLG* 235).

But they are "dangerous" also in another and more significant sense. Any attempt to control them ends in failure. The "supplement" is dangerous because it refuses its "exteriority", the derivative and "secondary" role attributed to it. This explains why all these different but, at the same time, similar descriptions of the "supplement" by Rousseau, are deconstructible. So, the examination of particular cases in the light of a more general context (a similar move to that of the examination of particular writers in

the light of a "historical totality"), aims at making visible those structures responsible for their similarities.

There is no doubt that the correlation of apparently different moves, and the discovery of a common structure that conditions them is, in some cases, particularly illuminating. Nevertheless, this particular way of reading, this strange intertextuality, this interweaving of heterogeneous passages or texts through the tracing of the function of a certain concept runs the risk of being reductive. This is a danger lurking in Derrida's claim about the existence of a structure which conditions the entirety of the history of Western philosophy; and, in his exhortation to "think Rousseau's experience and his theory of writing together", the *Confessions* and the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, the "supplement" of writing and the "supplement" of masturbation and other cases of supplementation in Rousseau's corpus.

In our critical appraisal of Derrida's reading of the *Confessions*, we have already taken the risk of putting forward the claim that if Derrida refers to other uses of the concept of the supplement in the *Confessions* (or even in other Rousseauian texts) besides that of writing, this is because the passages from the *Confessions* which refer to writing are incapable of supporting a reading according to which Rousseau condemns writing as a "dangerous supplement" of speech.

Derrida's 'ruse' is the following: since the particular passage from the *Confessions* which refers to writing is not in itself sufficient to substantiate the denunciation of writing, Derrida takes other passages from the text (or from other texts) which will provide this substantiation through their linkage to an apparently common concept, namely, in this particular case, that of "supplement". In this way, from Rousseau's description of masturbation as a "dangerous supplement", he will articulate the dangerousness of the "supplement" in general, and then, as a consequence,

the dangerousness of the supplement of writing. The constant fusion of different cases that the *Of Grammatology* performs functions in order to bring about an ineluctable confusion about levels and demarcations, which help the production of a certain effect.

In this manner, a certain passage is interweaved with other passages, other texts, upon which Derrida systematically draws in his reading. The effect is to introduce a certain fluidity to the notion of the boundaries of a certain passage or text. This interweaving is itself predicated upon a structure which is presupposed from the beginning so that the interpretation of the particular cases is always already determined by it.

This is evident in another of Derrida's readings of the *Confessions*. In this particular case, Derrida wishes to show that the supplement in Rousseau occupies an intermediate position between total presence and total absence. He effects this through the following passage from the *Confessions*:

> Ah, my Thérèse! I am only too happy to possess you, modest and healthy, and not to find what I never looked for. [The question is of "maidenhood" [*pucelage* or unpenetrated-ness] which Thérèse has just confessed to have lost in innocence and by accident.] At first I had only sought amusement. I saw that I had done more and had been given a companion. A little familiarity with this excellent girl, a little reflection upon my situation, made me feel that, while thinking only of my pleasures, I had done much to promote my happiness. To *supply the place of* my extinguished ambition, I needed a lively sentiment which should *fill* my heart. In a word, I needed a successor to mamma. As I should never live with her again, I wanted someone to live with her pupil, in whom I might find the simplicity and docility of heart which she had found in me. I felt it necessary that the gentle tranquility of private and domestic life *should compensate* me for the

loss of the brilliant career which I was renouncing. When I was quite alone, I felt a void in my heart, which it only needed another heart to *fill*. Destiny had deprived me of, or, at least in part, alienated me from, the woman for whom nature had made me. From that moment I was alone; *for with me there never has been an intermediary between everything and nothing. I found in Thérèse the supplement that I needed.* (quoted in *OG* 170-171/*DLG* 226) (*Confessions* 310-311)

In relation to this passage, Derrida states that:

The intermediary is the mid-point and it is the mediation, the middle term between total absence and the absolute plenitude of presence. [...] And the supplement occupies here the middle point between total absence and total presence. The play of substitution fills to the top and marks a determined lack. (*OG* 171/*DLG* 226)

Does Derrida grasp this relation adequately? Has Thérèse, as a "supplement", taken a position between "total absence and total presence" as Derrida claims? Not at all! Since the loss of his "mamma", who represented "everything" for him, Rousseau was obliged to stay alone since the guiding principle in his life was that if he could not have everything he preferred having nothing. As he insists: "*for with me there never has been an intermediary between everything and nothing*". This continued until he encountered, in the person of Thérèse, the supplement for his "mamma", something that made him feel that he had everything again. "Blinded" by the desire to find that evidence which will validate and strengthen his explication of the function of the concept of the "supplement" in Rousseau, Derrida misinterprets the role Thérèse plays as a "supplement" in the passage, by arguing that she (as a supplement) "occupies here the middle point between total absence and total presence". Yet, for Rousseau, it is clear: If

he had decided to be alone, it was because he did not wish to make any compromise. He waited until he "*found in Thérèse the supplement that [he] needed*". That is, he found a substitute for his "mamma", so he could have "everything" again. Therefore, the "supplement", in this passage, plays exactly the opposite role to that which Derrida attaches to it; it is on the side of "plenitude" and not on the side of the "intermediary" as Derrida interprets it.

> Derrida's generalisation of the dangerousness of the supplement to include writing is arbitrary. This, in turn, leads Derrida to make wider assertions, which diverge radically from Rousseau's treatment of writing in the *Confessions*: "On the chain of supplements, it was difficult to separate writing from onanism. Those two supplements have in common at least being dangerous. They transgress an interdict and are lived in culpability [...] (*OG* 179/ *DLG* 235).

Reflecting the views of his age on the dangerous consequences of masturbation, it is true that Rousseau refers to the supplement of masturbation as dangerous. Nevertheless, the extension of the dangerousness of masturbation, as a supplement of the heterosexual love relationship, to other forms of supplementation, and, in particular, to the supplement of writing, is unfounded and is based entirely on the misinterpretation of certain passages of the *Confessions* and, in particular, on the sole passage in which Rousseau explicitly refers to writing, when he undertakes to explain the reasons for writing his autobiography. This misinterpretation expands its effects through the accordance of interpretative predominance to this particular determination of the concept, and the displacement of its other determinations or uses in the same text or in others. Rousseau's declaration about the need to hide himself through writing since, "[i]f I were present, one would never know what I was worth" (quoted in *OG*

154/*DLG* 205) (*Confessions* 115-116), becomes in Derrida's "exorbitant" reading, Rousseau's transparent and unhesitating indictment of writing.

Notes

1. We have already mentioned that Derrida's reading of Rousseau in the second part of *Of Grammatology* is presented as the "[m]oment [...] of the example" of that "theoretical matrix" which Derrida has "sketched" in the first part (*OG* cxiii/*DLG* 7).

2. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 24.

3. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010, 1955¹), 143-144, and *Jokes and their Relation to unconscious*, Standard Edition, VIII, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1963), 62, 205.

4. Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 132.

5. Barbara Johnson, "Translator's Introduction", in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), xi.

6. Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation", 115-116. Derrida's remark on the irreducibility of the desire to an original presence is made in the context of his claim that Heidegger assumes that behind basic Greek words there is an archi-originary intactness, a kernel of meaning that remains veiled from the beginning.

7. Geoffrey Bennington, "Derridabase", in Geoffrey Bennington, Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 159-160.

8. Jacques Derrida, "Envois", in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 194.

9. Bennington, "Derridabase", 160.

10. Cousins, "The Logic of Deconstruction", 76.

11. David Wood, *Deconstruction of Time* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1989), 268.

12. Spivak, "Translator's Preface", c-ci.

13. Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 211.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Norris, *Derrida*, 117.

16. *Ibid.*, 117-118.

17. *Ibid.*, 118

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (London: Routledge, 1983), 104.*

21. Ibid.

22. Norris, *Derrida*, 119.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. Referring to the problems that hermeneutics might possibly face, and here one recalls the Heideggerian reading of Nietzsche's posthumously published notes gathered under the title *The Will to Power,* in the case of Nietzsche's forgotten note written at the margin of his manuscripts which reads: "I have forgotten my umbrella", Derrida does not forget to refer to similar problems that "a psychoanalytic decoding" (Derrida, *Spurs*, 129), which would believe that it can master the meaning of the present note, might possibly face too:

[P]sychoanalysis, familiar as it is with forgetting and phallic objects ["[t]he umbrella's symbolic figure is well known, or supposedly so", *Ibid*.], might yet aspire to a hermeneutic mastery of these remains. And if not, the psychoanalysts, who are otherwise not so naive as one might have an interest in thinking them, can still continue to suspect that, if these generalities were to be articulated and narrowed and the context itself thus prudently completed, they would one day be able to satisfy their interpretive expectations.

In this respect the analyst, albeit somewhat less naive, he or she rejoins in principle the impulsive reader or hermeneut ontologist in their common belief that this unpublished piece is an aphorism of some signifiance. Assured that it must mean something, they look for it to come from the most intimate reaches of this author's thought. But in order to be so assured, one must have forgotten that it is a text that is in question, the remains of a text, indeed a forgotten text. An umbrella perhaps. That one no longer has in hand. (*Ibid.*, 131)

Yet, we think that Derrida's oversimplified version of hermeneutics and psychoanalysis, as any kind of insubstantial oversimplification in general, does not do justice to the complexities of the subject under examination. See, for example, David Couzens Hoy, "Forgetting the Text: Derrida's Critique of Heidegger", *boundary 2* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1979): 223-236 and Alex Argyros, "The Warp of the World: Deconstruction and Hermeneutics", *Diacritics* 16, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 47-55.

27. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), #153, 248.

28. *Ibid.*, #156, 248.

29. Derrida adds: "One recognizes the other aspect of the same gesture when, in general works on Rousseau, in a package of classical shape that gives itself out to be a synthesis that faithfully restores, through commentary and compilation of themes, the total package of the work and the thought, one encounters a chapter of

biographical and psychoanalytical appearance on the 'problem of sexuality in Rousseau,' with a reference in an Appendix to the author's medical case-history" (*OG* 173/*DLG* 229).

30. Yet, the same could be said of deconstructive reading: deconstruction's interest in literary texts promotes in no-way their literary element.

31. In a footnote concerning the well-known passage of the "morsel" from Rousseau's *Confessions*, Derrida initially approves of the distrust of the editors of the *Confessions*, "[t]he Pleiade editors of the *Confessions*, Gagnebin and Raymond, are no doubt right in being cautious, as they are, systematically and inevitably, of what they call psychiatry". However, he then remarks, "[b]ut this caution is not legitimate, it seems to me, except to the extent that it concerns the abuse – which has hitherto no doubt been confounded with the use – of psychoanalytic reading [*de la lecture psychanalytique*]".

Derrida's continuous disapproving references to psychoanalytic reading, at least as it has been exercised so far, exclude the possibility of any positive appraisal of its work. Nevertheless, Derrida reserves a totally different treatment to psychoanalytic teaching. He thus wishes to distinguish "between, the often summary and unwise, but often also enlightening, analyses by Dr. René Laforgue ('Etude sur J.-J. Rousseau,' […] which moreover do not consider the texts we have just cited, and an interpretation which would take into more rigorous account, at least in principle, the teachings of psychoanalysis. That is one of the directions in which Jean Starobinski's fine and wise analyses are engaged."

Yet, Derrida wonders "if, too concerned with reacting against a reductionist, causalist, dissociative psychoanalysis, Starobinski does not in general give too much credit to a totalitarian psychoanalysis of the phenomenological or existentialist style. Such a psychoanalysis, diffusing sexuality in the totality of behavior, perhaps risks blurring the cleavages, the differences, the displacements, the fixations of all sorts that structure that totality" (*OG* 402-403n.6/*DLG* 218-219n.6).

32. Burke, *The Death & Return of the Author*, 127.

33. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 106.

34. Jacques Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other" (interview with Richard Kearney), in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, ed. Richard Kearny (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 173.

35. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 106.

36. *Ibid.*, 105.

37. *Ibid*.

38. Johnson, "Translator's Introduction", xiv.

CHAPTER FIVE
DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF ROUSSEAU'S
ESSAY ON THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES

A. Deconstructing the *Essay*

1. *Rousseau and Language*

According to Newton Garver, Rousseau held an unusual view of language, one that is very rare in the history of Western philosophy, and which is found at its margins rather at its centre. Rousseau sees language as a type of communication, which originates from cries and gestures rather than from "ideas". His analysis of language concentrates on what Wittgenstein will term the *sense* of self-standing expressions (sentences) rather than upon the *meaning* of words (sentence parts). This conception of language cannot occupy an exemplary position within the philosophical tradition because it stands in opposition to two central tenets of this tradition, namely (1) "the unity and analyticity of semantics", and (2) "the priority of logic over rhetoric".[1] According to Garver,

> [t]he first of these tenets amounts to the belief in a theory of meaning that unifies its domain under a single set of laws and concepts, and explains and predicts all the possible relations which can be obtained among *all* the various sorts of data within its scope. A theory of mean-

ing must say how the meaning (=sense) of utterances is related to the meaning (not sense) of words. The sense of what a person says is to be explained in terms of the meaning of its parts (words). This analytic conception of a unified semantics allows meaning to be conceived and determined independently of the circumstances of utterances (it is John Austin who unsettles this tradition by bringing the circumstances which surround of utterances, namely, the "context of an utterance", into consideration) and, thus, clears the ground for the second tenet, that of the priority of logic over rhetoric.[2]

Rousseau rejects both these assumptions. For him, the first form of speech was figurative rather than literal, and since figures of speech follow rules of rhetoric rather than logic, this places logic as subordinate to rhetoric. If one were to suppose that Rousseau had a conception of language which would lead him to a unified theory of meaning, it would be one which placed messages before words, with sentences as the elaborations of cries and gestures, rather than as constructions formed from isolated logical elements.[3]

Viewed from such a perspective, Rousseau constitutes a clearly unorthodox case in Western thought, and it seems that this makes it more difficult for him to be taken as an example of a Western, logocentric, philosophical tradition. Derrida incorporates him into this tradition by approaching him from a different perspective. On Derrida's account of Western metaphysics, what is most significant is "whether or not we have an immediate encounter with what we mean" ("autopathy"), namely, "whether or not we have an encounter that is fully intelligible on its own" (directly and intuitively, without presupposing a system of signs), and this constitutes the ground for what we mean to express through a linguistic utterance (a system of signs). Such an en-

counter is an instance of what Derrida, following Heidegger, calls "presence".[4] For, according to Derrida, the history of Western philosophy is the history of the "metaphysics of presence". This "metaphysics of presence" conceives meaning only on the basis of an ultimate presence, which, in the case of Rousseau, is identified with "passions". For Derrida, Rousseau attributes importance to passions and feelings because of their immediacy and self evident significance.

2. The Exteriority *of Writing*

In his reading of the philosophical tradition, Derrida, according to Garver, insists not only on an immediate encounter with what is meant but also on a rigid, fundamental distinction between the internal (essential) and the external (contingent) as well as on the inefficiency of all signs because of their "exteriority". From this perspective, Rousseau's work is a typical example of the tradition under deconstruction. Speech is the heart and soul of communication, while writing is absolutely exterior to it. Writing, according to Derrida's reading of Rousseau, constitutes a mere exteriority; it is entirely based on a convention that is foreign and exterior to the subject it expresses. The written sign, as an external *supplement* to vocal sign, is devoid of any essential relation to what it means; it is absolutely "exterior" to its "meaning"; it is simply an external "substitute", and, thus, it *differs* radically from a meaning or a natural sign, while it *defers* our encounter with what it signifies.[5]

For Derrida, Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages* treats writing as a mere "supplement" of speech. The written sign is devoid of any essential relation to what it means; it is absolutely "ex-

terior" to its "meaning"; it is simply an external "substitute", and, thus, it *differs* radically from what signifies, while it *defers sine die* our encounter with it. Rousseau finds, according to Derrida's reading of the *Essay*, speech closer to the very origin of language and, thus, a more "natural" form of expression than writing. He treats writing with a strange distrust not only as merely derivative, but also, in a certain way, as an "unnatural" way of expression. Derrida links this position of Rousseau's philosophy of human nature, namely, his belief that humanity has fallen from a state of divine grace into the bonds of political and civilized existence. Language constitutes an indicator of the extent to which human nature has been corrupted and divided against itself by the erroneous affectations of civilization.

Derrida's ultimate aim is to show that Rousseau *contradicts* himself in certain parts of his text in such a way as (rather than proving that speech is at the origin of language and writing to be merely a parasitic development) finally to affirm the priority of writing over speech, and the illusory character of all those myths about origins. What is eventually rendered clear is the "logic of supplementarity" which marks any attempt to think the origin of language or to ground this origin on the experience of self-present passions or feelings. In the inescapable improprieties that Rousseau commits in expression, in the conclusions he reaches despite his intentions, Derrida finds a tangible confirmation of his own theoretical positions, which are elaborated in a the first part of *Of Grammatology*. By the end of his deconstruction of Rousseau, Derrida hopes that it will have been made clear that there is no presence without absence, concealment, *différance* or writing. Derrida will insist that the results of this recognition are not only in Rousseau's meditations on language, music, politics or civilization, but also in his more "personal' writings (*Confessions*). Each time Rousseau wants to say one thing he ends, for

Derrida, by saying something else, thereby, effectively opposing the underlying intention of his argumentation. This happens not through some minor oversight, some accidental failure by Rousseau to pose his case clearly or to perceive its problematic drift. In fact, Derrida thinks that Rousseau poses these questions with clarity and force, something that gives his writings an exemplary value for the aims of deconstruction. For Derrida, Rousseau's case is a characteristic example of that thinking that necessarily confronts its limits on each occasion that it attempts to define some origin or "natural" state of language. Thus, the key-concepts of deconstruction, like those of *writing* (*écriture*), *supplementarity* or *différance*, seem not only to be adequately explained, but also to explain by themselves all those things which Rousseau's text ends up saying against its programmatic declarations on the issue of the origin of language, or the relationship between nature and civilization, writing and speech, etc. These "non-concepts" are not only produced "unconsciously" by Rousseau's discourse, but they also explicate why it is doomed to failure from the start, that is, why it takes this strange turn against the intentions which animated it. The *Essay* submits itself to this subversive nature of writing even in the process of its condemnation of writing's subversive results and its "supplementary" character. Derrida finds the strange motif of "supplementarity" running through the entirety of Rousseau's *Essay*, which twists its intended meaning. Rousseau cannot *mean what he says* (or to *say what he means)* at certain crucial moments of his argument. In Derrida's reading, the *Essay* succumbs to a type of twisting, which prevents it from accomplishing the logic of its own declared intention.

3. Speech and Writing

According to Derrida's reading of the *Essay*, language is, for Rousseau, an indicator of the degree to which nature has been corrupted and divided against itself by the false affectations of civilization. What must have come first, Rousseau argues, was a language of passions, which had not yet formed itself into sophisticated grammatical structures needed for the articulation of abstract thoughts. It was a *natural* language, an authentic medium of expression, still unaffected by other more refined ways of speaking. This language would be located at the furthest possible distance from writing, if, by writing, one understands a highly developed totality of cultural conventions through which language manages to communicate from a distance, without the advantage of the face to face contact. Language would need to resort to the "dangerous supplement" of writing only when it put an end to this co-originary relationship between speech and self-presence.

For Derrida, Rousseau constructs – on the basis of the dominant logocentric motif of the voice-as-presence that valorises the priority of speech to the virtues of an innocent, transparent self-knowledge – an opposition between a "natural" language, which remains close to its source as passionate linguistic enunciation, and the "artificial" languages in which passion is submerged by the rules and the mechanisms of linguistic convention. The initial, "natural" language is situated in a geographical "South", with a culture, which remains more or less indifferent to progress, and the grace and the innocence of origins is expressed by this language. The "artificial" languages are identified with those "Northern" characteristics which, for Rousseau, signify the effect of civilization. Passion is surmounted by reason, and social life is subordinated to the forces of economic organisation. This polar-

ity, according to Rousseau, is also marked in these languages themselves. In the passionate, melodic, vowel dominated languages of the South, one finds speech still close to its origin. In the North, one finds languages marked by a rough and a heavy structure of *consonants*, which, though it renders them more effective as communicative instruments, widens the gap between feeling and meaning, instinct and expression.

Rousseau associates the threat of writing with the multiplication of "articulations" through which language extends its communicative power. "Progress" includes a displacement from origin, and a substitution of all those elements in speech – "accent", "intonation" and "passion" – which tie language to the human subject, and society in general. The more complex language becomes, the more it depends on articulation which renders writing possible. For Derrida, Rousseau interprets it as an absolute loss, as a fall from this state in which speech was perfectly joined to passion.

According to Christopher Norris, the question of articulation and writing in Rousseau is connected to a whole series of related questions in his discourse concerning nature, origin, and social institutions:

> Writing is whatever threatens to invade the utopian community of free and equal discourse which exists among primitive peoples. It gives rise to injustice, to political oppression and to all those evils that attend the birth of modern "civilized" society. Rousseau can only account for these effects by evoking some primal catastrophe, some accident that has befallen mankind through the perverse addiction to false ideas of social and intellectual progress. What Rousseau *cannot* think – expressly at least – is the notion of these evils having always existed as far back as the origins of human society.[6]

Derrida undertakes the deconstruction of what he sees as a mythology of presence by following the "graphic of supplementarity" (*OG* 268/*DLG* 349) which seems to condition the entirety of Rousseau's text, and to defer any resort to the idea of origins. This deferral indicates that there is no thinking regarding the character of language, of history, of culture, or social relations that would not have always already presupposed the fall to writing, to *différance* or to supplementarity. More precisely, language, for Derrida, from the moment that it passes beyond the state of the primitive cry, is "always already" marked by writing, or those signs of an "articulate" structure which Rousseau deems decadent and corrupted. In Rousseau's historical thinking, speech in its imaginary plenitude of meaning seems to be divided at its source by the supplement of writing:

> But if Rousseau could say that "words" [*voix*, vowels], not sounds [*sons*, consonants], are written," it is because words are distinguished from sounds exactly by what permits writing — consonants and articulation. The latter replace only themselves. Articulation, which replaces accents, is the origin of languages [*langues*]. Altering [for the worse] through writing is an originary exteriority. It is the origin of language [*langage*]. Rousseau describes it without declaring it. Clandestinely.
>
> A speech without consonantic principle, what for Rousseau would be a speech sheltered from all writing, would not be speech; it would hold itself at the fictive limit of the inarticulate and purely natural cry. (*OG* 343/*DLG* 443)

Accordingly, while, Rousseau

> *declares* what he *wishes* to *say*, that is to say that articulation and writing are a post-originary malady of language [*langue*]; he says or *describes* that which he *does not wish*

> *to say*: articulation and therefore the space of writing operates at the origin of language [*langage*]. (*OG* 249/*DLG* 326)

Rousseau, on Derrida's reading, presents the evils of articulation and writing as ones which have "come upon the origin unexpectedly", overwhelming the innocent community of speech *a posteriori*:

> [...] the dangerous supplement [...] *comes to add itself from the outside as evil and lack* to happy and innocent plenitude. It would come from an outside which would be simply the outside. Which conforms to the logic of identity and to the principle of classical ontology (the outside is outside, being is, etc.) but not to the logic of supplementarity, which wants that the outside be inside, that the other and the lack come to add themselves as a plus that replaces a minus, that what adds itself to something takes the place of a default in the thing, that the default, as the outside of the inside, should be already within the inside, etc. What Rousseau in fact describes is that the lack, adding itself as a plus to a plus, broaches an energy which *will (would) have* been and remain intact. And indeed it breaks in as a dangerous supplement, as a *substitute* that *enfeebles, enslaves, effaces, separates*, and *falsifies* [...]. (*OG* 233-234/*DLG* 308)

The manner in which Rousseau presents this case opens a different perspective which places this deviation of language at a point prior to all articulations of origin: "What does Rousseau say without saying, see without seeing?" (*OG* 234/*DLG* 308). That "[t]he becoming-writing of language is the becoming-language of language" (*OG* 249/*DLG* 326). Rousseau's text can then only conceive language and society in terms of difference, supplementarity and the absence of presence. Rousseau does not want to think

in these terms, but he is obliged to do so by the logic of his own arguments. For, how did language come into existence or how did words acquire their meaning if not through the existence of semantic codes and conventions which had to be *always already* there?

Thus, Rousseau's text bears witness to the fact that the conceptualization of the nature of language is impossible without the recognition that articulation and writing were there, from the beginning, as part of the natural resources of language. On this basis, the fall from a "natural" language to the supplement of writing has always already occurred, so that its signs will be there to be read even in those passages in which Rousseau describes – or attempts to describe – what this language would be if civilization had not imposed its foreign, artificial values. In this attempt, therefore, Rousseau will provide evidence, against his deep desires, that there is no language beyond that point at which language is *inscribed* for the first time in the strange non-original "logic of the 'supplement'" (*OG* 8/*DLG* 17).

What Rousseau's text *describes* as "writing" does not, thus, constitute language *solely* at the point of its supposed historical decline, but is the state of *all* language. Rousseau is obliged indirectly to recognise (manifesting itself in the "blind spots" and the contradictions of his text) that language is inconceivable without the supplement of articulation, or the deviation from origin, something that eventually determines the possibility of its progress. Thus, Rousseau's quest for the "origin" of language *presupposes* an existent productive movement which has already severed language from such an original presence. The "supplement", according to Derrida,

> is inserted at the point where language [*langage*] begins to be articulated, is born, that is, from falling short of itself, when its accent or intonation, its mark of origin and

> passion within it, is effaced under that *other* mark of origin which is articulation. According to Rousseau, the history of writing is indeed that of articulation. The becoming-language of the cry is the movement by which spoken plenitude begins to become what it is through losing itself, hollowing itself out, breaking itself, articulating itself. The cry vocalizes itself by beginning to efface vocalic speech. (*OG* 294/*DLG* 381)

The "supplement", as Derrida notes, is what simultaneously signifies the lack of a "presence", or a state of plenitude forever beyond recall, and *supplements* this lack by putting in motion its own economy of difference and deferral (*différance*). It is nowhere present in language, but it is everywhere presupposed by the existence of language as a pre-articulated system.

B. How Adequate is Derrida's Deconstructive Reading of the *Essay?*

1. *Mis-Reading Articulation*

According to Derrida, Rousseau's disdainful, reproachful statement concerning the secondary, exterior but simultaneously dangerous, supplementary nature of "writing" is found in the fifth chapter of the *Essay*, entitled, "On Script". There one finds Rousseau claiming:

> Writing, which would seem to crystallize language, is precisely what alters it. It changes not the words but the spirit, substituting exactitude for expressiveness [*L'écriture substitue l'exactitude à l'expression*]. Feelings are expressed in speaking, ideas in writing. In writing, one is forced to use all the words according to their conventional meaning [*dans l'acception commune*]. But in speaking, one varies the meanings [*les acception*] by varying one's tone of voice, determining them as one pleases. Being less constrained to clarity [*êclair*], one can be more forceful [*il donne plus à la force*]. And it is not possible for a language that is written to retain its vitality [*vivacité*] as long as one that is only spoken. (*Essay* 21-22) (*OG* 341-342/*DLG* 443)

Then he carries on remarking that,

> Words [*voix*], not sounds [*sons*], are written. Yet, in an inflected language, these are the sounds, the accents, and all sorts of modulations that are the main source of energy for a language, and that make a given phrase, otherwise quite ordinary, *proper only to the place where it is*. The means used to *overcome* [*supplier*] this weakness tend to make written language rather elaborately prolix; and

> many books written in discourse will enervate the language. To say everything as one would write it would be merely to read aloud. (italics added) (*Essay* 22) (*OG* 305-306/*DLG* 397-8)

The "expressiveness" of language is substituted, through alphabetic writing for "exactitude". It replaces the expression of the emotional drive, of the passion that is found at the origin of language: "[...] man's first motives for speaking were of the passions" (*Essay* 12). "Sounds", "intonation", "accent" are the elements which keep passions and feeling alive within the generality of concepts. The expressive power of passions is better represented by the phonetic, and not the consonative, element of language. The emotional drive cannot be expressed by a language which has replaced accent and vowels with a plethora of articulations and consonants. Although the particularity of the subjective emotional drive is distorted within the generality of the concept even in the case of speech, since speech is also organised on the base of concepts which are the result of connections, the generality of the concept is limited in favour of the particularity of impulse through accent, intonation and melody that speech possesses: "A tongue which has only articulations and words has only half its riches. True, it expresses ideas; but for the expression of feelings and images it still needs rhythm and sounds, which is to say melody, something the Greek tongue has and ours lacks" (*Essay* 51).

In the case of writing, we substitute "accent marks" for "intonation" in vain: "It is mistaken to think that accent marks can make up for oral intonation. One invents accents signs [*accens*] only when intonation [*l'accent*] has already been lost" (*Essay* 24-25). Hence, it is the difference between "accent marks" and "intonation" that highlights the difference between writing and speech.

Derrida will respond to Rousseau's "attack" against writing, by showing that what, at an explicit level of argumentation, is insistently *declared* to "corrupt" language, is simultaneously *described* as constituting a fundamental condition of its possibility:

> *Articulation is the becoming-writing of language.* Rousseau, *who would like to say* that this becoming-writing *comes upon the origin unexpectedly,* relies on it, follows it, *describes in fact* the way in which that *becoming-writing comes upon the origin unexpectedly,* happens from the origin. The becoming-writing of language is the becoming-language of language. He *declares* what he *wishes* to *say,* that is to say that articulation and writing are a post-originary malady of language; he says or *describes* that which he *does not wish to say*: articulation and therefore the space of writing operates at the origin of language. (*OG* 249/*DLG* 326)

According to Derrida, Rousseau identifies the corruptive advent of writing with that stage of linguistic development at which language has "excessively" developed articulation: "[...] the more articulated [a language] is, the more it lends itself to writing" (*OG* 267/*DLG* 348). Derrida undertakes to restore writing *through the restoration of articulation*. Hence, while Rousseau, according to Derrida, *would like* articulation to be conceived as a "supplement" which came to be added to language *a posteriory* as an "accident",

> [h]e describes it however in its originary necessity. This unhappy accident is also a "natural progress." It does not come unexpectedly upon a constituted song, it does not surprise a full music. There is no speech, then, as we know, no song, and thus no music, before articulation. Passion, then, could not be expressed or imitated without articulation. The "cry of nature" (*Second Discourse)*, the "simple sounds [that] emerge naturally from the throat"

> (*Essay* VI), do not make a language because articulation has not yet played there. "Natural voices [vowels] are unarticulated" *(Essay* p. 295). Convention has its hold only upon articulation, which pulls language out of the cry, and increases itself with consonants, tenses, and quantity. *Thus language is borne out of the process of its own degeneration*. (*OG* 264/*DLG* 344-5)

However, despite what Derrida's reading attributes to Rousseau, Rousseau *does not want* nor *intend to say* that articulation happens to the language *a posteriori*. On the contrary, he *does* declare expressly that articulation is there from the beginning. This becomes clear from the following passage from the *Essay*, which remains curiously absent from Derrida's reading of Rousseau:

> With the first voices came the first articulations or sounds formed according to the respective passions that dictated them. Anger produces menacing cries *articulated* by the tongue and the palate. *But the voice of tenderness is softer: its medium is the glottis. And such an utterance becomes a sound*. It may occur with ordinary or unusual tones, it may be more or less sharply accented, according to the feeling to which it is joined. Thus rhythm and sounds are borne with syllables: all voices speak under the influence of passion, which adorns them with all their eclat. Thus verse, singing, and speech have a common origin. Around the fountains of which I spoke, the first discourses were the first songs. The periodoc recurrences and measures of rhythm, the melodious modulations of accent, gave birth to poetry and music along with language. Or, rather that was the only language in those happy climes and happy times, when the only pressing needs that required the agreement of others were those to which the heart gave birth. (italics added) *(Essay* 50)

Therefore, it is Rousseau himself who explicitly *declares* that it is articulation which gives birth to language, opening up speech as an institution that is born from passion even though it is articulation, which eventually, in a *later phase* of linguistic development, through its multiplication, will lead speech or language in general, to silence.

Nevertheless, Derrida will seek additional support for his reading through reference to another passage from the *Essay*, in which Rousseau seems, according to Derrida, to attempt to describe how the character of the "first language", or the "ideal of the language of origin", would be (*OG* 265/*DLG* 346). The "first language", characterised by rhythm and intonation, is neither the result of material needs nor a product of an industrious logic, but results from impulses and feelings, and the awakening of desire:

> I do not doubt that independent of vocabulary and syntax, the first tongue, if it still existed, would retain the original characteristics that would distinguish it from all others. Not only would all the forms of this tongue have to be in images, feelings, and figures, but even in its mechanical part it would have to correspond to its initial object, presenting to the senses as well as to the understanding the almost inevitable impression of the feeling that it seeks to communicate.
>
> Since natural sounds are inarticulate, *words have few articulations.* Interposing some consonants to fill the gaps between vowels would suffice to make them fluid and easy to pronounce. On the other hand, the sounds would very varied, and the diversity of accents for each sound would further multiply them. Quantity and rhythm would account for still further combinations. Since sounds, accents, and number, which are natural, would leave little to articulation, which is conventional, it would be sung rather than spoken. Most of the root words

> would be imitative sounds or accents of passion, or ef-
> fects of sense objects. It would contain many ono-
> matopoetic expressions. (Italics added) *(Essay* 15-16) *(OG*
> 265/*DLG* 345)

From this passage, and in relation to the *Essay* as a whole, "Rousseau's declared intention" is, according to Derrida, "[t]o speak of origin and zero degree [...]. Rousseau would like to separate originarity from supplementarity" *(OG* 264/*DLG* 345). In this way, for Derrida, the "ideal of the language of origin" is presented, by Rousseau, as that stage of language in which, although language "has broken with gesture, need, animality, etc", it "*has not yet* been corrupted by articulation, convention, supplementarity" *(OG* 265/*DLG* 346).

But why does Derrida claim that Rousseau's "declared intention" is to separate originality from supplementarity, that is, the "first language" from articulation, when it is explicitly and clearly *declared* in the *Essay* that this "first language", which, although it has not lost contact completely with its previous stage, that of the inarticulate natural voice, includes the supplement of articulation? On the basis of what textual evidence does Derrida reach the conclusion that Rousseau's "declared intention" is to efface from this first language the element of articulation? Is it not Rousseau who explicitly *declares*, in the passage, suppressed on Derrida's reading, that, "[w]ith the first voices came the first articulations"? *(Essay* 50). Furthermore, in the passage that Derrida offers as evidence of the exclusion of articulation from the "first language", he states that "[s]ince natural sounds are inarticulate, words have few articulations" *(Essay* 15). Rousseau says "few articulations"; he does not say that this "first language" had "no" articulations at all. He never speaks about a language that would be free of articulations.

The only language that is free of articulations is the language of gestures, which is a mute language. Without denying the existence of supplementation, that is, the presence of the supplement of articulation even within this "first language", Rousseau notes that this language has not yet lost its vitality, something that will happen at a later stage of its development, through the multiplication of the always already existing articulations, a process that will eventually render possible the appearance of alphabetic writing. Hence, at the beginning of the next chapter, entitled "On Writing", Rousseau writes:

> Anyone who studies the history and progress of the tongues will see that the more the words become monotonous, the more the consonants multiply; that, as accents fall into disuse and quantities are neutralized, they are replaced [*supplée*] by grammatical combinations and new articulations. But only the pressure of time brings these changes about. To the degree that needs multiply, that affairs become complicated, that light is shed [knowledge is increased], language changes its character. It becomes more regular and less passionate. It substitutes ideas for feelings. It no longer speaks to the heart but to reason. For that very reason, accent diminishes, articulation increases. Language becomes more exact and clearer, but more prolix, duller and colder. This progression seems to me entirely natural [...]. (*Essay* 16) (*OG* 266/*DLG* 347) (*OG* 295/*DLG* 381-382)

By treating articulation and language as two mutually incompatible possibilities in Rousseau, Derrida outlines a "contradiction" that plays a fundamental role in his deconstructive reading of the *Essay*:

> What are the two contradictory possibilities that Rousseau wishes to save simultaneously? And how does

> he go about it? He wishes on the one hand to *affirm*, by
> giving it a positive value, everything of which articulation
> is the principle or everything with which it constructs a
> system (passion, language, society, man, etc.). But he in-
> tends to affirm simultaneously all that is crossed out by
> articulation (accent, life, energy, passion yet again, and
> so on). (*OG* 268/*DLG* 349)

Yet, describing this "first language", Rousseau, not only explicitly *affirms* "everything of which articulation is the principle or everything with which it constructs a system (passion, language, society, man, etc.)", but, also, articulation itself, since it is articulation which offers the possibility for the expression of that "quality of passion", which cannot be expressed by "inarticulate voices", and an example of which is erotic passion: "Anger produces menacing cries articulated by the tongue and the palate. But the voice of tenderness is softer: its medium is the glottis. And such an utterance becomes a sound" (*Essay* 50).

At this stage, language has not yet broken away from the passions, so it is still possible for a harmonious coexistence between a *partly* articulated language and the passions, which this language can express. Therefore, in this situation, Rousseau can af*firm simultaneously*, *without falling into contradiction*, all those things, which presuppose articulation for their existence, including articulation itself, as well as all that which, in a *later* stage, "is cancelled by articulation (accent, life, energy, passion yet again, and so on)".

Within the history of human language, which is, as Jean Starobinski points out, the transition "from a first to a final silence [*d'un premier à un dernier silence*]",[7] there is at the interim, a certain moment of plenitude, both linguistic and emotional. This stage represents, for the history of language, a point of equilibrium and happiness. From that point onwards, language becomes en-

meshed in a plurality of articulations and conventions. At this stage, these bonds of articulation and convention, although they already exist, still remain incorporated in the expression of passion and feelings, thereby constituting a state of harmonious coincidence. These bonds will subsequently lead humans from expression as the non-continuous succession of moments – something that constitutes the main characteristic of their early existence (i.e., gestures) – to a condition of achievement of duration (as this is expressed by speech). Swept along by this movement, language will become a chain of modulation; it will become *discourse.*

Although in the past, it was sufficient for a human being, in order to express their needs satisfactorily, to use gestures, now, where emotions animate their soul, they have to make recourse to the fluctuations and the intonations of the voice. The instantaneous gesture is adequate for someone who wants to show their hunger or thirstiness; but "when it is a question of stirring the heart and inflaming the passions" (*Essay* 8), then they have to add the temporal rhythms brought about by speech to the gestures:

> But when it is a question of stirring the heart and inflaming the passions, it is an altogether different matter. The successive impressions of discourse, which strike a redoubled blow, produce a different feeling from that of the continuous presence of the same object, which can be taken in at a single glance. Imagine someone in a painful situation that is fully known; as you watch the afflicted person, you are not likely to weep. But give him time to tell you what he feels and soon you will burst into tears. It is solely in this way that the scenes of a tragedy produce their effect. Pantomime without discourse will leave you nearly tranquil; discourse without gesture will bring tears from you. (*Essay* 8-9) (*OG* 261/*DLG* 341)

It is obvious that Rousseau is well aware of the capabilities of gesture and, in many instances, prefers the movement of the body or the hands to speech. Nevertheless he recognises the specific difference of the *temporal* order which characterises speech.

2. From Gesture to Speech

It is at this moment of the passage from gesture to speech that Derrida views the emergence of "one more" *contradiction* into which Rousseau seems to fall:

> 1. Rousseau speaks the desire of immediate presence. When the latter is *better represented* by the range of the voice and reduces dispersion, he praises living speech, which is then the language of the passions. When the immediacy of presence is *better represented* by the proximity and rapidity of the gesture and the glance, he praises the most savage writing, which does not represent oral representation: the hieroglyph. 2. This concept of writing designates the place of unease, of the regulated incoherence within conceptuality, well beyond the *Essay* and well beyond Rousseau. (*OG* 259/*DLG* 338)

Immediately before the passage in which speech is extolled for its ability to "express" and provoke emotions in opposition to signs, which are placed on the side of "exactitude", it is signs which are praised for their ability to express the passions. This leads Derrida to talk once again about "contradiction" and "regulated incoherence" within Rousseau's argumentation. The "incoherence" within Rousseau's argumentation is referred to as "regulated" since it aspires to a *unified* argument:

> Since learning to gesticulate, we have forgotten the art of pantomime, for the same reason that with all our beautiful systems of grammar we no longer understand the symbols of the Egyptians. What the ancients said in the liveliest way, they did not express in words but by means of signs. They did not say it, they showed it. (*Essay* 6) (*OG* 257/*DLG* 336)

While, a little further down, Rousseau continues:

> Darius, engaged with his army in Scythia, receives from the King of Scythia a frog, a bird, a mouse, and five arrows. The herald makes the presentation in silence and departs. That terrible harangue was understood; and Darius returned to his own country as quickly as he could. Substitute a letter [namely, a phonetic script] for this sign: the more menacing it is, the less frightening will it be. It will be no more than a boast, which would draw merely a smile from Darius....Thus one speaks more effectively to the eye than to the ear. There is no one who does not feel the truth of Horace's judgment in this regard. Clearly the most eloquent speeches are those containing the most imagery; and sounds are never more forceful than when they produce the effects of colors. (*Essay* 7-8) (*OG* 260/*DLG* 339-340)

Derrida will underline:

> Decisive consequence: eloquence depends upon the image. [...] Now if one considers that Rousseau elsewhere associates visibility, space, painting, writing, etc., with the loss of passional energy, with need and sometimes with death, one must surely conclude in favor of a unity, in the *interest of writing*, of heterogeneous or so-declared values. But this unity of the interest of writing Rousseau cannot declare. He can only describe it clandestinely as he plays with the different parts of his discourse. Even if

> it means contradicting himself, he places writing on the side of need and speech on the side of passion. In the passage that we have just cited, it is clear that it is a question of passional signs. That will be confirmed further along when hieroglyphic script will be defined as "impassioned language." [....] Rousseau abruptly reverses the order of the demonstration: only the spoken word has the power of expressing or exciting passion. (*OG* 260/*DLG* 340-1)

Yet, if Rousseau can be, without falling into contradiction, on the one hand, affirmative towards writing, while, on the other hand, disapproving when he connects it, as Derrida claims, "with the loss of passionate energy, with need and sometimes with death", this is because he refers to two different types of writing: *hieroglyphic* and *alphabetic* writing.

In fact, the *Essay* distinguishes three different types of writing, which correspond to three different stages of linguistic and social development. The "primitive way of writing", which did not "represent sounds, but objects themselves", is that of the hieroglyphics. It "corresponds to passionate language, and already supposes some society and some needs to which the passions have given birth" (*Essay* 17). The second way of writing "represents words and propositions by conventional characters", such as the writing of Chinese. The third, which is directly opposed to the first, is that of alphabetic writing, which breaks down "the speaking voice into a given number of elementary parts, either vocal or articulate, with which one can form all the words and syllables imaginable" (*Essay* 17). These three ways of writing are hardly similar to one another and, while the first is appraised by Rousseau as "passionate", the last is blamed for "depriving" language of passions. As a result, these three ways of writing are not examined and juxtaposed to speech in their commonality. Therefore, Rousseau does

not fall into "contradiction" when, on the one hand, he defines hieroglyphic writing as the "language of passion", while, on the other, he connects writing as alphabetic writing "with the loss of passionate energy, with need and sometimes with death". Moreover, in this passage, Rousseau explicitly juxtaposes *signs* to *letters.* When Derrida claims that Rousseau treats writing as the "language of passion" while, at another point, "he contradicts himself", when "he places writing on the side of need and speech on the side of passion", he does not pay sufficient attention to the latter's distinction between these two different kinds of writing – hieroglyphic and alphabetic of writing.

We can now return to our first "contradiction", that is, Rousseau's initial praise for the language of gestures and signs at the expense of speech, which is then suddenly inverted with speech coming to occupy the position of privilege: "Rousseau abruptly reverses the order of the demonstration: *only* the spoken word has the power of expressing or exciting passion" (italics added) (*OG* 260/*DLG* 341). Here, Derrida paraphrases Rousseau once more. Indeed, at which point, is it declared that it is "only" (a word, that is introduced illicitly into the reading) speech, which "has the power of expressing or exciting passion"? Rousseau ends the paragraph cited above in the following manner:

> The passions have their gestures, but they also have their accents; and these accents, which thrill us, these tones of voice that cannot fail to be heard; penetrate to the very depths of the heart, carrying there the emotions they wring from us, forcing us in spite of ourselves to feel what we hear. We conclude that while visible signs can render a more exact imitation, sounds more effectively arouse interest. (*Essay* 9) (*OG* 261/*DLG* 341)

Therefore, it is *not only* speech, which expresses the passions; it is *also* gestures: "The *passions have their gestures*, but they also have

their accents". Yet, it is sounds, which "more effectively arouse interest". This is because the language of gestures, as is also the case with writing, lacks accent. Also, the language of gestures does not yet have won time; it lacks duration: "The successive impressions of discourse, which strike a redoubled blow, produce a different feeling" (*Essay* 8). This will lead Derrida to view the Husserlian model of "autopathy" as emergent in the case of Rousseau:

> Voice penetrates into me violently, it is the privileged route for forced entry and interiorization, whose reciprocity produces itself in the "hearing-one-self-speak," in the structure of the voice and of interlocution. [...] In the voice, the presence of the object already disappears. The self-presence of the voice and of the hearing-oneself speak conceals the very thing that visible space allows to be placed before us. The thing disappearing, the voice substitutes an acoustic sign for it which can, in the place of the object taken away, penetrate profoundly into me, to lodge there "in the depth of the heart." It is the only way of interiorizing the phenomenon; by transforming it into *akoumène* [...]. Speech never gives the thing itself, but a simulacrum that touches us more profoundly than the truth, "strikes" us more effectively. Another ambiguity in the appreciation of speech. It is not the very presence of the object which moves us but its phonetic sign [...]. (*OG* 261-262/*DLG* 342)

Yet, one does not confront here the usual structure of "autopathy". In this case, "I-hear-the-other-speaking", not myself. Derrida needs to explain how the structure of the "hearing-oneself-speaking", derives from the structure of "hearing-myself-speaking". Moreover, as a direct consequence of this structure, Derrida recognises that in Rousseau the "hearing-oneself-speaking" structure has supremacy over the "something-being-before-one's-eyes" structure; the vocal sign plays a more primary role

than the presence of the object itself. Hence, Derrida's puzzlement at Rousseau's position on speech is clear. And this is because, while, on the one hand, the identification and tracing of the structure of autopathy in Rousseau's argument renders him an adequate candidate for his incorporation into Western metaphysics, on the other hand, his elevation of the vocal sign over the presence of the thing itself creates problems for this strategy of incorporation. The fact that Rousseau privileges the vocal sign in relation to the presence of the thing itself places into question Derrida's claim that his discourse is subordinated to metaphysics of presence. Also, it places into question Derrida's claim that the supplement is treated by Rousseau's text as secondary, as being inferior to the thing, which it comes to supplement. Derrida will try to circumvent this obstacle by presenting Rousseau as being critical towards this "complicity between voice and heart" (*OG* 261/*DLG* 342). This is because the "substitution" of the thing itself by the vocal sign, the truth by the "simulacrum", "installs a sort of fiction, if not a lie, at the very origin of speech" (*OG* 262/*DLG* 342). Yet, we doubt whether it is possible to attribute to Rousseau such a negative assessment of the nature of the vocal sign *solely* on the basis of the following passage, which Derrida adduces as evidence: "The successive impressions of discourse, which strike a redoubled blow, produce a different feeling from that of the continuous presence of the same object. [...] I have said elsewhere why feigned misfortunes touch us more than real ones" (*Essay* 8) (*OG* 262/*DLG* 342).

Yet, the premise that "feigned misfortunes", through their excessive use of the voice, have the capacity to be more moving than the vision of a real misfortune, is not asserted as a disapprobation, but as proof of the claim that the vocal sign is more effective for the stimulation of feelings than the presence of the thing itself. Nevertheless, for Derrida, Rousseau's mistrust is not only taken

as given, but it also explains his "nostalgia for a society of need that Rousseau disqualifies so harshly elsewhere. Dream of a mute society, of a society before the origin of languages, that is to say, strictly speaking, a society before society" (*OG* 262/*DLG* 342). This claim is based on the following passage from the *Essay*:

> This leads me to think that if the only needs we ever experienced were physical, we should most likely never have been able to speak; we would fully express our meanings by the language of gesture alone. We would have been able to establish societies little different from those we have, or such as would have been better able to achieve their goals. We would have been able to institute laws, to choose leaders, to invent arts, to establish commerce, and to do, in a word, almost as many things as we do with the help of speech. Without the fear of jealously, the secrets of oriental gallantry are passed across the more strictly guarded harems in the epistolary language of salaams. The mutes of great nobles understand each other, and understand everything that is said to them by means of signs, just as well as one can understand anything said in discourse. (*Essay* 9) (*OG* 262/*DLG* 342-3)

We can now see what really belongs to Rousseau's text, and what Derrida's reading arbitrarily adds to it. His assertion that "while visible signs can render a more exact imitation, sounds more effectively arouse interest" leads Rousseau to conclude ("This leads me to think…") that *if* we had to express *only* natural needs, visible signs would be adequate by themselves. Hence, Rousseau does not show any preference for a mute society, a society which would be based exclusively on the language of gestures. His discourse is strictly assertive (connotative). Yet, this does not prevent Derrida from concluding, based on the above assertion, that, for Rousseau, "[w]ith reference to this society of mute writing, the

advent of speech resembles a catastrophe, an unpredictable misfortune. Nothing made it necessary. At the end of the *Essay,* this schema is exactly inverted" (*OG* 262/*DLG* 343).

How would it possible for Rousseau to affirm a mute society limiting itself solely to the expression of "physical needs", when he insistently defends a society based on passion? Hence, in the beginning of the next chapter entitled "That the First Invention of Speech is Due not to Need but Passion", Rousseau will state that "[i]t seems then that need dictated the first gestures, while the passion stimulated the first words" (*Essay* 11).

3. The First Language Connects Harmoniously Articulation and Accent

Rousseau's developmental schema shows a preference for that phase of the historical development of language and society when, although articulation has already appeared as the originary possibility of language (the expression of passions supplemented by the intensity and the duration which characterize the expressive medium of speech), language has not yet broken its links with passion and feelings. The crisis of language will appear later through the hyperbolic growth of consonants and articulations, and the disappearance of the accent resulting from phonetic writing. In his reading of Rousseau, Derrida fails to perceive this stage of linguistic and social development which unites articulation and accent in a non-contradictory manner, with the result that Rousseau is held to contradict himself when he attempts to "affirm" all those things which articulation creates as well as all those which it effaces.

In these first languages, rhythm and accent dominate. These languages are not the product of material needs or reason; they

are connected to the impulse of feelings and the awakening of passions. Rousseau places the birth of language not in the process of the productive activity, but in those moments of leisure and expenditure which interrupt active life. Rousseau's originality consists in making language well up from a spring full of emotion. In the intervals between work (work, that has not yet become slavery), festivities are improvised. The rhythm and the tone of the first languages are inseparable from bodily verve and vivacity:

> In that happy age when nothing marked the hours, nothing would oblige one to count them; the only measure of time would be the alternation of amusement and boredom. Under old oaks, conquerors of the years, and ardent youth will gradually lose his ferocity. Little by little they become less shy with each other. In trying to make oneself understood, one learns to explain oneself. There too, the original festivals developed. Feet skipped with joy, *earnest gestures no longer sufficed*, being accompanied by an impassioned voice; pleasure and desire mingled and were felt together. There at last was the true cradle of nations: from the pure crystal of the fountains flow the first fires of love. (italics added) (*Essay* 44-45)

At this stage, people distinguished themselves from nature; they came close to each other; they abandoned their initial speechlessness; and they were no longer satisfied with instantaneous cries. Yet their language, both musical and poetical, does not constitute an element of disjunction. It authorises the expressive communication of passion and feelings, and perfect, mutual understanding. Despite the fact that such a language already allows the existence and development of articulations and consonants, it has not yet given birth to the absence of passion and feelings; it still remains in their service. The subject has not yet fallen victim to mediations (to the "intermediate"), which he will develop

in the future, and which, by finally freeing themselves from their role as mediators in communication, will be transformed into a cover, a veil between civilised people. Language remains inseparably bound to the body of the passionate subject itself. It maintains the remembrance and the force of the archaic onomatopoeia; it still has the gift of the immediate persuasive power of the "voice of nature". Yet, it is, also, capable of determining, beyond the speaking subject, the autonomous existence of a reality conceived by thinking. Even though articulation is responsible for the deviation of language from a primary immediacy, it provides it with an instrument (an intermediate), capable of restoring this immediacy. As Jean Starobinski claims, in singsong speech, which is the first speech, even though we have already overcome

> [...] the wild cry of the origins (without phonemes and accent), however, we are still very far from the impersonal language of the civilized human beings, which disappears within the generality of the signified, which abandons the speaking subject, a language which is under the domination of its mechanical function and its external aims, an impersonal language. [8]

Derrida fails to perceive that Rousseau's simultaneous *affirmation* of those elements which have articulation as their condition of possibility, and those elements which, through the multiplication of articulation, will be threatened in the *future*, is *not* contradictory. For, Rousseau refers to a certain stage of linguistic and socio-historical development, which can harmoniously accommodate all of them: this is the linguistic ideal that corresponds to the happiness of a "new-born society". Hence, Rousseau is not dismissive of articulation in general, since he does not hesitate to *state* explicitly that articulation constitutes a central element in the "language of passion". He is, rather, critical of the unrestricted

multiplication of articulation, which deprives language of its ability to express passion and feelings. Moreover, the intentional or unintentional acknowledgement of the fact that articulation has invaded and determined language from the beginning, that it is always already at the origin of language, does not necessarily deprive Rousseau's criticism of its force in relation to an overarticulated language. Although articulation constitutes a condition of possibility for language, a language, which has *too many* articulations, is lacking in "expressiveness".

After describing the appearance of the first intonated language, the *Essay* becomes the history of a progressively and ineluctably deepened separation. Speech will lose its force, through the disappearance of its fluctuations and accent; it will become logical, cold and monotonous. The depth and extent of the depravity of existing societies and languages will be assessed according to the extent to which they differ from this archetype or ideal. The *Essay* ends with the reminder of a final catastrophe, where the civilized world has been overwhelmed by idle talk, bragging and garrulousness. The modern idioms, so ornate and flexible, are no longer able to be used to transmit content full of passion and liveliness: "[Our tongues] are made for murmuring on couches. Our preachers torment themselves into a sweat in the pulpit without anyone knowing anything of what they have said" (*Essay* 73).

4. Evaluating Derrida's Restoration of Writing

Through this critical reconstruction of the deconstructive enterprise, the central question becomes whether the relation between writing and speech has been plausibly transformed into

one in which writing as *articulation* is found at the origin of language as its condition of possibility. Yet, as it has been shown, Rousseau does not blame phonetic writing for being articulation. Writing is accused of being an *overarticulated* language; in the case of *alphabetic* writing, accent, intonation, and prosody have been entirely subsumed by articulation with the result that language has lost all its expressive resources. In contrast to writing, speech, and indeed only the passionate speech of the warm climates, the South, is still able to maintain the element of accent. Indeed, for Rousseau, it is not speech in general that is praised and elevated in relation to alphabetic writing. Speech can be subject to the same evils as alphabetic writing. Rousseau does not attempt to create a binary opposition between speech and writing in general. For example, in his history of the development of languages, Rousseau contrasts the passionate languages of the South with the dispassionate languages of the North (*Essay* 48-49) (*OG* 246/*DLG* 322).

Hence, in his deconstruction of Rousseau's *Essay*, Derrida has attempted to redeem writing-as-articulation, as *arche-writing*, as *différance*, namely, as that which divides immediate presence, and, thus, renders both speech and writing in their traditional meaning possible. However, what finally happens to alphabetic writing, to writing in its traditional sense, which is *not*, in fact, accused of being articulation, but of representing that stage of linguistic development, in which, accent has been entirely substituted for the multiplication of articulations, losing, in this way, its contact with passions and feelings? If speech has supremacy over writing, it is not because it is free from the element of articulation — Rousseau never claims such a thing — but because it can retain its contact with passions and feelings through accent.

Deconstruction would have accomplished its aims sufficiently if what concerned it was to show that the essential distancing from

origin – of which writing is traditionally considered a sign — constitutes a characteristic of language in general. Yet, for Rousseau, the objection to writing and articulation is not that they are responsible for the distancing of language from its origin or for substituting presence for absence or immediacy for mediation (speech as a *medium* of expression in itself could be blamed for the same reasons), but because they gradually *accentuated* this distancing, something which finally resulted in the clear and definite separation of language from its origin (i.e., passion and feelings). Speech is considered superior to writing, not because it excludes articulation, but because it retains *accent*, which is related, by Rousseau, to the expressiveness of passions and feelings. In this sense, the aforementioned determinate difference between speech and writing remains intact in the work of deconstruction, since what deconstruction is solely preoccupied with demonstrating is that writing as articulation is found at the origin of language. Hence, the accusation of its lack of expressiveness is still in effect:

> Words [*voix*], not sounds [*sons*], are written. Yet, in an infected language, these are the sounds, the accents, and all sorts of modulations that are the main source of energy for a language, and that make a given phrase, otherwise quite ordinary, uniquely appropriate. The means used to overcome this weakness tend to make written language rather elaborately prolix; and many books written in discourse will enervate the language. (*Essay* 23) (*OG* 305-306/*DLG* 397-398)

The demonstration of a certain distancing of speech from its origin – which renders speech, in this sense, a kind of writing – is not sufficient to efface its difference from the traditional concept of writing, since this difference is related to the ability of speech to express passion through the medium of accent, something which writing cannot do: "A tongue which has only articulations and

words has only half its riches. True, it expresses ideas; but for the expression of feelings and images it still needs rhythm and sounds, which is to say melody, something the Greek tongue has and our lacks" (*Essay* 51).

There is no doubt that it would be possible for a critical reading of Rousseau's *Essay* to contest the claim about the link between accent and passion, or the inability of writing to express passion. This, however, does not constitute the centre of deconstruction's questioning. Deconstructive reading would be completely successful if writing *as* articulation was really *declared* absent from the origin of language and consequently, deconstruction's sole concern was to repair this injustice. Yet, we have doubted Derrida's claim that Rousseau *declares* articulation absent from the origin of language. As we have doubted that the demonstration that writing-as-articulation constitutes a condition of possibility for language is sufficient to obliterate Rousseau's "injustice" done to alphabetic writing, as to its relation to speech.

Notes

1. Newton Garver, "Derrida on Rousseau on Writing", *The Journal of Philosophy* lxxiv, no. 11 (November 1977): 667.

2. *Ibid.*, 667-668.

3. *Ibid.*, 668.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, 669.

6. Norris, *Derrida*, 105.

7. Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 315 / *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle suivi de Sept essais sur Rousseau* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, Collection "Tel", 1971), 371.

8. *Ibid.*, 318 / 375 (translation modified).

CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have sought to describe the tensions or contradictions that arise from the *double* nature of the reading strategies that Derrida uses in his confrontation with Western metaphysics. This description has brought to the fore the difficulty involved in the attempt to keep the different and disjunctive elements of this "double gesture" together.

Derrida accepts the existence of "rather stable" determinations of textual meaning in order to justify his obviously *unequivocal* interpretation of the entirety of the philosophical tradition as a "logocentrism" or a "metaphysics of presence". This itself is a prerequisite for the possibility to undertake a strategy of deconstruction in relation to the texts of this tradition. Yet, once this acceptance is accorded, one is then permitted to inquire into the "adequacy" or the "rightness" of the "doubling" of a text's *vouloir-dire* during the first phase of deconstructive reading. In the description of the manner in which the "double" reading of deconstruction is executed (using as an "example" Derrida's reading of Rousseau's *Essay* and the *Confessions)* in the second part of this thesis, a rather problematic, and at times questionable, approach to the textual evidence became apparent. The accumulated effect of these doubts and uncertainties leads one to ask, together with McGee, "whether Derrida...adhere[s] to the rigorous standards he ha[s] himself demanded of any reading".[1] In his reading of Rousseau, Derrida fails to respond to the demands of

a "close reading" that deconstruction has initially posed to itself. For the extent and the seriousness of the failures of interpretation on Derrida's part make their treatment as mere oversights almost impossible. These failures are themselves the effect of a more general difficulty embedded in Derrida's contention that all the texts of the philosophical tradition both reproduce and maintain the "metaphysics of presence" while simultaneously containing elements within themselves which undermine it. This general claim generates a further problem: the choice and attribution of an "exemplary" value to certain texts in relation to numerous texts that constitute the metaphysical tradition. This attribution seeks to provide evidential support for the claim that all philosophy is bound up to "metaphysics of presence" and inaugurate the successful deconstruction of this tradition as a *whole*. Rousseau needs to be more than a mere "example" within 2.500 years of philosophy in order for his deconstruction to have a broader effect as the deconstruction of metaphysics as a *whole*. Yet, how persuasive are Derrida's arguments about his elevation of Rousseau to the metaphysical thinker *par excellence* in such a way as to open a passage through which deconstruction is enabled to "glimpse beyond metaphysics" without having to deconstruct infinitely?

This, in turn, touches upon the relationship between deconstruction as a "quasi-transcendental" position in relation to the conditions of possibility and impossibility of identities of all sorts and its *critical* or practical dimension, namely, the textual deconstructive operation as a process of subversion and displacement of any type of binary hierarchical oppositional logic. If one accepts that deconstruction is an operation that is *a priori* applicable to all discourse and all texts – if all texts are inscribed within an (apparently) monolithic ontological tradition and yet provide indications of the heterological, non-metaphysical system which conditions them – then actually carrying out a deconstruction

seems to be something trivial and monotonous since its results are always known in advance. As Mark Cousins points out in his "Logic of Deconstruction":

> […] there is clearly the possibility of deconstruction being a machine whose product is already known. Deconstruction would be that reading which was adequate to the already deconstructed "unconscious" of the text. It could initiate the production of an endless series of playful deconstructions which manifest a certain sameness in the name of *différance*.[2]

The critic knows before they begin to read what, by *deep linguistic necessity*, they are going to find – that is, a contradiction or an aporia – and sure enough, given the freedom of interpretative manoeuvre that deconstruction is designed to grant them, they find one. The readers of deconstructive criticism soon learn to expect that invariable discovery. Therefore, for all the surprising new readings achieved *en route*,[3] it is difficult to see how Derrida's counter-philosophical strategy can avoid reducing philosophical works to narratives with an invariable plot.

Notes

1. McGee, *Derrida and the Necessity of Metaphysics*, 249.
2. Cousins, "The Logic of Deconstruction", 76.
3. As Derrida's numerous readings demonstrate (including his reading of Rousseau's *Essay* and the *Confessions)*, deconstruction has indeed proved its ability to find strange meanings – although, as it has already been demonstrated, deconstructive readings are adjudged to be strange only by tacit reference to the meanings of the text as already construed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrams, M. H. "Construing and Deconstructing". In *Deconstruction: A Critique*, edited by Rajnath, 32-67. London: Macmillan, 1989.

Argyros, Alex. "The Warp of the World: Deconstruction and Hermeneutics". *Diacritics* 16, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 47-55.

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

Bennington, Geoffrey. "Derridabase". In Geoffrey Bennington, Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, 1-316. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Bernasconi, Robert. "No More Stories, Good or Bad: de Man's Criticism of Derrida on Rousseau". In *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, edited by David Wood, 137-166. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Edited and Introduced by John B. Thompson. Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

Burke, Sean. *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992.

Caputo, John D. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997.

Claude Evans, J. *Strategies of Deconstruction: Derrida and the Myth of the Voice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Cousins, Mark. "The Logic of Deconstruction". *The Oxford Literary Review* 3, no. 2 (1978): 70-77.

Critchley, Simon. *Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

Culler, Jonathan, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. London: Routledge, 1983.

Cutrofello, Andrew. "Derrida's Deconstruction of the Ideal of Legitimation". *Man and World* 23 (1990): 157-173.

de Man, Paul. "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau". In *Blindness & Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism,* 2nd ed., 102-141. London: Routledge, 1983.

Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Literature,* edited by Derek Attridge. London: Routledge, 1992.

Derrida, Jacques. *De la Grammatologie*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967.

Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981.

Derrida, Jacques. "Deconstruction and the Other" (interview with Richard Kearney). In *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, edited by Richard Kearny, 139-156. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

Derrida, Jacques. *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Derrida, Jacques. *Force de loi: Le "Fondement mystique de l'autorité"*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1994-2005.

Derrida, Jacques. "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'". Translated by Mary Quaintance. In *Acts of Religion: Jacques Derrida*, edited and with an introduction by Gil Anidjar, 228-298. New York and London: Routledge, 2002.

Derrida, Jacques. *Khôra*. Paris: Galilee, 1993.

Derrida, Jacques. *La dissémination*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil, collection "Essais", 1972.

Derrida, Jacques. *La voix et le phénomène*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962.

Derrida, Jacques. *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil, collection "Essais", 1967.

Derrida, Jacques. *Limited Inc*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993.

Derrida, Jacques, "Living On: *Border Lines*". Translated by James Hulbert. In *Deconstruction and Criticism*, 75-176. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

Derrida, Jacques. *Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972.

Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 40th Anniversary Edition. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016, 1976[1].

Derrida, Jacques. *On the Name*. Edited by Thomas Dutoit. Translated by David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Derrida, Jacques. *Positions*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972.

Derrida, Jacques, *Positions*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: The Athlone Press, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Translated by David B. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

Derrida, Jacques. *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles / Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*. Translated by Barbara Harlow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*. Edited by Christie V. McDonald. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Schocken Books, 1985.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Derrida, Jacques & Derek Attridge. "Cette étrange institution qu'on appelle la littérature". In *Derrida d'ici, Derrida de là*, sous la direction de Thomas Dutoit et Philippe Romanski, 253-292. Paris: Galilée, 2009.

de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by Roy Harris. Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2009, 1986[1].

Desmond, William. *Art & the Absolute: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

Donato, Eugenio. "The Two Languages of Criticism". In *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Science of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, 89-97. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1972.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Anniversary Edition. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2008, 1983[1].

Ellis, John M. *Against Deconstruction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in this Class?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Foucault, Michel. *L'ordre du discours*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971.

Foucault, Michel. "The Order of Discourse". Translated by Ian McLeod. In *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, edited by Robert Young, 48-78. London and New York: Routledge, 1990, 1981[1].

Frank, Manfred. *What Is Neostructuralism?* Translated by Sabine Wilke and Richard Gray. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 2010, 1955[1].

Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and their Relation to unconscious*, Standard Edition, VIII. Translated by James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1963.

Garver, Newton. "Derrida on Rousseau on Writing". *The Journal of Philosophy* lxxiv, no. 11 (November 1977): 663-673.

Gasché, Rodolphe. *The Tain of the Mirror*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Gasché, Rodolphe. "Deconstruction as Criticism". In *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*, 22-57. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Gasché, Rodolphe. "On Re-representation, or Zigzagging with Husserl and Derrida". *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* XXXII, Supplement, (1993): 1-18.

Glendinning, Simon. *On Being with Others: Heidegger-Derrida-Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Goodheart, Eugene. *The Failure of Criticism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Harland, Richard. *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*. New York: Methuen, 1987.

Heidegger, Martin. "Letter on Humanism". Translated by Frank A. Capuzzi in collaboration with J. Glenn Gray & David Farell Krell. In *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farell Krell, Revised and Expanded Edition, 213-265. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*. Translated by David Farell Krell. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1979.

Hoy, David Couzens. "Forgetting the Text: Derrida's Critique of Heidegger". *boundary 2* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1979): 223-236.

Hoy, David Couzens. "Must We Say What We Mean". In *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Brice R. Wachterhauser, 397-415. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

Johnson, Barbara. *Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Johnson, Barbara. "Translator's Introduction". In Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, vii-xxxiii. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981.

Kant, Immanuel. "Preface to the Second Edition". In *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: MacMillan, 1993.

Knapp, Steven & Walter Benn Michaels. "Against Theory". In *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell, 11-30. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Originally published in *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1982): 732-742.

Llewelyn, John. *Derrida on the Threshold of Sense*. London: MacMillan, 1986.

McGee, Andy J. *Derrida and the Necessity of Metaphysics*. PhD Thesis, University of Essex, 2000.

Naas, Michael. *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of Idols*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books, 1983.

Norris, Christopher. *Derrida*. London: Fontana Press, 1987.

Rousseau Jean-Jacques. *The Confessions*. Translated by J.M. Cohen. London: Penguin Books, 1953.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. Translated by J.H. Moran and A. Gode. New York: Frederick Uncar Publishing Co., 1966.

Schrift, Alan D. *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.

Schwartz, Stephen Adam. "The Deconstructive Imperative". *MLN* 105, no. 4, French Issue (September 1990): 857-874.

Searle, John R. "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida". *Glyph* I (1977): 198-208.

Searle, John R. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Spitzer, Anais N. *Derrida, Myth and the Impossibility of Philosophy*. London and New York: Continuum, 2011.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model: Derrida's *Limited Inc*". In *The Spivak Reader*, edited by Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, 75-106. New York and London: Routledge, 1996.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Translator's Preface". In Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 40th Anniversary Edition, xxvii-cxiv. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016.

Starobinski, Jean. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Starobinski, Jean. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle suivi de Sept essais sur Rousseau*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, Collection "Tel", 1971.

Wood, David. *Deconstruction of Time*. New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1989.

INDEX

The present work is a critical description and evaluation of deconstructive *double* reading that Jacques Derrida applies to certain texts of the philosophical tradition to demonstrate the way in which fundamental binary hierarchical oppositions of Western thought are undone, displaced or deconstructed by the very text in which they are inscribed.

The first part of this book presents deconstruction as a *double* reading. The *first* reading – what Derrida names "doubling commentary" – reproduces or "reduplicates" the authorial or textual intention (the "*vouloir-dire*") of a given text in order to deconstruct it during the *second* or "critical reading".

The first part of the book focuses on the way that deconstructive *double* reading is executed. The second part then clarifies these issues by means of rigorous examination of a crucial example of Derrida's deconstructive reading, namely that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Essay on the Origins of Languages* and the *Confessions* in *Of Grammatology*. In addition to arguing that for Derrida deconstruction is a *double* reading, a double process, the book makes the critical claim that there is tension or even contradiction between those two distinct gestures which constitute deconstructive reading.

Gerasimos Kakoliris is associate professor in contemporary continental philosophy at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece.