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DERRIDA AND MEANING:
THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORIAL INTENTION

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Abstract

This thesis examines Jacques Derrida's deconstructive critique of the logocentric concept of meaning and proposes that Derrida's critique maintains the importance of authorial intention for literary critical practice. Derrida's critique of 'meaning' entails a situating of authorial intention as that which, while of importance to a critical reading, is incapable of absolutely determining the 'meaning' of the text.

The introduction gives a brief sketch of the importance of authorial intention in modern literary theory. Chapter One articulates Derrida's critique of Saussure's concept of the sign, showing how such a critique entails a questioning of any meaning beyond the series of differences which is language. Chapter Two demonstrates how Derrida's deconstructive reading of Rousseau in the latter half of *Of Grammatology* situates Rousseau's intention as that which is incapable of fully determining the meaning of his "Essay on the Origin of Languages", due to the undecidable meaning of the word 'supplement'. The third and final chapter is concerned with Derrida's postulation of the 'graphematic structure of the mark' as that which characterises all forms of speech and writing, as well as the structure of intention. The 'graphematic structure of the mark' is seen by Derrida as being that which renders the concept of a fully closed and final 'meaning' a problematical one due to the mark's ability to be grafted from one context into another. The chapter ends with an account of the 'concept' of 'dissemination', and demonstrates how this concept differs from the traditional concept of 'meaning'.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter One : Derrida and The Sign	10
Chapter Two : Derrida and Rousseau	43
Chapter Three : The Iterable Structure of the Mark	55
Afterword	76
Notes	82
Selected Bibliography	97

Introduction

How does one begin to interpret a text that denies the very logic of interpretative thought, and hence undercuts the reader's every move to assimilate its meaning into some kind of ordered intelligibility?¹

Derrida and meaning. Or if reversed, meaning and Derrida. What does such a title mean? What borderlines, margins and areas does it hope to delimit? Which meaning of 'meaning' is meant? Which - given the dual processes of reading and translation - Derrida? Is such a title finally readable?

The raising of such questions and the inquiry into the possibility of their being answerable is typical of post-structuralism's strategy of asking questions instead of attempting to answer them. It is a dangerous enterprise, for in doing so post-structuralism is deliberately working against, and yet *within*, the practice of traditional criticism, a criticism which has had as its rule of thumb (be it any number of divergent schools; New Critical, Existential, Reader-response, Archetypal) the conviction that questions raised - leaving aside for a moment the range of issues that such a conviction opens for discussion - by the text, or reader, or rhetorically by the critic, are capable of being answered. Post-structuralism operates not exactly on different tenets but rather on no tenets at all; questions are endless and answers are only always other questions in the process of being asked. As the proliferation of readings of any one text shows, criticism, despite its often avowed intentions, raises further questions concerning the text under its scrutiny. As one of its 'tenets' post-structuralism argues that there can be no

final 'conclusive' reading of a text. The position that there can be no final conclusive reading is held by post-structuralism as being the correct way to view the text.

It is the modern day scepticism of Derrida - a scepticism witnessed in his constant asking of questions without believing in the possibility of their being answered conclusively, in his having no new model of meaning to offer but that of the questioning of all models - that makes a clear exposition of what is meant by 'Derrida and meaning' impossible. For a clear exposition in the case of Derrida's work would be an unclear distortion. To make Derrida 'clear' is to cloud, for it is a notorious trait of Derrida's writing to be difficult, to hide meaning so as to reveal what makes possible meaning's revelation. Derrida's work is somewhat paradoxical as on the one hand it presents the reader with an exposition on what allows any text, be it written or spoken, to signify, yet on the other hand it declares the impossibility of such an unveiling. The reader is caught, like a Zen student in the grips of a paradoxical *koan*, between a feeling of knowing what is being said and precisely because one knows what is being said, a feeling of not knowing what is being said. This dual sensation is an illustration of Derrida's point (in his essay "Signature Event Context") that one can never *fully* say anything, that meaning is *always already* incomplete, for to be able to mean, to be able to signify, is to be a part of a sign system which has as one of its fundamental features the capacity for re-iteration. The bundle of words that constitutes the text of Derrida's work has the capacity - because they are words - to mean, to signify something, and yet this meaning can never be totally determined nor absolutely fixed because the words themselves can be cited, repeated, translated, *re-contextualised* so as to change their meaning. Traditionally the notion of an original meaning, an original context, has served as a touchstone, a centre, for our conceptions of language and how it works. Derrida challenges the security of such a centre, making his work - and how we read the works of others - a matter of ambiguity, a matter of seeking out

centres so as to show their limitations, their failure to be the centres which they propose they are.

Still, to make such claims about the meaning of meaning and not be dismissed as inconsequential, mad, or both, one has to employ certain strategies. One has to be to some degree convincing. Post-structuralism and Deconstruction is stimulating a good deal of debate in many university departments, a good indication that it is convincing enough to inspire both support and opposition. One can, of course, cite numerous cultural reasons why the world, especially the West, is undertaking a questioning of its own interpretive ground-rules: namely the series of theoretical revolutions that mark the modern epoch, beginning with Copernicus and continuing with Darwin, Freud, Einstein and, for some, Saussure. Derrida takes full advantage of these revolutions, reminding us constantly that our frame of reference is about to be changed and that the implication of such a series of changes is that an absolute frame of reference does not, and indeed *cannot*, exist. Derrida has no new model, no new frame of reference, to offer us. His position on meaning is in fact a re-reading, a critique, of Saussure's postulation of the sign and his subsequent 'structuralist' linguistics. Derrida's reading of Saussure is a double one, one working within Saussure's premises while at the same time inhabiting Saussure so as to work against - by disclosing how such premises stand in opposition to certain established hierarchies - the metaphysical presuppositions of the text.

No literary, or philosophical, work is written, or assumes importance, in an historical void. To understand the impact and relevance of Derrida's work it is necessary to take note of the context in which Derrida's work appears. However, this context is difficult to determine for a variety of reasons, for the context surrounding Derrida's work is the problematic 'context' of a cultural, linguistic, and inter-disciplinary *exchange*. It is an exchange which is nowhere present at any one time or place but is rather a movement, an interaction, between various times and various places. Derrida writes in

French, in France - a France both before and after the *événements* of 1968 - and addresses the majority of his work to a borderline area somewhere between the domains of literature and philosophy.² As with all exchanges of this sort, the reaction has been one of a feeling of enrichment for some, along with a xenophobic - and sometimes crude - dismissal by others.³ Any speculations about such contexts must indeed be limited here to a brief and selective background sketch, but within the context of Anglo-American literary criticism, the problem of meaning has largely been addressed in terms of authorial intention.

The debate concerning authorial intention and its relation to the meaning of a text goes back - within the confines of the Modern Era - to I. A. Richards and the New Critics.⁴ W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's essay "The Intentionalist Fallacy" written in 1946 postulates a view of the poem as being the reconciliation of opposites which occur and having meaning within the structure of the poem itself.⁵ The meaning of a poem, according to the New Critics, was not to be found in the intentions of its author, either during or after the moment of the poem's composition. In their essay "The Affective Fallacy" Wimsatt and Beardsley further assert that the meaning of a poem is not equatable with the series of responses experienced by the reader while reading the poem.⁶ For Wimsatt and Beardsley, the poem existed as a self-sufficient 'concrete universal', the meaning of which lay beyond the author's intentions and the reader's response.

Literary meaning was connected by Wimsatt and Beardsley to principles of 'coherence' and 'complexity', principles which were ultimately founded upon their conceptions of what constituted poetry. A literary text was an organic whole, a series of composite units whose differences were reconciled to produce the coherence - even though such a coherence might include ambiguities - that was the poem. For the New Critics, the notion of literary

discourse as a resolution of opposites governed by the principle of coherence provided an interpretive, as well as evaluative, framework that allowed the reader to provide a justifiable reading of the poem in the absence of a conjectured authorial intention. In other words, the New Critics operated from an aesthetically founded critical base which justified, and indeed constituted, their theory of poetry. As Frank Lentricchia succinctly points out:

... working within a neo-Coleridgean heritage, the New Critic tends, first, to ascribe, *a priori*, special objective properties to literary discourse (it is inherently ambiguous, or symbolic, or organically whole), and then, with circular logic, to describe the critical act as consisting in the location, that is, the *finding* of those qualities, wherever they may be.⁷

This is not to say that the literary criticism of the New Critics was without a theoretical basis. It is rather that such a basis was founded upon conceptions of the 'literary qualities' of the text, qualities which were themselves a result of the theoretical practices which uncovered them, a process which was, indeed, circular.

Such 'circular logic' can be seen in Wimsatt's distinction between the Iconic and Symbolic sign in his book *The Verbal Icon*.⁸ He makes this distinction following the American behaviourist C. W. Morris: the iconic sign is that which proclaims in itself certain properties of that which it signifies, and the symbolic sign is that which makes no such proclamation, its relationship to its referent being purely a matter of convention. Wimsatt then applies this distinction between the icon and the symbolic sign to poetry, arriving at the conclusion that all poetry exploits the iconic, or directly imitative powers of language. Such a position was later contested by structuralist critics who claimed that poetry did not exploit the 'iconic' powers of language and who proposed a more unified model of the sign than that

of Wimsatt's.

As witnessed in Wimsatt's distinction between the symbolic and the iconic sign, the advent of New Criticism led to a greater concern with reading the text as being composed of distinct units of language, or signs. Rather than construing the poem as being merely a medium for authorial intention, the New Critics conceived the poem as being a self-contained whole which had a *public* meaning regardless of its author's intentions. This public meaning was not only the *denotative* but also the *connotative* meanings of the poem's words. The New Critics' espousal of the public meaning was problematic as it left unresolved the question as to which factor finally determined this 'public meaning'. Was the meaning of a poem determined by the reconciliation of opposites within the structure of the poem, or was the public meaning of the poem determined by the sense of a vague consensus among like-minded public readers? In this way - as we shall later see - the dilemma of the New Critics' conception of public meaning was similar to the structuralist one, as both the New Critics and the structuralists were unable to locate the site of the production of the text's meaning.

From the mid-sixties onwards, critics such as E. D. Hirsch have sought to re-establish authorial intention as the determinant factor in a text's meaning. Hirsch's arguments for re-establishing the priority of authorial intention emerged against the growing influence of structuralist and reader-response criticism in the United States. In *Validity in Interpretation* Hirsch argues that "to banish the original author as the determiner of meaning was to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation".⁹ For Hirsch, the absence of any such 'normative principle' is a source of anxiety, since without such a principle it becomes impossible to distinguish a valid interpretation of a text from an invalid one. Hirsch claims that the notion of authorial

intention provides the critic with just such a normative principle. However, Hirsch concedes that his choice of authorial intention is arbitrary:

Since it is very easy for a reader of any text to construe meanings that are different from the author's, there is nothing in the nature of the text itself which requires the reader to set up the author's meaning as his normative ideal.¹⁰

While it is conceded by Hirsch that there is no reason to posit the author as the determiner of a text's meaning, nevertheless it must be pretended that authorial intention has this determining function: "On purely practical grounds, therefore, it is preferable to agree that the meaning of a text is the author's meaning."¹¹ In this way, Hirsch's equivalence of authorial intention with the determinate meaning of the text is something of a functional fiction, since Hirsch himself concedes that such an equivalence does not, in itself, have to occur.

While Hirsch seeks to reinstate the author as the determiner of textual meaning, his account of the importance of 'types' throughout *Validity in Interpretation* is similar, in some respects, to the structuralist project of attempting to formulate the rules which govern the production of meaning. According to Hirsch, "the determinacy and sharability of verbal meaning resides in its being a type. The particular type that it is resides in the author's determining will. *A verbal meaning is a willed type*".¹² While the author wills the type of the utterance, it is the conventional nature of the type which produces meaning. Since for Hirsch all meanings must be *sharable* in nature, it is the conventional, that is, sharable, character of 'types' which allows the text to have significance. However, the exact relationship between the author's

will, the conventional nature of the type, and the meaning of the text is, by the end of *Validity in Interpretation*, distinctly unclear. Concerning the issue of implication, for example, Hirsch asserts that

Implications are derived from a shared type that has been learned, and therefore *the generation of implications depends on the interpreter's previous experience of the shared type*. The principle for generating implications is, ultimately and in the broadest sense, a learned convention.¹³

If the principle for generating implications is ultimately a 'learned convention', then one wonders why the generation of the text's meaning as a whole does not depend on just such a learned convention, but is instead viewed by Hirsch as being reliant on the author's intention.

The concept of authorial intention remains, then, a problematic, despite such attempts to define its function, and within this context Derrida has a distinctive place. A deconstructive reading of Hirsch, for instance, would be one which sought the portions of Hirsch's work where the hierarchical ordering of the terms 'author' and 'type' were both temporarily inverted and displaced. Within such a reading, Hirsch himself would no longer be considered the determiner of the text's meaning, nor would the conventional types themselves be construed as producing the meaning of the text. A deconstructive reading of Hirsch would presumably concentrate on the inability of any such conventional types to account for all the workings of the text, as well as their failure to maintain their own self-identity.

The purpose of this thesis is to render, as

clearly as possible, Derrida's critique of meaning. This critique involves a deconstruction of the logocentric conception of meaning, and a new concept of the force, or play, of language, a concept which is a non-concept, a non-word, what Derrida names as *différance*, but also as *dissemination*. Throughout this thesis, special attention is paid to authorial intention, not just because the subject of authorial intention is of general concern to literary criticism, but because one of the current myths surrounding deconstruction is that it seeks to do away with authorial intention altogether. Indeed, as this thesis shows, this is not the case. Derrida's critique of meaning entails a meticulous, and complicated, re-situating of authorial intention. Authorial intention is re-situated by Derrida as being unable to control, or master, the significantional play of the text. Furthermore, for Derrida, authorial intention is never fully self-present or self-identical, but is always already constituted by the play of *différance*. All of these points require further explanation. The purpose of this thesis, once again, is to offer just such an explanation in order to provide a starting point for the understanding of Derrida's critique of meaning and its importance for modern literary theory.

Chapter One

Derrida and The Sign

i. A critique of the sign

An understanding of Derrida, and of post-structuralism in general, requires a knowledge of Saussure's theory of the sign. Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, a collection of notes taken by his students and published after his death in 1916, articulates this theory and postulates the oncoming science of the sign - semiology or semiotics. In its broadest sense structuralism designates all practices which have as their theoretical base Saussure's conception of the sign. Language, according to Saussure, is not a system of naming concepts that exist prior to language in some form of pre-linguistic state. Rather than indicate or re-present pre-linguistic concepts in a servile manner, language precedes such concepts, allowing them to signify, that is, to have meaning, by a process of differentiation; "... in language there are only differences, without positive terms."¹⁴ Saussure's justification of this point is his claim that different languages differentiate differently. For example, Modern French's *mouton* is similar to the English *sheep* but not the same since English uses 'mutton' and not 'sheep' to signify meat ready to be eaten. French uses *louer (une maison)* 'let (a house)' to mean both 'pay for' and 'receive payment for', whereas in German the words *mieten* and *vermieten* are used; there is no exact equivalence of meaning. Different languages divide the colour spectrum in different ways: in Welsh the colour *glas* includes a range of colours which in English would

be named as blue, green, or grey. Saussure concludes from this that "If words stood for pre-existing concepts, they would all have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next; but this is not true."¹⁵

Saussure's theory is founded upon the premise that language differentiates a nameless, formless, 'continuum' of which nothing, as it lies outside the realm of language, could be said. Language is *diacritical*, dependent on a series of signs that have meaning only by virtue of their difference from one another. For example, 'weed' only signifies due to its difference from *tree, flower, grass, herb, shrub, bush* etc.¹⁶ In studying a language it follows that we cannot understand what any element or sign means in isolation, but must consider its relationship to the language, or sign system, as a whole. Saussure, as an extension of this principle, proposed the crucial distinction between the language system (*langue*) and the individual speech act (*parole*). The object of linguistics was to determine the grammars and rules of the language, a knowledge which would, in turn, show how each speech act was able to signify.

Saussure proposed that the linguistic system is composed of signs. The sign is composed of two elements: a sound shape or its representative written shape (the signifier) and a concept (the signified). The signifier and the signified are inseparable, for one cannot be conceived of without the other:

Language can ... be compared with a sheet of paper: thought is the front and sound the back; one cannot cut the front without cutting the back at the same time; likewise in language, one can neither divide sound from thought nor thought from sound ...¹⁷

Despite this inseparability, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is an 'arbitrary' one. The sign is 'arbitrary' - not necessarily in relationship

to an extra-linguistic reality but as a matter of social convention. There is no controlling principle - such as thought or 'things' - which determines the meaning of a sign; rather it is the series of inter-relationships between each sign, that is, the structure of the language or code, that produces the meaning of the sign.

In *The Course in General Linguistics* Saussure makes the important distinction between *synchronic* and *diachronic* approaches to language. The *diachronic* method, the one most prevalent before Saussure, was concerned with the study of the changes within language through time, often showing how a word, phrase, or verb, had evolved into its modern form. While Saussure accepted the value of this discipline he argued that the *diachronic* method was incapable of showing how a language operates. The *synchronic* study of language hoped to achieve this by attempting to map systematically the relationships between the language's constituent parts at any given time. The synchronic study of language viewed language as being composed of *syntagmatic* and *associative* relationships. The *syntagmatic* designates the sequential relationships possible within the language. For example the word 'cat' is comprised of a *syntagmatic* combination of the sound letters 'c', 'a', 't', a syntagmatic possibility being their re-combination into the word 'a', 'c', 't'. The word 'cat' is comprised of the same letters as 'act': the difference being their syntagmatic order. According to Saussure, meaning is produced within a language sequence not solely by what is present within the sequence but also by what is absent from it. As language is a series of differences without positive terms, it follows that the word 'cat' signifies by means of its difference from its *not* being 'bat', 'hat', 'cap', 'cot' etc. The *paradigmatic* relationship is the *associative* relationship that a language sequence or sign has with what is absent from it - which is a logical extension from Saussure's theory of language as a series of differences. A word has meaning by *not* being other words which are both similar and dissimilar to it. Language is hence

an interlaced network of meaning. The linguistic unit cannot be conceived as being a self-contained, isolated, autonomous entity, as the meaning of the unit is not found, is not located, within the unit itself, but in its relationship to all the other units within the totality of the language structure.

Derrida's critique of Saussure's theory of the sign occupies the first part of his controversial *De la Grammatologie* (1967) and is essential reading for anyone attempting to come to grips with his work. Derrida's critique involves a close reading of Saussure, taking to its greatest implication Saussure's tenet that language is a series of differences without positive terms. While doing so, Derrida seeks to chart the philosophical pre-suppositions, the margins, the previously undisclosed borderlines, that operate behind and yet within Saussure's work. This kind of reading - one that works within the premises of the text it is commenting upon yet shows how those very premises work against the text - is, as we shall later see, a deconstructive one. Yet the subject of *Of Grammatology*, its purpose and its aim, is not simply Saussure's theory of the sign but rather the tradition, the epoch, what Derrida names the *logocentric* era, upon which Saussure's theory is unwittingly based. The *logocentric* era, according to Derrida, has for its basis the conceptual pillars of *logos* and *presence*. *Logos* is the assigning of truth and meaning to voice, be it the voice of God, the voice of reason, or the spoken word. This privileging of voice reflects the status of *presence* within the logocentric tradition. To be 'real' is to be actually present as opposed to being a representation, a sign for, something else. Logocentrism privileges the real thing over its representation. For example, in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* - as throughout the logocentric tradition - the spoken word, the real thing, is valued over its substitute - the written word. Writing merely re-presents the spoken word. Nor is the privileging of speech over writing the only

privileged opposition within the logocentric era: on the contrary, the logocentric tradition is witnessed in a series of oppositional pairs that privilege presence over non-presence: *phonē* (spoken word) over *graphie* (written word), consciousness over unconsciousness, original over representational, truth over falsehood, reality over non-reality, signified over signifier.

Within Saussure's work, Derrida hopes to show the operation of the logocentric tradition, this tradition postulating that what is meant is determined by a metaphysics of presence, that is that meaning lies in what is thought by, what is present to, an individual at either the time of utterance or the time of hearing. Derrida locates this metaphysics of presence in the very concept of the sign itself, with its two faces of the signifier and the signified:

The maintenance of the rigorous distinction - an essential and juridical distinction - between the *signans* (signifier) and the *signatum* (signified), the equation of the *signatum* and the concept, inherently leaves open the possibility of thinking a *concept signified in and of itself*, a concept simply present for thought, independent of a relationship to language, that is of a relationship to a system of signifiers. By leaving open this possibility - and it is inherent even in the opposition signifier/signified, that is in the sign - Saussure ... accedes to the classical exigency of what I have proposed to call a 'transcendental signified', which in and of itself, in its essence, would refer to no signifier, would exceed the chain of signs, and would no longer itself function as a signifier.¹⁸

By establishing such a rigorous (for the signifier and signified while inseparable can never be allowed to contaminate one another) and juridical (implying that such a distinction is an act of judgement, a verdict, a demarcation) distinction

between the two faces of the sign, Saussure leaves open the possibility of thinking a signified concept in itself, a concept without a signifier, a concept complete in itself - such a conception working against Saussure's proposal of the inseparableness of the signifier and the signified. The opening of this possibility is one of a number of residual logocentric traits that reside within Saussure's language - traits of metaphysics which conceived of a reality beyond its play of differences and which language represented. These traits stand in conflict with Saussure's claim that meaning is a function, a result, of language. Derrida sees the signifier-signified distinction as an hierarchical ordering in which the signifier serves to present the signified to the subject. In doing so the sign re-affirms the extra linguistic reality of the 'intelligible' - the realm of thought, of being, of *presence*, that is the site of language's meaning. This presents a teleological aspect to the sign that stands in conflict with the claim that the sign merely marks a place of difference: a conflict that marks the site of logocentric metaphysics within Saussure's project, a project which sought to stand against such a tradition by no longer positing the subject as being the source of a discourse's meaning. Saussure wished to de-centre, to dislodge, the status of presence, yet the conceptual oppositions with which he works, and his language in general, stand in contrast to this aim.

The signifier/signified opposition is not, according to Derrida, to be considered as a mistake nor even as a matter of choice. As Derrida's use of the Latin *signans* and *signatum* illustrates, such an opposition between the sensible and the intelligible is not confined to Saussure but is rather a traditional division stemming, in the West, from Plato onwards that has allowed for the possibility of the conception of the sign itself:

The concept of the sign, in each of its aspects, has been determined by this opposition throughout the totality of its history. It has lived only on this opposition and its system. But we cannot do without the concept of the sign, for we cannot give up this metaphysical complicity without also giving up the critique we are directing against this complicity, or without the risk of erasing difference in the self-identity of a signified reducing its signifier into itself or, amounting to the same thing, simply expelling its signifier outside itself.¹⁹

Derrida's critique of the sign is hence an impossible one: for just as Saussure is tied to the traditions that operate within, that has allowed for the very oppositions between sensible and intelligible, signifier and signified, so too is Derrida's critique of Saussure - and he knows this. Perhaps the most common mis-reading that one encounters of Derrida is the misunderstanding that because Derrida concentrates on the assumptions, the presuppositions, that operate - and indeed permit - 'philosophical' claims, he, in revealing such presuppositions, is thereby invalidating the work in question. Derrida's critique of the sign is not an *invalidation* of the sign, but rather an account of what has made it possible. His point being that if the signifier serves to yield forth a signified, then it follows that the signified exists beyond that signifier, that it exists beyond the field of differences that is language, and that a different signifier could yield forth the same signified. The very division of the sign into the signifier/signified hints at the possibility of the conceiving of the one without the other, of a signified existing without a signifier. Western philosophy - indeed logocentrism in general - has always privileged due to the metaphysics of presence, the signified over the signifier, conceiving for itself and for its operation a *transcendental signified* that requires no signifier and is fully present, fully meaningful, to itself, this transcendental signified being God, conscious self-presence, truth, essence etc. The lure of the commonsense approach

to language is the temptation to collapse the signifier into the signified - to 'expel' the signifier's function from philosophical consideration. All of Derrida's work is, to an extent, a critique of any such transcendental signified, and hence of *any meaning which is not a product, a result, of a series of differences*. It is a critique which is having a profound influence on the manner in which we approach literature and its study.

If language is viewed from a paradigmatic perspective - a perspective conceived of by Saussure himself - then the difficulties of the signifier/signified polarity become apparent. Saussure tells us that the sign marks a site of difference, that its capacity to signify comes from its relationship to other signs which are not present: the sign means by virtue of what it is not. If this is so then each sign within language contains within itself *traces* of all the other signs, its meaning *not being fully present to itself* but being a matter of its *difference* from other signs. Since the meaning of the sign is not fully present to itself, is a matter of its difference from other signs, its meaning is to some extent *absent*, to some extent deferred. Derrida, as part of his critique of logocentrism, employs here the ambiguous neologism *différance*, a word derived from the French *différer* meaning 'to postpone, put off, defer, delay' and 'to differ, be different from'. *Différance* also suggests the Latin '*differre*' meaning 'to scatter, disperse'. In French the "a" in *différance* passes unheard, the difference in spelling only detectable in its written form. The first two senses of the word suggest how any element in language relates to others so as to have meaning; *différance* is not a thing, not a site, not a truth, not a transcendental signified, but a force, *the force*, of differentiation. It is *différance* which makes the operation of the sign possible, yet, at the same time, it is this operation which makes the possibility of a meaning fully whole and self-present impossible. If the meaning of a sign is not fully present to itself,

is a matter of its difference from other signs, of *différance*, then its meaning, as we have said, is to some degree absent. Signifieds are always already inhabited, constituted, by *différance*, and are as such in the position of being other signifiers due to the effects of tracing. To conceive of signifieds being in this position is not - to touch upon another common mis-reading of Derrida - to deny that there are signifieds nor is it to assert the priority of the signifier over the signified. The signifier will never dominate the signified - since if it did so, it would no longer be a signifier. To be a signifier is to summon forth the signified. The process of signifieds being in the position of signifiers does not mean that signifieds *are* merely signifiers - a meaningless proposition - but rather that signifieds are incapable of being fully meaningful, fully present, to themselves. Saussurean linguistics, however, in Derridean terms, is founded on the logocentric presumption that signifieds are fully present to themselves. The signifier is always a medium, constituted by difference for a signified which is not:

And for modern linguistics, if the signifier is a trace, the signified is a meaning thinkable in principle within the full presence of an intuitive consciousness. The signified face, to the extent that it is still originally distinguished from the signifying face, is not considered a trace; by rights, it has no need of the signifier to be what it is.²⁰

Derrida names the site in which there is an irreducible difference between signifier and signified, in which in other words the signified has no signifier, where the signified is not a sign for a thing but the thing *itself*, as being the place of the *transcendental signified*. This *transcendental signified* exists beyond the force of *différance*, beyond the activity of the sign inhabited in both its aspects by the traces of what it is not, in fact beyond the very structure of language itself; and yet, paradoxically, the *transcendental signified* is in the position of being the very centre of this structure. Within the logocentric

tradition of the West, thought is in the position of being a *transcendental signified* due to its being a centre of what it does not take part in, just as in this tradition the signified face of the sign provides the centre for the play of traces that constitute the signifier without being, in itself, touched by the activity of tracing, without being reduced into being a part, a *function*, of their differential play. The signified, within modern linguistics, is not a product, a result, not constituted by difference, but a psychic event: a meaning given to a consciousness fully present to itself. Within logocentrism Derrida sees *presence* in the form of a *consciousness fully present to itself* as being a centre, a frame of reference, for the operation of many oppositional terms: inside/outside, worldly/non-worldly, transcendental/empirical etc. These oppositions would be literally meaningless, in fact *impossible* without the transcendental signified of *thought as being beyond difference*, thought as presence, as being present to itself. The value of self-presence and its status as a conceptual base is seen in our conception of our own full presence, the immediacy of experience, and the presence of ultimate truths to God.

ii. Structure and text

Derrida's critique of the sign is just one part of his three tier critique (the other two, as his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Social Sciences" in *Writing and Difference* so clearly demonstrates being 'structure' and 'play') of structuralism: structuralism is for Derrida any method or approach which, forgetting the *metaphorical* nature of the term structure, conceives of all the elements of a system as being equally self-present at any one time, a system which hence conceives itself as being a synchronic totality. In this sense all of literary criticism is structuralist in its conception of the totality of the text, that is, in the conception that all the elements of a text - including here of course the meaning of that text - are present to themselves beyond

différance. This is not to deny, however, that Derrida is directly commenting upon 'structuralist' critics for whom language or any signification system operated according to a system of rules, or grammars which could be uncovered - through semiotic analysis - and thereby known. Just as linguistics has concerned itself not only with the significance of an utterance but with the grammatical rules which permit meaning, so structuralist criticism hoped to map systematically - often in diagrammatic form - elements of signification and the laws of recombination that allowed literary discourse to have meaning; this practice often incorporated the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss. Structuralist critics posited all meanings as being relational in nature and maintained that all discourses were instances of *parole*, an act (though Saussure himself confined his definition of discourse to that of speech-acts) of speaking or writing that had meaning only by virtue of a series of laws (*langue*) that the individual employed.

For literary critics such a model of the production of meaning, which is concerned with the ways a reader interacts with the text she or he is reading, posited numerous theoretical difficulties, difficulties which lay at the centre of all critical activity. These difficulties lay in structuralism's conception of an ideal reader whose knowledge of the laws of the *langue* constituted a 'literary competence' which enabled him to read and understand the text in question. Criticism became for the structuralists the study of how the reader produced the text, what rules enabled the reader to 'make' sense of what had been read, and how the text itself embodied and operated according to these rules. The structuralist quest for the rules, the 'poetics' of literature, in turn raised the disturbing question of whether or not the text was a function of the reader, or the reader a function of the text. The American critic Stanley Fish in *Is There A Text In This Class?* came to the conclusion that everything in the text, including all linguistic and grammatical features, was a function of the reader, a reader trained and raised within the context of an 'interpretive

community' which had imparted its knowledge to the reader. Critical debate, according to Fish, was the manifestation of various competing 'interpretive strategies' which for all their divergence performed along established and accepted rules.

One could easily, however, reverse Fish's argument, for if in mapping out the operations of the text one was engaged in mapping the way a reader read such a text, then it would be equally valid to suggest that the reader is a function of the rules, the features, of the text. Criticism here had reached a paradox, a Derridean 'aporia' (irreconcilable paradox, self-contradictory excess of meaning) of sorts, a place where the oppositional terms of reader and text began, as if in passing a Schwarzschild radius, to break down and collapse into one another. Here the issue of meaning was at the very centre of the debate, the essential question being: 'Where was meaning to be located, within the reader or the text?' The structuralist enterprise, as well as reader-response theory, was entering a crisis state due to an inability to locate the site of the production of the meaning whose rules they wished to formulate.

Derrida's contribution to this debate is an oblique one, never directly addressing the problem within the limited arena of literary criticism - an arena whose borders Derrida wishes to place under scrutiny - but rather, as the collection of his essays *Writing and Difference* shows, opening up the debate so as to include philosophy and the social sciences. The inability to locate the position of the structure is, for Derrida, a direct consequence of failing to see the conception of structure as being nothing more than a *metaphor* that provides a spatial image of what is actually non-spatial in its nature:

Hence for as long as the metaphorical sense of the notion of structure is not acknowledged *as such*, that is to say interrogated and even destroyed as concerns its figurative quality so that the nonspatiality or original spatiality designated by it may be revived, one runs the risk, through

a kind of sliding as unnoticed as it is *efficacious*, of confusing meaning with its geometric, morphological, or, in the best of cases, cinematic model.²¹

'Structure' is challenged as being a metaphor which has effaced, usurped, its own status as metaphor, so as to dominate, to mould and to shape, conceptions of meaning. For a structure to be, it has to be spatially present, such a spatial presence (including here, of course, two dimensional as well as three dimensional structures) requiring that all its elements be simultaneously present. For Derrida meaning is beyond structure, beyond the rules governing a structure, due to the inability - considering *différance*, the *impossibility* - of language being a 'structure' in which all elements were simultaneously present. *Différance* neither *denies* nor *confirms* the 'simultaneously present' bases of structural models: it makes them possible by allowing the presence/absence distinction to be made. The point here is that the structuralists only conceive of elements being simultaneously present and not what makes such a conception possible. Furthermore, the structural study of language is teleological in its practice, seeing an end, a closure of meaning; it is a teleology witnessed in the twin notions of anticipation and intentionality:

And if meaning is meaningful only within a totality, could it come forth if the totality were not animated by the anticipation of an end, or by an intentionality which, moreover, does not necessarily and primarily belong to a consciousness?²²

In terms of a text, a particular word, sentence, paragraph or passage only has meaning when considered as a closed totality, a *whole*: our way of reading and hence the way we produce meaning is orientated by the anticipation of what is to come and what has been *intended* by the author of what we have read. Derrida's point here is that such orientations are supposed as existing outside the text in the domain of consciousness. Language refers to an intention, a referent, beyond its field which nevertheless orientates it. The Saussurean revolution lay in Saussure's

dénial of such an outside referent and his subsequent claim that meaning is solely an effect of language. Yet Derrida notes Saussure's logocentrism in his *phonocentrism*, that is, in his privileging of speech over writing. Speech is given a higher status than writing because, unlike writing - which is merely a dead recording of speech - it is privileged as being an immediate, transparent medium, closer to the intention of the speaker. By privileging speech over writing Saussure subscribes to a hierarchical ordering which has as its implication the placing of thought, intention, as the meaning of a discourse. Thought is the centre which orients yet escapes the structurality of which it is the orientation. Derrida overturns the phonocentric privileging of speech over writing, so that writing now comes before speech: his rationale being that since meaning is produced by language therefore *not* by intention, presence, or being, then speech is a kind of writing, a general writing, incorporating both speech and writing, that is coined by Derrida as *Archi-écriture*. *Archi-écriture* differs from logocentric notions of language in its denial of the possibility of its own structure or of its own absolute meaning or centre, this denial being an acknowledgement of its constitution by the non-entity of nowhere present *différance*.

iii. The absent centre

Derrida shakes the structuralist enterprise by hoping to show that within the discourse of the social sciences - including here philosophy and the study of literature - the centre which governs the structure in question is absent from this very structure. In Saussure this centre - while not explicitly revealed as such - is consciousness present to itself at the moment of understanding. The centre functions in order to balance, to organise, the structure - for all structures must be organised. Above all, the centre is the site where the substitution of one element

of the structure for another, what Derrida names as the 'play' of the structure, is no longer possible, is expressly *forbidden*. If one considers, for a moment, the traditional centre of language in its logocentric conception, then one is drawn to the inevitable conclusion that the centre, the *meaning*, of language is *self-presence*, self-being, self-being present *as* being, a centre *which has been considered* incapable of substitution by or for something else. Derrida is quick to draw on the implications of having centres which govern, but are beyond the play of, the structures they organise:

Thus it has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the centre is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*. The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its centre elsewhere*. The centre is not the centre.²³

In terms of the study of language, if the meaning of a sentence or a text is what was intended, or alternatively how a reader responds, or reads, that text, then it follows that the meaning of that sentence is absent from itself, that its centre, its semantic meaning, is situated within itself but lies elsewhere.

Derrida claims that prior to the centre, before its very possibility and the possibility of structure, *différance*, that is, the field of substitutional play, is in operation. Play, that is, *différance*, allows for the duality, the oppositional binding, of polarities such as presence/absence. It is the field of differentiation, a field which disrupts the security of self-presence, producing a series of substitutions at the centre which, in turn, works against the positing of a centre, an origin, beyond substitution. Once the centre is seen as being absent from the system of which it is the centre, once it is seen that the field

of play permits the possibility of a non-present centre, then it becomes necessary to conceive that the substitute does not substitute itself for an entity that exists before the act of 'substitution'. The essence of structuralism was the fundamental premise that there was no absolute centre, no single site of determining reality; on the contrary it became necessary to see the centre as being a *function*, a 'nonlocus' of the sign substitutions of the system in which "... an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play".²⁴ Derrida cites numerous examples of such a re-thinking of the centre in the work of Nietzsche, in Freud's critique of self-presence, and in Heidegger's project of the destruction of metaphysics. Derrida's position is that there is no presence, no being, no meaning, or possibility of meaning, no structuralist rules which could serve as transcendental absolutes, no essence, beyond the play of language, and that centres are mirages, functional nonlocuses produced by *différance*. In short, presence beyond language, existence beyond language, has no meaning, as it is *différance* which allows for the being/nonbeing, meaning/non-meaning distinction to be made.

The structuralists agreed that there was no meaning beyond language, beyond language as a series of differences and as semiotic system, but believed in the possibility of totalising the field, the play, of language within any given text. This totalisation permitted the mapping out of the inter-relationships between the text's constituent elements; an operation which revealed previously undisclosed rules, or structures, within the text. The entire structuralist project was an attempt to formulate a series of absolute rules which could be said to govern a totalised field of language. In other words structuralism was a quest for a *meta-language*, a language capable of yielding a series of rules about another language so as to account fully for

the operation of the language under investigation.

Derrida - in a double gesture of both criticising structuralist tenets while working within them - exposes structuralism's logocentric yearning for centre in its failure to realise the purely metaphoric nature of the term 'structure'. For Derrida, the structuralists have, unwittingly, posited the metaphor of structure as being a centre, a transcendental signified, beyond *différance*. This privileging of the metaphor 'structure', as the word 'structuralist' itself so obviously suggests, orientates - one is tempted here to say *contaminates* - the structuralist enterprise. The notion of structure implies a two-dimensional system model, or an architectural construction, in which all elements are present, are placed, so as to constitute a (spatio-temporal) 'whole'. The metaphor of structure has visual connotations: it invokes architectural imagery, an object which can be seen and mapped, an object which conforms to a series of rules, a *design*. It is the visual connotation of the word 'structure' that has, in part, resulted in the structuralist belief in the possibility of being able to totalise, to account for, all the elements of a text's structure. The metaphor of *structure* is more than an innocent label, a convenient heading to describe the critical activity of a certain group of people at a certain time, it determines to an extent the very nature of the activities performed under its name. The term 'structure' has a series of connotations, a certain philosophical history, and structuralism as an activity inherits - whether it approves or desires this inheritance or not - all the senses of its own name. For these senses shape, as the desire for totalisation shows, structuralism's own aims and aspirations.

iv. The supplement

Yet is the totalisation of the structure of language possible? Does language, like a three-dimensionally

designed object, have an accountable, absolute structure?
For Derrida the answer is clearly no:

If 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 centre which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions.²⁵

It is for this reason that Derrida himself is labelled as being a 'post-structuralist' - a position which is simply *beyond* structure and its connotations.²⁶ Derrida works within structuralism, taking its tenets to their fullest implication, this implication, namely *différance*, leading in turn to a rejection of both 'structure' and 'centre', and of absolute rules which could account for the workings of language. The structuralist totalisation of language is impossible not because the field of language is infinite, but rather because the nature of the field is without a centre, an orientation. Hence the field is not merely open to substitution, but is, in itself, an inexhaustible play, or chain, of substitutions. The transcendental signified is absent from the field of play, leaving a supplement 'in its place'. The centre cannot be determined because the sign which appears as the centre is not the centre itself but is an addition, a surplus, a sign-for, the centre itself. An understanding of this point is crucial for any serious discussion of Derrida's work. Within the logocentric era of the West, 'being as thought' has been situated as the centre, the orientation, of language, and so, accordingly, language has been considered a supplement to, a sign-for, thought as

presence fully present to itself. Language is hence a mere addition. Yet we cannot determine thought, cannot conceive of it, beyond what is added by - or the act of adding the surplus, of language itself. The sign 'thought' appears here as the centre of language, *but its very status as a sign* shows that it is a *supplement* to thought itself: the point being here that it is this very 'conception' of thought 'itself', of thought beyond the play of signification, that is being brought by Derrida into question. "Thought means nothing," Derrida says,²⁷ for if the meaning of thought is beyond language, beyond signification, then its meaning is a non-conception, its meaning cannot be any meaning as we know it, its meaning is hence a zero-meaning, a no-thing. Without a centre, the self-identity of each distinct element of signification is impossible because a sign can always be substituted for another sign, this substitutional play being the very condition, the very *play*, of language itself. It is this play which eludes all attempts at totalisation.

The finding of a series of substitutions at the centre is what Derrida names, throughout *Of Grammatology*, as the 'order of the supplement'. The term 'supplement' is taken from Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (Derrida's reading of Rousseau which occupies a central position in the latter half of *Of Grammatology* will be touched on again later within this thesis) where Rousseau maintains that languages are meant to be spoken and that writing serves only as a supplement to speech.²⁸ It is a sentiment which, approximately one hundred and fifty years later, would be re-inscribed in Saussure's privileging of speech over writing. The supplement is an addition, an extra, added to something supposedly complete in itself; and yet the supplement is needed to fill a lack, a deficiency, in what was believed to be complete. Within speech there resides a deficiency, an absence, that allows

writing to act as supplement; just as within thought there is a lack that allows and requires the supplement of speech. At the centre there is always a lapse:

The supplement comes in the place of a lapse, a nonsignified or a nonrepresented, a nonpresence. There is no present before it, it is not preceding [sic] by anything but itself, that is to say by another supplement. The supplement is always 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*.²⁹

Derrida's positing of a supplement being at the source is difficult, at a first glance, to understand.³⁰ This is because it stands in direct opposition to our conventional way of thinking. *Conventionally*, the status of the centre, the origin, is never placed under scrutiny. The centre is always conceived - for it must be to maintain its status as centre - as being a fully completed whole. Derrida, however, challenges this conception on two grounds: *firstly*, there is an absence at the centre that both permits and requires the supplement to come into operation; *secondly*, as the centre cannot be found beyond the sign which is deemed to be a supplement to that centre, then there is, in fact, a supplement at the source, as opposed to there being a centre beyond the supplement.

What implications does the 'logic of the supplement' have for literary criticism and for our discussion of meaning? The relationship between a critical work, or commentary, and the text to which it is said to refer immediately presents itself. (So too, of course, does the relationship between thought as intention and its supplements speech and writing. This relationship will be dealt with fully after an account of deconstruction.) Conventionally, the text to which the critical work refers is viewed as being complete in its meaning; it is a finished, closed text, fully complete and

whole in itself. Those texts which are not complete, are not considered fixed or finished, are considered as *exceptions*, as subjects for typographical or bibliographical study. On the whole, literary criticism conceives of the text, the object under its investigation, as being *complete*; the meaning of the text resides within the confines of its covers, it requires nothing more to make it complete. It is fully finished. Yet somehow the original text requires the supplement of the critical work, a work which claims, in many cases, to elucidate the original text, to make it clearer. However, the supplement of the critical text can only generate further supplements: the more elucidating a commentary is, the more commentary it in turn produces. While criticism often aims at achieving a correct final reading, this finality, this closure, can paradoxically never be achieved. No matter how self-evident the meaning or meanings of a particular work might appear to the critic, the disclosure of such meanings does not bring discussion to an end but only serves as a stimulus for further discussion.³¹ Nor is this process of supplementarity limited to the domain of literary criticism; the more authoritative any theory or system is, the greater the supplementary discussion it will entail - although any piece of writing, no matter how trivial, is open to endless supplementation. For example, Freud's theory of psycho-dynamic drives while being of unquestionable importance to our understanding of the individual, did not bring to a close the discussion on the meanings of dreams or other unconscious activities, but rather only brought about further debate on these matters. The failure to achieve closure does not imply that literary criticism is in any way a useless or redundant activity, but rather that we should acknowledge that the readings, the *meanings*, which it produces can never be final in their nature.

For Derrida it is the borderlines of writing itself which makes any final reading, any closed meaning, impossible. Writing (*l'écriture*) has an extended sense within Derrida's

work, a sense which encompasses all signifying systems. Writing is *différance*. As such, its meaning is an effect produced by the process of differing/deferring, by the activity of the trace. It is this activity that displaces meaning beyond the reach of an ultimate and conclusive signified. The trace - a non-thing which cannot be 'itself' but can only be a product, an effect, of *différance* - constitutes writing, allowing for its very possibility and operation, yet, at the same time, making an explanation of what *is* writing unachievable. Within this writing Derrida locates philosophy as a movement of writing which attempts to deny its own existence as writing, which hopes to efface the signifier and to restore presence, including here, of course, the presence of a final signified, a closed meaning. Philosophy bases its operation upon centres which lie outside the structure of language, such as reason and truth, pointing to them as sites of a fully present meaning. Derrida, as we have seen, dislocates such centres, situating them as functions, as *movements* of writing.

Given such a conception of writing, meaning is placed in the awkward position of being both *no where outside the text* and at no one position within it. Derrida's phrase "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" ("there is nothing outside of the text")³² is a catch-phrase critique of the concept of the *referent*: of a referent existing beyond the logic of the supplement. If writing is *différance*, then how has literary criticism pursued its course? How has it located for itself meanings which appeared to be present? Derrida's answer is two-fold:

*The security with which the commentary considers the self-identity of the text, the confidence with which it carves out its contour, goes hand in hand with the tranquil assurance that leaps over the text toward its presumed content, in the direction of the pure signified.*³³

The assertion "There is no outside-text" is, in the passage

above, now being transformed into the question 'What the text?' A question which all criticism, all commentary, must presume to be answered before it can itself begin. Criticism must carve out the text by establishing certain borderlines. These borderlines constitute a definitive context for the text. Conventionally, the text is seen as being an autonomous entity, divorced, to an extent, from other books. The author is established as both its origin and site of meaning; an orientation which propels the reader outside the realm of the book towards a psychobiographical signified. If the critic concerns herself with just the 'text' then other contexts will have to be established, other limits will have to be drawn. Criticism has to erect for itself certain contexts - a dam wall against the force of *différance* - so as to limit the play of the text and thereby arrive at a presumably closed meaning. Derrida's essay "Living On: Borderlines"³⁴ is an investigation, a questioning, of literary criticism's drafting of borderlines. Is Derrida's project to abolish all borderlines, all contexts? Is even the borderline between the text and world, as the phrase "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" suggests, to be abandoned? Is Derrida hoping to transform the world into an enormous book without author, spine, title page or cover? Addressing those who would conclude that Derrida's work was aimed at bringing about such a transformation, Derrida writes:

All this has taken place in non-reading, with no work on what was thus being demonstrated, with no realization that it was never our wish to extend the reassuring notion of the text to a whole extra-textual realm and to transform the world into a library by doing away with all boundaries, all frameworks, all sharp edges (...) but that we sought rather to work out the theoretical and practical system of these margins, these borders, once more, from the ground up.³⁵

To extend the 'reassuring notion of the text' so as

to include the entire world is, after all, only to consolidate, to re-affirm, the conventional conception of the text. Derrida's project is the antithesis of this; rather than expand the notion of the text, he wishes to question it. This questioning is not a destruction, a 'doing away with', boundaries and frameworks, but is an activity which seeks to analyse the presuppositions, the unchallenged ground-rules that permit a philosophical method - or a critical practice - to take place. The authority of the margin is neutralised while the philosophical history of the margin is being uncovered: the history of what it has had to exclude from itself in order to establish its status as a commanding margin. This authority, however, is to an extent damaged by such historical tracing, and by the location, of certain sites, within the text, where the margin is breached and crossed. The margin can never completely delimit the play of the text due to the nature of writing itself, due to its endless powers of supplementation, due to the uncontainable force of *différance*.

Aside from Derrida's critique of the metaphor of 'structure', in what way is such a suspension different from structuralist projects? Structuralism, we should remember, also hoped to suspend all discourse, all boundaries, so as to arrive at a series of rules which would disclose how the elements of a discourse interacted with one another. Within literary criticism, structuralist practice differs from that of Derrida's due to its belief in a given meaning - produced by the reader's literary competence, his knowledge of the rules of reading - being present within the text. Structuralism never questioned the nature of meaning as such, never examined how the concept of a final meaning itself came to occupy such a central position in Western thought, but rather hoped to discover, in a scientific manner, the codes which resulted in the delivery of

the final meaning to the reader. For structuralism, meaning was the centre, the very subject to be scientifically studied. Ironically, structuralism never questioned the placing, the status, the very possibility, of this centre. It presumed the integrity of the centre by excluding from its consideration the possibility of a reading which would break the rules of its own formulation.

The structuralist enterprise concentrated on the organisation of meaning, relegating deviant readings as being mis-readings, mistakes and accidents. How such mis-readings were possible, and what the implications of such mis-readings were for the rules that structuralism desired to formulate, were issues which structuralism never considered - for they were issues which threatened its own status as a metalanguage. Structuralism dominated the text by forcing the text to conform to a certain range of readings. In other words, structuralism sought to reduce the plurality of the text, to minimise the varieties of readings possible from any work.

Derrida's work is a movement away from the *hierarchical* and *totalitarian* methodology of structuralism.³⁶ Hierarchical because it views the relation between a structure's elements as not - despite structuralism's fundamental tenets - being purely differential, **but** as being orientated towards an end, a *telos*, which is the structure's meaning. The sum of the structure's constituent parts is of a subordinate value to the structure *as a whole*, because this whole, this final accumulative result delivers the final meaning of the structure. This hierarchical ordering can lead to structuralism's favouring of certain elements or codes within a discourse as having greater semantic value than others. Structuralism is *totalitarian* because it seeks to reduce a discourse, its force and its play, into a series of rules which would then,

despite this reduction, be seen as dominating the discourse in question.

Both the hierarchical and totalitarian aspects of structuralism are partly a result of its conception of the text as a structure both fully self-contained and totally present: a conception that stands in opposition - despite the fact that the seeds of post-structuralism lie within this conception and all it implies - to the force of *différance*. Structuralism's own maxim of language as "a series of differences without positive terms" is, as its hierarchical ordering and totalitarian aspirations show, breached by its own activity. It is *différance* which clearly separates Derrida from the structuralists; for it is *différance* which does not allow the text to be perceived as a synchronically organised structure, the elements of which are simultaneously present and open to view. The irreducibility of *différance* does not permit its reductive accommodation into either the diachronic or synchronic categorisations: it is *différance* which permits such categorisations to have meaning themselves. *Différance*, the play of presence and absence that constitutes the text, escapes any attempted totalisation, any hierarchical ordering, and any final conclusive meaning.

v. The strategy of deconstruction

Derrida proposes - in opposition to structuralist criticism and logocentric practices in general - the strategy of deconstruction. This strategy works on two fronts, performing two activities at once, and is as such named by Derrida as being a form of '*écriture double*' (a 'double writing').³⁷ The notion of a double writing, or a double gesture, is fundamental to deconstruction. It is most easily explained by employing the rhetorical figure of the 'two hands', a figure which occurs numerous

times throughout Derrida's work.³⁸ Deconstruction *on the one hand* works within the terms of the philosophical system subjected to its reading, seeking out the oppositions which constitute the system while showing, at the same time, how one term is favoured over its opposite. Deconstruction then implements a reversal of this preferential ordering so that the denigrated term is now favoured over its opposite. Deconstruction *on the other hand* attempts to find a third term, a term which disrupts the opposition in question by revealing how the identity of each term of the opposition is, to an extent, constituted by that term's opposite. The third term is that which paradoxically explains the operation of the opposition while showing, at the same time, how such an opposition is incapable of maintaining the pure self-identity of each of its opposed terms.

Derrida's deconstructive reading of Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* in *Of Grammatology* serves as an excellent example of the two handed gesture of deconstruction. *On the one hand* Derrida's reading of Saussure isolates the opposition of 'speech-writing' within the *Course in General Linguistics* showing how this opposition is hierarchically constructed so that speech is favoured over writing. As part of his deconstructive reading Derrida now reverses this hierarchy so that writing, in its extended sense as *archi-écriture* is favoured over speech. *On the other hand* Derrida isolates Saussure's conception of language as a "series of differences without positive terms" as being that which disrupts the speech-writing opposition while, at the same time, being the very conception which permits such an opposition to be made. What is being disrupted here is not the usefulness, or even the validity, of the speech-writing opposition. What is being disrupted is Saussure's logocentric preference for speech over writing. If language is a series

of differences without positive terms then on what grounds is speech to be favoured over writing? Saussure's emphasis on language as difference - an emphasis which is the foundation of his argument as well as being his point of departure from the study of language up until his time - is seen by Derrida as actively working against Saussure's preference for speech over writing. Saussure's difference - which Derrida extends into the neologism *différance* - is here the third term which permits, and yet disrupts, the speech-writing opposition within Saussure's *Course*.

Deconstruction is both a reversal and a displacement of the dualisms or binary oppositions of the system it inhabits. To be precise, deconstruction undertakes a reversal of any binary opposition so as to lead to a displacement of the privileged status of the favoured term. This displacement - which takes the form of finding a third term which unsettles the preferential organisation of the terms of the opposition - cannot be arrived at without the prior reversal of the opposition. The necessity of the phase of overturning is strategic. In Derrida's own words:

To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. Therefore one might proceed too quickly to a *neutralization* that *in practice* would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of *intervening* in the field effectively. We know what always have been the *practical* (particularly *political*) effects of *immediately jumping beyond* oppositions, and of protests in the simple form of *neither this nor that*. When I say that this phase is necessary, the

word *phase* is perhaps not the most rigorous one. It is not a question of a chronological phase, a given moment, or a page that one day simply will be turned, in order to go on to other things. The necessity of this phase is structural; it is the necessity of an interminable analysis: the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself.³⁹

Simply to jump beyond the opposition is, in effect, to leave the opposition untouched. To overturn the opposition, however, is to intervene in the operation of the opposition. The 'phase' of overturning is hence a strategic one which allows deconstruction to work within the structure of the opposition as opposed to working outside, or beyond, the terms of the opposition itself.

With this in mind it becomes easier to understand why Derrida, in his deconstruction of Saussure's *Course*, must temporarily place writing over speech. This is done by extending the sense of writing (*écriture*) so that it now encompasses the activity of all signification systems. Speech is hence an instance of a *general-writing*, a general-writing which occurs whenever there is a signification system. This overturning is, in itself, again a two-handed gesture. *On the one hand* overturning *maintains* the terms of the opposition while reversing their status relative to each other. The act of overturning also directly intervenes with the logocentric ordering of the text undergoing deconstruction. *On the other hand*, however, overturning *changes* the terms of the opposition because once the hierarchy is overturned the subservient term has an *extended* sense, an extended sense that was not present in the term while it occupied its subservient position within logocentric assumptions. Saussure's favouring of speech over writing is logocentric because it ultimately relies, as we have seen, on the metaphysics of presence for its justification. Once writing

is viewed from a position other than that defined by the logocentric epoch, it is free to acquire an extended sense that no longer requires it to be the servant of speech. Indeed, the structural necessity of the phase of overturning is the structural necessity of writing, or any denigrated term, to acquire this extended sense. Without this phase of overturning the finding of the third term would effectively leave the opposition both untouched and intact.

While deconstruction seeks to find a third term which unsettles the operation of certain logocentric oppositions, it is important to remember that deconstruction is not attempting to dispense with these oppositions. The hierarchy of dual oppositions always re-establishes itself because the third term is only intelligible in terms of the oppositional pair it attempts to unsettle. *Différance*, for example, can only be explained by showing how it both allows for and yet breaches the speech-writing opposition. The trace can only be explained by showing how it escapes Saussure's rigorous distinction between the signifier and the signified. Hence the third term does not negate, invalidate, or jump beyond the opposition in question. The third term is rather that which unsettles the self-contained identity of each term of the logocentric opposition by showing how it is the opposition itself which provides each term with its identity. Derrida's point, remember, is that logocentric oppositions are always hierarchically constructed so that one term is favoured over its opposite. By showing how the identity of each term of the opposition is constituted by *différance* - a difference which breaches the notion of each term having a pure self-contained identity - deconstruction hopes to expose the hierarchical nature of the opposition itself. The third term is that which *maintains* the logocentric opposition undergoing

deconstruction (because it is only intelligible in terms of that opposition) while, at the same time, removing from this opposition its hierarchical construction.

Deconstruction attempts to demonstrate how one term of an opposition has always been favoured over its opposite by uncovering the forgotten history of the preferred term, the history of how it came to occupy its privileged position within the logocentric epoch. Deconstruction then articulates that which the preferred term has had to exclude from itself in order to preserve its illusory self-identity and to justify its superior position over its opposite. However, as it is *différance* which has both constituted and breached this opposition there will always be, within the text where this opposition is inscribed, an *aporía* (a Greek word which occurs frequently throughout Derrida's work meaning 'impassable path', 'contradiction' and 'irreconcilable paradox') which undermines the hierarchical organisation of the opposition. To put it another way, the *aporía* of the text is that part of the text which is *self-deconstructing*. It is that part of the text where the subservient term temporarily usurps the throne of its superior, causing the validity of the hierarchy of the opposition - and hence the validity of the opposition itself - to be called into question. Within the *Course in General Linguistics* Saussure's recourse to alphabetical script - the subservient supplement to fully present speech - in order to illustrate the nature of speech is, within the *Course*, the site of the text's *aporía*.⁴⁰ Saussure himself seems to be well aware of this difficulty: "But the spoken word is so intimately bound to its written *image* that the latter manages to *usurp* the main role."⁴¹ Derrida comments that for Saussure this *aporía* is both intolerable and fascinating:

What is intolerable and fascinating

is indeed the intimacy intertwining image and thing, *graph*, *i.e.* and *phonè*, to the point where by a mirroring, inverting, and perverting effect, speech seems in its turn the speculum of writing, which 'manages to usurp the main role'.⁴²

It is Saussure himself who is forced to acknowledge that writing somehow "manages to usurp the main role". In other words it is Saussure himself who is forced to place writing temporarily over speech. Derrida's placing of writing over speech thus follows the operation of Saussure's *Course* and is not an imposition which occurs from outside the *Course* itself.

The concept of the *aporia* is of great importance to deconstruction, as it is the *aporia* of the text which both reverses and breaches the hierarchy of dual oppositions within the text. Strategically, the *aporia* thus has the value of being a form of critical 'proof' that the text is itself self-deconstructing and that it is not merely the whim of the deconstructive critic which is overturning the hierarchical oppositions of the work in question.

Deconstruction is essentially a critique of the metaphysics of presence found within Western philosophy and literature. This 'metaphysics of presence' permeates through all levels of Western philosophy and its offshoots. Hence a metaphysics of presence is found to be operating throughout Western philosophy, literary criticism, and the social sciences. Deconstruction always attempts to disrupt the metaphysics of presence at work within a text, although, by locating the site of the text's *aporia*, deconstruction hopes to show how the text performs such a disruption upon itself. Ultimately, deconstruction looks beyond the logocentric epoch towards an unknown, inconceivable future - a future which is not constrained by

the conceptual limitations of the metaphysics of presence. In his *Exergue to Of Grammatology* Derrida writes:

The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a form of monstrosity. For that future world and for that within it which will have put into question the values of sign, word, and writing, for that which guides our future anterior, there is as yet no exergue.⁴³

With this in mind we can say that deconstruction is a movement towards a goal which we, within the confines of our logocentric thought, cannot yet know. Derrida wishes us to believe that the future world after the closure of the logocentric age is beyond this language and its established structures.

Chapter Two

Derrida and Rousseau

i. The undecidable meaning of the 'supplement'

How is deconstruction to be put into practice? Does deconstruction attempt to situate authorial intention within its reading? Does deconstruction wish to ignore authorial intention altogether? Finally, what is the relationship between authorial intention and the meaning, or meanings, of the text? The programme of this chapter is to investigate Derrida's deconstruction in practice, and to explore the relationship between authorial intention and deconstructive reading. Derrida's reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology* is here used as a 'model' for deconstructive critical practice.

These questions are of obvious relevance in discussing the topic 'Derrida and meaning'. And yet before we start to search through Derrida's copious work in the hope of finding short, precise and explicit answers to these questions, we should be aware that for Derrida these questions are themselves logocentric in nature. Derrida's work, as we have seen, is itself a critique of the metaphysical tradition which provides the assumed philosophical ground upon which these questions stand. Not only are the concepts of 'author', 'intention', 'language', and 'text' themselves open to deconstruction, but the very notion of a question to which a single answer would perfectly satisfy and hence close is itself a logocentric conception and hence, for Derrida, to be regarded with suspicion. In other words, by asking such questions

I am attempting to impose a series of logocentric constraints upon Derrida's work - in fact the very constraints Derrida is himself engaged in challenging. However, in attempting to understand deconstruction, what choice do I, or any other reader of Derrida, have but to ask such 'logocentric' questions? To be sure, at the present time these questions cannot be avoided - even by Derrida himself. For if Derrida's deconstructive criticism is to be intelligible to us - as 'logocentric' readers - then it must confront these questions and their possible answers. Derrida's work, however, calls for a new programme which invites us to become 'post-structural' (though Derrida himself does not use this term) readers. As 'post-structural' readers, the logocentric questions raised by conventional criticism are themselves open to a deconstructive reading.

All of these questions are raised by - yet not all are explicitly dealt with within - Derrida's meticulous reading of Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, a reading which dominates the second part of *Of Grammatology*. Derrida's reading of Rousseau is undertaken because for Derrida there resides within Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*,⁴⁴ and indeed throughout Rousseau's work in general, a series of oppositions which are central to the character of the logocentric epoch and are, as such, repeated throughout Western culture until the present day. Within the *Essai*, Rousseau favours speech as being the natural form of language, a form closer to the origin of the discourse's meaning - this origin being the self-present intention of the speaker. Writing is in turn envisaged as being an unnatural and derivative supplement to speech.⁴⁵ Rousseau's contempt for the 'unnatural', the 'derivative' and the 'supplementary' is further witnessed in his conception of human history as being a movement away from the joys and pleasures of a natural state into the folly of an unnatural and over-complex culture. Just as 'man' has moved foolishly from the plentitude of nature to its derivative supplement culture, so too

has language moved foolishly from a natural language to a series of derivative supplements, the most perverse of which is the written script.⁴⁶

Derrida - engaging himself in a detailed reading of Rousseau's work - performs a deconstructive reading of Rousseau's *Essai*. The result of this reading is the conclusion that *on the one hand* the *Essai* only confirms that which it seeks to deny, namely the *necessity* of the denigrated term within Rousseau's hierarchically constructed oppositional pairings. Hence the *Essai* stands as a testament to the necessity of writing as an addition, just as it stands as a testament to the inevitability of 'Culture' arising as an addition to 'Nature'. In other words, while Rousseau seeks to deny the naturalness of both writing and culture - or *the Natural* in the sense of being the original, pure, primal state of both 'Man' and the world - his argument only affirms the inevitability, or necessity, of a movement away from the pure state of *the Natural* towards both the abhorrent and the abnormal. *On the other hand* the logic, or order, of what is named within the *Essai*, and elsewhere within Rousseau's work (notably the *Confessions*); as being the 'Supplement', threatens the self-identity of both (the preferred and subservient) terms of Rousseau's oppositional pairings (such as speech/writing, nature/culture), unsettling their operation and forcing the text to reveal the site of its own *aporia* or self-contradiction.

Derrida's deconstructive strategy in his reading of Rousseau is centred around the *undecidability*, the plurality of meanings, inherent in Rousseau's use of the word 'supplement':

For the concept of the supplement - which here determines that of the representative image - harbors within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *technè*, image,

representation, convention etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function. This kind of supplementarity determines in a certain way all the conceptual oppositions within which Rousseau inscribes the notion of Nature to the extent that it *should* be self-sufficient.

But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory (*suppléant*) and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place (tient-lieu)*. As substitute, it is not simply added 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 can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself.

This second signification of the supplement cannot be separated from the first. We shall constantly have to confirm that both operate within Rousseau's texts. But the inflexion varies from moment to moment. Each of the two significations is by turns effaced or becomes discreetly vague in the presence of the other. But their common function is shown in this: whether it adds or substitutes itself, the supplement *is exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it.⁴⁷

Mediating between the polarised terms of 'nature and culture', 'speech and writing', is the activity of the supplement, a supplement which harbours a dual signification that cannot be contained within the confines of a single sense. It is the irreducible play of the supplement which threatens both the autonomy of the oppositional pairs to which it is an intermediary, and the cohesion of Rousseau's argument. The logic of the supplement - in a manner similar to the performance of the deconstructive reading which has designated the supplement as being the disruptive 'third term' existing between the oppositional terms of Rousseau's work - is a two handed affair. *On the one hand* the supplement adds to and extends presence, as writing, speech and representation in general demonstrate. Here the

supplement is a convenient - yet in itself unimportant - addition, "a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude". *On the other hand* the supplement threatens the status of the presence - as a fully present, controlling, origin or centre - to which it is a supplement. "It adds only to replace." In other words, the supplement 'usurps' the authority of the centre to which it is a supplement by replacing itself at the centre. For the supplement to be able to occur there must be a deficiency, a lack within the presumed plenitude of the presence - this centre being that which is named as 'Nature' within Rousseau's work - which provided the space, the gap or the interval which the supplement, with its added presence, readily fills. Once this supplementary activity occurs - and if there is a lack at the centre then, as we have seen, such a supplementary activity has *always already* occurred - then the supplement takes the place of that which it supplements, positing in this movement the centre as a function of its operation.

In its position as the third term which disrupts the oppositions present within a certain number of texts, the supplement is clearly equivalent to what Derrida has provisionally named within the first part of *Of Grammatology*, and throughout his work, as *différance*. Just as *différance* cannot be reduced to a containable meaning or definitive singularity, so too is the play of the supplement without limit. As *différance*, the activity of the supplement is by necessity beyond the intentional control of Rousseau:

It does not suffice to say that Rousseau thinks the supplement without thinking it, that he does not match his saying and his meaning, his descriptions and his declarations. One must still organize this separation and this contradiction. Rousseau uses the word and describes the thing. But now we know that what concerns us here belongs neither to word nor to thing. Word and thing are referential limits that only the supplementary structure can produce and mark.⁴⁸

Only that which is named as *différance* "belongs neither to word nor thing". For Derrida's *différance* is that which escapes the word/thing dichotomy while permitting such a difference to be made. Just as "word and thing are referential limits that only the supplementary structure can produce and mark" so too are word and thing referential limits that only the play of *différance* can produce and mark. *Différance* produces such referential limits while breaching their pure self-identity. Hence the supplement is now the third term of Derrida's deconstructive reading which displaces the hierarchical organisation of the text's oppositional pairs.

To conclude his reading of Rousseau, Derrida situates - following a line of reasoning identical to that found in his earlier essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" - the supplement at the source of the presumed plenitude of presence. In other words, Derrida transforms all of Rousseau's postulated centre of origin and presence into 'non-locuses', mirage-like illusions of the non-deferral of the fullest presence. If nature is known only through the supplementary mediations of culture, and if thought is known only by means of the supplementary mediations of a corrupted speech, then by virtue of this line of reasoning itself it becomes possible for Derrida to construe Rousseau's centres of presence as being mirages produced by the activity of the supplement:

Through 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.⁴⁹

Throughout his reading of Rousseau, Derrida hopes to show how the necessity of the 'sequence of supplements' that 'produce the sense of the very thing they defer' finally results in the supplement usurping the inferior

status bestowed upon it by Rousseau. While Rousseau maps the operation of the supplement, he denies the necessity of the sequence of supplements by deriding the supplement as being both unnatural and abhorrent. For Derrida, the logic of the supplement disrupts Rousseau's preference for the original (witnessed in Rousseau's love of the original state of nature and in his favouring of an original language) over the derivative by forcing Rousseau's argument into a self-engendered paradox where what is being asserted by Rousseau is being contradicted by the logic of the supplement itself.

ii. The question of authorial intention

How does Derrida accommodate Rousseau's intention into his reading of *The Essay on the Origin of Languages*? How does any deconstructive reading accommodate the author's intention into its own method of reading? The answering of the first question entails an understanding of the latter, for *Of Grammatology* is, in itself, a model (if one can use such a word when writing of Derrida) of deconstructive reading. To begin with we should remember that for Derrida 'There is nothing outside the text'. Indeed, the maxim of there being 'nothing outside the text' is the basis of Derrida's reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*.⁵⁰ A close reading of Derrida's reading of Rousseau reveals the difficulties of applying such a maxim to a specific text. The main difficulty for Derrida is that *on the one hand* he claims that there is no outside to language, to which the meaning of the text - including the meaning of the word 'supplement' - can be anchored to and hence secured. As we have seen, the first part of *Of Grammatology* is concerned with establishing the premise that there is nothing beyond the series of differences, the play of *différance*, which is the text itself. *On the other hand*, however, Derrida must preserve the conception of Rousseau's intention so that he can demonstrate how Rousseau's use of the word 'supplement' works against

such an intention by demonstrating a line of argument other than that which Rousseau would have wished. In betraying the intention of its author the supplement must refer outside the text to such an intention itself. The irreconcilable difference between these two positions constitutes the greatest difficulty in Derrida's reading of Rousseau. Yet according to the tenets of Derrida's own deconstructive project such an irreconcilable paradox, or *aporia*, is in itself inescapable. The *aporia* of the text is, by virtue of the play of *différance* which constitutes the text, that which cannot be avoided or escaped. Derrida's deconstructive reading of Rousseau is hence open to a further deconstructive reading (which would commence, one presumes, with locating the site of the *aporia* within *Of Grammatology*), and so on *ad infinitum*.⁵¹

How, then, does Derrida arrange this difficulty between maintaining that 'there is nothing outside the text' and postulating an intention behind the text which, while being clearly discernible in the text, is nevertheless incapable of controlling the play of meanings generated by the words of the text themselves? Derrida attempts to organise the difficulty in a section entitled 'The Exorbitant. Question of Method'.⁵² Consider the following passage from this section:

This brings up the question of the usage of the word 'supplement': of Rousseau's situation within the language and the logic that assures to this word or this concept sufficiently *surprising* resources so that the presumed subject of the sentence might always say, through using the 'supplement', more, less, or something other than what he *would mean* [*voudrait dire*]. This question is therefore not only of Rousseau's writing but also of our reading. We should begin by taking rigorous account of this *being held within* [*prise*] or this *surprise*: 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 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*.⁵³

In this case the '*surprising* resources' of the supplement is its double meaning as both addition and substitute. Because of the double faced nature of the supplement, Rousseau cannot control the meaning - or range of possible readings - of his argument within the *Essai*. Rousseau says one thing, yet the double-faced nature of the supplement means that his argument can be read in a way other than intended. Derrida's strategy in his reading of Rousseau is hence to concentrate on how language escapes, or in Rousseau's case actively works against, the intentions of the author, rather than to pursue the begging question of how Derrida *knows* what Rousseau intended in the first place.⁵⁴ Given Derrida's ensuing reading of Rousseau, the word 'might' in the first sentence of the above quotation is distinctly unconvincing. Given that ambiguous 'might', how does Derrida *know* that Rousseau did not intend the supplement to mean both an addition and a substitute? How does Derrida know that Rousseau did not intend the *Essai* to reach a point of self-contradiction?⁵⁵ These questions are not raised by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*. Indeed, rather than pursue these crucial - yet for Derrida undoubtedly problematic - questions, Derrida chooses to comment on how a writer can never hope to dominate the 'proper system' of his or her language.

For Derrida, the meaning of a text is beyond the control of its author and his intention, because the author "writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely". The author writes, but because the language he or she writes pre-exists both the author and the writing, the meaning of the writing is always something more than that merely intended by the author. Hence to write is

always to relinquish a *certain* control over what one means, since to write is to become subservient to a language whose system and laws pre-exist, and perhaps even structure, one's intentions. A critical reading of any text should try to ascertain the relationship between what the author consciously commands and what the author does not command within the language of the text in question. However, this relationship is not something which exists in the text itself, but is rather a "signifying structure that critical reading should *produce*".⁵⁶

What does Derrida mean by 'produce'? Derrida himself raises the question:

What does produce mean here? In my attempt to explain that, I would initiate a justification of my principles of reading. A justification, as we shall see, entirely negative, outlining by exclusion a space of reading that I shall not fill here: a task of reading.

To produce this signifying structure obviously cannot consist of reproducing, by the effaced and respectful doubling of commentary, the conscious, voluntary, intentional relationship that the writer institutes in his exchanges with the history to which he belongs thanks to the element of language. This moment of doubling commentary should no doubt 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. But this indispensable guardrail has always only *protected*, it has never *opened*, a reading.⁵⁷

Let us follow, point by point, the line - or considering Derrida's text as a textile, the 'thread' - of Derrida's argument in the above quotation, so that we may understand how the critic is to *produce* this relationship between what the writer does and does not command in the language of his or her text.

(1) Derrida begins his argument in the above quotation

by telling us that the justification of his 'principles of reading' will be 'entirely negative'. That is, Derrida's principles of reading are not concerned with what the critical reading *could* produce, but are concerned rather with what such a structural reading *could* never hope to produce. In other words, Derrida's justification of his principles of reading lies in an articulation of what a critical reading is incapable of achieving.

(2) The production by the critic, or reader, of the relationship between what a writer does and does not command, *cannot* consist of reproducing the conscious, voluntary, intentions of the author. Derrida reminds us here that the intentions of the author are, by virtue of the history of the language itself, already mingled with the symbolic order of the language: the "intentional relationship that the writer institutes in his exchanges with the history to which he belongs thanks to the element of language". It is the nature of this exchange, in which the author inscribes his message in a language whose history and significance he cannot hope to dominate absolutely, that for Derrida renders the simple reproduction of authorial intention by commentary *insufficient*, as authorial intention is only *half* of the 'signifying structure' between what a writer 'commands and does not command' of the patterns of language that he uses. Simply attempting to reproduce an authorial intention is not enough, as such a reproduction cannot fully account for the significance of the text.

(3) While the reproduction of an author's intention is inadequate to any full account of the signifying structure of the text, nevertheless this reproduction, which is brought about by the 'effaced and respectful doubling of commentary', should have its place in a critical reading. Why? If the aim of this doubling commentary is, according to Derrida's own line of reasoning in points one and two, *inadequate*, then why does Derrida wish to maintain this logocentric practice? The answer is that without the reproduction of authorial intention as its goal, "critical production

would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything". If the notion of authorial intention is no longer postulated as that which provides the centre for critical practice, then commentary can construe the text as saying anything the commentary wished. The result, one presumes, would be a directionless free-play of language in which the commentary ran along its own lines of play rather than retracing the intentionally woven threads of the author. For Derrida, then, authorial intention has always been an 'indispensable guardrail' which has only protected and never opened a critical reading. It is a guardrail which, at the present time, is within limited reading indispensable. This is the force of Derrida's statement. Authorial intention is *indispensable*, but it is also a *protection*. A reading which merely reproduces authorial intention is not a sufficient reading, but is one which excludes any consideration of the relationship between authorial intention and the language of the text.

Given the line of reasoning presented in the points above, we could say that Derrida's account of Rousseau's intention is a rhetorical critical gesture. Derrida acknowledges that a reproduction of what Rousseau intended to mean in the *Essai* is insufficient, but he cannot conceive a serious critical reading of the text that could operate without orientating itself around authorial intention. Derrida therefore employs the 'guardrail' of authorial intention to open up his reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*. This 'guardrail', however, is not the *limited* guardrail of logocentric reading, but is a guardrail which, while respecting traditional critical practices, nevertheless seeks to investigate the relationship between Rousseau's intention and the language of the *Essai*. Derrida's point, in his reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, is that what Rousseau writes and what Rousseau intends cannot be separated from the *system* of Rousseau's writing, a system which has, as one of its features, the double-edged meaning of the word 'supplement'.

Chapter Three

The Iterable Structure of the Mark

i. Communication and context

What are the implications of Derrida's claim that the relationship between what an author does and does not command, or intend, in the language of his text is essentially "a signifying structure that critical reading should *produce*". We can conclude from such a maxim that the sense of an intention, that is, of a commanding force behind language, is an effect *produced* by the reader. Rather than being that which is communicated by the medium of language from one person to another, intention is situated by Derrida as being an *effect of language*. As opposed to the classic addresser-addressee model of communication, which serves as a model of communication for structuralist critics, Derrida's critical practice is founded upon his conception of meaning as being a provisional effect produced by the play of language, this production including the construing, by the reader, of the sender's intention *and* the remaining significational play consisting of that which the author cannot control within the language of his or her discourse.⁵⁸ Derrida, in his reading of Rousseau, construes both Rousseau's intention within his use of the word 'supplement' while, at the same time, construing how the play of language itself escapes such a construed intention. Derrida, according to the logic of his own argument, cannot know what Rousseau 'actually' intended before, during, or after Rousseau had written the *Essai*. Indeed, Derrida claims - as we shall see - that any such knowledge is not only inaccessible to the reader, it is indeed *impossible*.

As his reading of Rousseau demonstrates, Derrida does not banish the notion of authorial intention from critical commentary. On the contrary, Derrida acknowledges that the notion of authorial intention is 'indispensable'. Rather than banishing authorial intention, Derrida wishes to situate intention, so that intention becomes an effect of language, a sense of what the author *might* have meant as opposed to being a presumed absolute knowledge of what the author wanted to mean.

There are a number of vital questions raised by such a conception of intention as an effect of language. Is the act of writing, or speaking, the communication of a determinable, intended meaning from one party to another? Can writing or speech be conceived of as an act which occurs within the constraints of a determinable context? If the answer to each of these questions is 'no', then how are speech and writing to be conceived? What will happen to the classic concept of communication? The issues raised by these questions are dealt with in one of Derrida's most important essays "Signature Event Context" (hereafter referred to as *SEC*). In *SEC* Derrida articulates his critique of the concept of 'communication' and then applies the result of such a critique to a critical reading of J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*.⁵⁹ One can say that nowhere else is Derrida's position on intention and its relationship to meaning more clearly stated than in *SEC*. Yet it would be a mistake to read *SEC* in isolation from a series of other texts which although written after *SEC* nevertheless form part of its open ended context.⁶⁰ *SEC* itself is a crucial text in a debate in which the central items of discussion are intention, communication, context, and their relationship to the production of meaning.

Derrida opens *SEC* with a questioning of the word 'communication':

Is it certain that there corresponds to the word *communication* a unique, univocal concept, a concept that can be rigorously grasped and transmitted: a communicable concept? Following a strange figure of discourse, one must first ask whether the word or signifier "communication" communicates a determined content, an identifiable meaning, a describable value. But in order to articulate and propose this question, I already had to anticipate the meaning of the word *communication*: I have had to predetermine communication as the vehicle, transport, or site of passage of a *meaning*, and of a meaning that is *one*.⁶¹

Derrida's critique of '*communication*' is a critique which operates not by rejecting the classical conception of communication, but by attempting to work within - for provisional reasons of strategy - the logocentric constraints of such a conception. To challenge the concept of communication, it must be presumed that the signifier '*communication*' communicates a determinable content, an irreducible signified. For Derrida to challenge such a concept, he has to work within the confines of such a concept, that is, he has to acknowledge that he has understood what the signifier '*communication*' means. Derrida is, of course, aware of this - *SEC* itself begins with an articulation of this dilemma. Derrida's strategic assault on the concept of communication is, in itself, revealing. Deconstruction begins not with a rejection of the terms undergoing deconstruction, but rather with an acknowledgement of the current indispensability of these terms and an investigation into the logocentric pre-suppositions of the terms in question.

The pre-supposition underlying the concept of '*communication*' is the notion of a set content, an irreducible signified, which is communicated by the word '*communication*' itself. In Derrida's own words:

If *communication* had several meanings, and if this plurality could not be reduced, then from the outset it would not be justified to define communication *itself* as the transmission of a meaning, assuming that we are capable of understanding one another as concerns each of these words (transmission, meaning etc.).⁶²

The concept of communication only breaks down if it is accepted that the word communication has several meanings which cannot be reduced. But is this the case? Does communication - or any word for that matter - have an irreducible plurality of meanings? Is not the meaning, or range of meanings, of the word 'communication' reduced by the constraints of the context in which the word is used? Any challenge to the classical conception of communication entails not only questioning the notion of *language as medium* but also a critical inquiry into the status of context as that which reduces the range of meanings that any particular word or phrase might have. Derrida's strategy here is to investigate the pre-suppositions which underlie the concept of the context while *retaining* as opposed to 'invalidating', the concept of the context itself.⁶³

Derrida maintains that it is the *iterable* structure of the mark, in other words the *iterability of writing*, which renders the formulation of any rigorous, absolute, context impossible. Indeed, it is this capacity to escape the limits of any absolute context which constitutes the nature of writing - as *différance* - itself. This capacity to escape the limits of any absolute context is found in the iterable nature of writing, an iterability which structures the mark of writing:

My "written communication" must, if you will, remain legible despite the absolute disappearance of every determined addressee in general for it to function

as writing, that is, for it to be legible. It must be repeatable - iterable - in the absolute absence of the addressee or of the empirically determinable set of addressees. This iterability ... structures the mark of writing itself, and does so moreover for no matter what type of writing (pictographic, hieroglyphic, ideographic, phonetic, alphabetic, to use the old categories). A writing that was not structurally legible - iterable - beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing.⁶⁴

For writing to be writing it must be iterable. For writing to be legible it must be able to function in the absence of any determinable sender or receiver. For example, for the passage of *SEC* cited above to be writing, it has to be able to signify in the absence of Derrida's presence. In terms of authorial intention, this means that the above passage has to be able, for it to be writing, to signify *something other* than that which the author intended. In a gesture of overturning Derrida situates absence, as opposed to presence, as being that which structures the mark of writing. Rather than being an extension of authorial presence, writing is that which functions in the absence of the author or any determinable reader.

The iterability of writing is of monumental importance for Derrida's argument, as it is this iterability which renders writing incapable of being contained within the confines of a rigorous, determinable context. The ability of writing to function in the absence of the author or any intended reader is the ability of writing to be repeated indefinitely without ever exhausting its capacity to have significance or meaning. Writing can be repeated, or cited, indefinitely without ever being rendered completely meaningless. Because writing can be indefinitely repeated in

this way, it thus escapes any set contextual limit. The notion of an absolute, fixed, determinable context is challenged by Derrida on the grounds that such a notion of context ignores the iterable nature of writing, an iterability which structures the mark of writing itself. The context surrounding any written sign, or passage of text, is not a stable, fixed, determinable boundary, because writing can always be grafted out of one context and placed into another without the sign being rendered meaningless. This iterability is threatening to the classical concept of communication because an acknowledgement of the iterable nature of writing entails an acknowledgement of the inexhaustible nature of the sign; that is, the sign's capacity to signify in an endless number of 'contexts' without ever losing its capacity to signify. A recognition of the semantic inexhaustibility of the sign - and of writing in general - challenges the logocentric conception of the sign being *just* a vehicle, or medium, for the communication of a set, determinable meaning, from one party to another.

Given such an acknowledgement of the iterability of writing and of the subsequent semantic inexhaustibility of the sign, then writing:

... could no longer, henceforth, be included in the category of communication, at least if communication is understood in the restricted sense of the transmission of meaning. Conversely, it is within the general field of writing thus defined that the effects of semantic communication will be able to be determined as particular, secondary, inscribed, supplementary effects.⁶⁵

Derrida's critique of communication follows the by now familiar pattern of a typical deconstructive reading. Rather than being constrained within

the logocentric category of 'communication', writing is, by a gesture of 'overturning', re-positioned as being that which produces the "particular, secondary, inscribed supplementary effects" of communication. These supplementary effects produce - as we have seen elsewhere in Derrida's use of the word 'supplement' - the very sense of the thing they defer. The sense of a determinable, fixed content, or of an authorial intention, is an effect, or series of effects, produced by writing - as *différance* - itself. The sense of an intention which lies behind, or outside, writing, as well as the sense of a piece of writing having a single, determinable content or message, are postulated by Derrida as being *effects* of writing. Derrida, in saying this, is *not* denying that people do have 'intentions' while they write; nor is he denying that people do respond to messages as if they did have a single determinable meaning. Rather than denying any of the above, Derrida is concerned with *situating* the site of these effects so that as opposed to being outside writing these effects are not situated as being a result, or production, of writing in general.

But what of speech? In the classical concept of communication writing is the reproduction of speech. If writing is the reproduction of speech, then should not Derrida's critique of intention, content and the role of context also apply to speech act situations? For Derrida's critique of communication to be convincing, he must be able to apply his conception of intention and the sense of a determinable content as being 'supplementary, secondary, inscribed effects' to speech act situations. Otherwise, he would be open to criticism from those people who wish to re-assert the priority of speech over writing, and who further wish to keep writing in its place as the subservient reproducer of a living speech whose meaning is fully present to itself, as opposed to being an effect

produced by Derrida's *différance*. For strategic reasons Derrida must, at some time, attempt a deconstruction of one or more texts from the 'Speech act' camp of contemporary philosophy. For not to attempt such a reading would be to leave a space, or opening, in Derrida's work where critics could hope to re-assert the priority of speech over writing by claiming that Derrida's work, while challenging the classical conception of writing, has never successfully tackled the issues of intention, context, and the production of meaning as they relate to speech acts and to speech act theory in general. It is perhaps for this reason that Derrida devotes so much time to challenging the arguments of J. L. Austin and J. R. Searle in their support of speech act theory. Derrida's critique of speech act theory begins with his deconstructive reading of Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* in the latter half of *SEC*.⁶⁶ Derrida's reading of Austin brilliantly demonstrates that the challenge to Austin's account of speech act situations comes not from *outside* *How to Do Things with Words* but is situated within the text itself. In other words, Austin's text is a self-deconstructing one. Rather than standing in opposition to deconstruction, Austin's text welcomes a deconstructive reading, due to its own inability to maintain the purity of its hierarchically organised oppositional terms.

In *How to Do Things with Words* Austin seeks to make a distinction between two types of speech, which he names as being *constative* and *performative* utterances. The constative utterance consists of being an assertion about reality. That is, the constative utterance is either a true or false description of the 'facts'. For example, "The sky is blue" is a constative utterance, as is "The cat is sitting on the mat". The performative utterance hopes to achieve something by means of speech itself. "I hereby declare you man and wife" is a performative utterance as is "I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth". The performative utterance, unlike the constative, does not refer to an

outside, extra-linguistic reality, but rather hopes to achieve a certain *effect* by means of referring to the power of speech itself. For example, "I hereby declare" does not refer to anything outside speech itself for its validity or force, it calls upon the power of speech to produce a certain effect on all those who are listening.⁶⁷ For Derrida, the difficulty inherent in making such a distinction between the constative and the performative utterance is as follows:

It is this: Austin has not taken into account that which in the structure of *locution* (and therefore before any illocutory or perlocutory determination) already bears within itself the system of predicates that I call *graphematic in general*, which therefore confuses all the ulterior oppositions whose pertinence, purity, and rigor Austin sought to establish in vain.⁶⁸

Austin fails to take into account the graphematic structure of language, this graphematic 'system of predicates' being the iterable nature of language; that is, its ability to be re-contextualised or cited without losing its capacity for signification. It is this *iterability* which for Derrida 'confuses' the 'ulterior oppositions' which Austin seeks to maintain in *How to Do Things with Words*.

What grounds does Derrida have for making such a claim? Continuing on from the passage from *SEC* cited above, Derrida states that:

In order to show this, I must take as known and granted that Austin's analyses permanently demand a value of *context*, and even of an exhaustively determinable context, whether de jure or teleologically; and the long list of "infelicities" of variable type which might affect the event of the performative always returns to an element of what Austin calls the total context.⁶⁹

In order to show that Austin ignores the graphematic structure of language, Derrida - presumably for reasons of space - must assume that the reader agrees with his claim that Austin's analyses 'permanently demand a value of context'. Austin's belief in an 'exhaustively determinable context' ignores the iterable structure of language. If language is capable of being endlessly repeated then on what grounds can an 'exhaustively determinable context' - a context which will determine whether or not a performative is successful or not - be established? For Derrida, there are *no* rigorous grounds which permit the establishment of such a determinable context. There are no grounds for such a determinable context because such a determinable context must ignore the iterable structure of language.

The value of context is central to Austin's distinction between successful and unsuccessful performative speech acts. Austin wants to set aside a certain group of performative speech acts as being *parasitic* in nature. These parasitical performatives are pretended, 'non-serious' utterances which Austin considers unworthy of consideration. A performative uttered by an actor on a stage, for example, is considered by Austin to be 'non-serious' or 'parasitic' on its normal use. One of the 'infelicities' which Austin excludes is the possibility that the performative - as well as the constative utterance - can be endlessly cited or repeated. For example, the performative utterance "I hereby pronounce you man and wife" might be repeated by actors on a stage; an utterance which Austin labels as being a 'parasitical', 'non-serious' use of language. This exclusion of 'parasitical' performative utterances which are spoken by people outside their 'normal' context is, in Derrida's own words, a "rather remarkable" procedure.⁷⁰ It is a procedure which

... consists in recognizing that the possibility of the negative (here, the *infelicities*) is certainly a structural possibility, that failure is an essential

risk in the operations under consideration; and then, with an almost *immediately simultaneous* gesture made in the name of ideal regulation, an exclusion of this risk as an accidental, exterior one that teaches us nothing about the language phenomenon under consideration.⁷¹

Austin acknowledges that speech acts can be cited, and that this is certainly a structural possibility inherent within the structure of speech itself, but he denounces this general iterability as being an 'infelicity' of language. He can only do this in the name of an *ideal* regulation because, by virtue of his own exclusion of the infelicities of speech, he cannot deny that such an iterability can and frequently does occur. Austin denounces the graphematic structure of the mark, as opposed to investigating this graphematic structure and pursuing its implications.

Derrida, in a meticulous reading of *How to Do Things with Words*, further points out that the ideal conditions required for the success of a performative utterance are, paradoxically, the very conditions in which an unsuccessful performative occurs.

For, finally, is not what Austin excludes as anomalous, exceptional, "non-serious", that is, *citation* (on the stage, in a poem, or in a soliloquy), the determined modification of a general citationality - or rather, a general iterability - without which there would not even be a "successful" performative?⁷²

Seen in this light, Austin's argument is a self-deconstructing one. A successful performative would have to be an impure, exceptional one, because there can be no successful performative that is not a 'determined modification' of a general iterability. The success of any performative relies on the repetition of a coded or iterable statement. For example, the performative statement "I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" could not be successful unless it was identifiable as conforming to an iterable model. The performative

can only be successful if it is recognised as being a citation. Moreover, the performative can only be successful if it is recognised as being a citation of *itself*. Derrida thus situates a 'general citationality' as being that which structures all acts of speech and writing. Following a by now familiar pattern, the subservient term within Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* has now been re-positioned, in a gesture of 'overturning', as the indispensable dominant term. Rather than being 'non-serious' or 'parasitical', the citation is revealed, by Derrida's deconstructive reading of Austin, as that which allows for the successful articulation of the performative utterance.

Derrida's critique of communication, as well as his meticulous reading of Austin, results in the situating of the graphematic or iterable structure of language as being present in all acts of speech and writing. Within Austin's speech act theory, it is the iterable nature of the performative which allows the performative to be successful, and it is this iterability which breaches the pure singularity of the speech act event.⁷³ If the success of a performative relies on the performative's iterable structure, then the success of the performative resides not just in the performative utterance itself, but in its degree of conformity to the iterable model with which it is identifiable. For example, if the success of the performative utterance "I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" resides in its degree of conformity to its own iterable structure, then the success of the performative is not determinable by the context in which the statement is itself uttered. The success of the performative breaches any determinable context, because this success is dependent on all the other occasions in which the performative has been uttered, and the degree to which the performative corresponds to the performative utterance spoken on previous occasions.⁷⁴

Derrida thus posits that every speech act derives its force from the graphematic structure of language. Language is hence a matter of repetition and difference. Language signifies - an effect - by being a repetition, or iteration, of itself. If language was *not* graphematic in general it would be both impossible and exhaustible. *Impossible* because it is only by being able to repeat itself that language can operate. As has been previously noted, a language that was not repeatable, or iterable, would not, by definition, be a language. *Exhaustible* because if language was truly context-bound then it would not be re-usable, its sense and significance would be exhausted in the moment of its utterance. However, the occurrence of the citation, that is, language's ability to be repeated while still retaining the sense of a 'meaning' - even if this meaning is different from that the author originally intended - demonstrates that language is not context bound. Derrida's tactic within *SEC* is to show that the citation, rather than being a special, abnormal instance of language, is that which constitutes the very possibility of language itself. All of language is structured by the graphematic nature of writing. It is for this reason that "one must less oppose citation or iteration to the noniteration of the event, than construct a differential typology of forms of iteration ...".⁷⁵

While such a typology would be primarily concerned with the 'graphematic structure of writing' it would nevertheless retain the category of intention:

In this typology, the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from this place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and the entire system of utterances. Above all, one then would be concerned with different types of marks or chains of iterable marks, and not with an opposition between citational statements on the one hand, and singular and original statement-events on the other.⁷⁶

Intention is not denied, or invalidated, by Derrida. It

is just that intention is no longer allowed permission to determine *completely* the significance or meanings of any utterance. It is the graphematic structure of the mark which cuts the "opposition between citational statements on the one hand, and singular and original statement-events on the other". Furthermore, the graphematic structure of the mark challenges the notion that an intention beyond the play of language can completely control the mark's functioning. This 'graphematic structure of the mark' is roughly equivalent to what has been named elsewhere in Derrida's work as *différance*.⁷⁷ Just as *différance* permits, while breaching, the making of distinctions and of oppositions, while not being in 'itself' any 'thing', 'conception', or 'entity', so does the graphematic structure of the mark permit the performance of speech acts without being in 'itself' any 'thing', 'conception' or 'entity'.⁷⁸

ii. Intention and iterability

An account of Derrida's conception of the 'graphematic structure of the mark' is of central importance to any discussion of intention because Derrida claims that *intention itself* is structured by the graphematic structure of the mark. As we have seen, Derrida's entire project is a critique of the metaphysics of presence which founds all Western philosophical thought. As part of this project, Derrida challenges the notion of a fully self-present intention, or being, as existing within an individual subject by asserting that the graphematic structure of the mark is also the *graphematic structure of experience itself*. Commenting on how the 'signifying form' of the mark is constituted by its iterability, Derrida writes:

This structural possibility of being severed from its referent or signified (and therefore from communication and its context) seems to me to make of every mark, even if oral, a grapheme in general, that is, as we have seen, the nonpresent *remaining* of a differential mark cut off from its alleged "production" or origin. And I will extend this law even to all "experience"

in general, if it is granted that there is no experience of *pure* presence, but only chains of differential marks.⁷⁹

On what grounds are we to grant that 'there is no experience of pure presence'? As this experience of 'pure presence' must surely include the experience of pure intention, we can re-phrase the question so that it now becomes: 'On what grounds are we to grant that there is no experience of pure intention?' And what exactly are the stakes? It is worth pausing to remember here that Derrida, as we have seen, does not claim that intention is non-existent. Nor does Derrida seek to exclude intention from any account of the production of meaning. For Derrida the issue at hand is that of trying to formulate a notion of intention which is not teleologically orientated towards an *idealisation* of intention as a plentitude of presence, a presence which is fully present and undivided to itself. What is at stake is not the validity of intention, or of the experience of intention *per se*, but rather the validity of intention as it is *ideally conceived* by the logocentric tradition Derrida is deconstructing.

Derrida challenges the idea that there can be an experience of pure intention on the grounds that such an idea is itself founded upon a naïve, and indeed archaic, psychological basis. In *Limited Inc* Derrida writes that "... *Sec's* enterprise is in principle designed to demonstrate a type of 'structural unconscious' ... which seems alien, if not incompatable [sic] with speech act theory given its current axiomatics".⁸⁰ Speech act theory wishes to include intention as being a part of a determinable, exhaustible 'total context'. And yet speech act theory fails to situate conscious intention as being an *effect* produced by the subject's ego; an ego which is, in turn, constituted by its difference from other elements of the individual's 'psyche'. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has noted, Derrida's work in this is clearly indebted to that of Freud's:

The picture of an irreducibly pluralized and heterogeneous subject can find its place in structuralist and post-structuralist interpretations of Freud. Such interpretations must see the conscious ego as an effect of the work of the "psyche" (whose outlines are, by that very token, more like an entangling network, structured by traces and postponements, than a neat geographical boundary), rather than as fully identical with the self as a whole.⁸¹

The basis of all modern psycho-analytical thought is the situating of the ego. This 'situating' involves making a series of distinctions between the ego as a self-aware agent and the totality of other drives or psychic forces within the individual as a whole. The intentions of the ego can never be equated with the will of the psyche as a whole, because the structural unconscious itself entails the possibility of a *displacement* of the intentions of the ego in such a way as to make them never *fully present* to the ego itself. The motives of the structural unconscious cannot, by their very definition, be consciously deduced and can always undermine any *conscious* intention the speaker may have. The structural unconscious unsettles, or calls into question, any common agreement or 'consensus' that might surround the notion of an individual intention. Derrida's point is that speech act theory introduces intention as an important factor in any speech act without ever investigating what the structural nature of such an intention might be. Indeed, the structure of intention is never itself questioned or investigated by either Austin or J. Searle. It is simply assumed that the nature of intention is 'obvious' and unworthy of any in-depth consideration. Austin's speech act theory is shown by Derrida to rely on a crude pre-Freudian concept of intention, and the implication here - given that *SEC* addresses itself to the issue of communication - is that these presuppositions (of intention, of context, and of determinable meaning) are inherent within the classical concept of communication itself.

iii. Dissemination

Rather than being the communication of a determinable meaning from one party to another, for Derrida writing is always the *dissemination* of meaning. This *dissemination* is an *excess* of meaning, a *remainder* which cannot be totalised or contained within the confines of a single definition:

The semantic horizon which habitually governs the notion of communication is exceeded or punctured by the intervention of writing, that is of a *dissemination* which cannot be reduced to a *polysemia*. Writing is read, and "in the last analysis" does not give rise to a hermeneutic deciphering, to the decoding of a meaning or truth.⁸²

In an attempt to arrive at an understanding of Derrida's *dissemination*, let us list, point by point, the line of Derrida's argument in the above passage. As the above passage occurs at the very conclusion of *SEC*, we shall be able to see how Derrida's critique of communication finally leads to a postulation of *dissemination* as that which *exceeds* communication.

(1) "The semantic horizon which habitually governs the notion of communication ...". The concept of communication always presumes that there is a set message or meaning that is transmitted from one fully present conscious individual to another within the horizon of a context which is both fixed and hence determinable. It is this series of presuppositions which constitute the *semantic horizon* which governs the notion of communication.

(2) "... is exceeded or punctured by the intervention of writing ...". 'Writing' is here clearly equatable with what Derrida names elsewhere as being *différance*. Not being anywhere present within the semantic horizon of a determinable context *différance* exceeds the confines of such an horizon. The intervention of writing 'exceeds'

or 'punctures' the horizon of self-presence by virtue of its situating the 'I' as being a result of *différance*, as opposed to being an entity which exists beyond the play of difference. Furthermore, the semantic horizon is exceeded by writing due to the *graphematic* structure of the mark. Writing punctures the semantic horizon governing communication, because writing has the ability to exceed any determinable context without losing its capacity to signify. In this way writing escapes or exceeds the teleological orientation (which Derrida names as being *habitual*, that is traditional and unquestioned) of the horizon itself.

(3) "... that is of a *dissemination* which cannot be reduced to a *polysemia* ..." Derrida here makes the important distinction between *dissemination* and *polysemia*. The problem with the concept of 'polysemia' is that, for Derrida, it still entails the resumption of meaning itself. Polysemia suggests that there are many plural meanings present rather than there being no absolute, determinable meanings whatsoever. Thus polysemia retains within itself the notion of a truth or meaning - even if this truth or meaning is itself a plural one - which is communicated by, and is inherent within the text. As such, *polysemia* is still situated within the very semantic horizon which Derrida's *dissemination* seeks to exceed and puncture.

Nevertheless, polysemia, as such, is organized within the implicit horizon of a unitary resumption of meaning, that is, within the horizon of a dialectics ... a teleological and totalizing dialectics that at a given moment, however far off, must permit the reassemblage of the totality of the text into the truth of its meaning ...⁸³

(4) "Writing is read, and 'in the last analysis' does not give rise to a hermeneutic deciphering, to the decoding of a meaning or truth." All writing is hence a matter of *dissemination*. The idea of a fixed, determinable

meaning or truth residing in the text is refuted by Derrida on the grounds that writing, as *dissemination*, itself renders any such truth structurally impossible. Yet, once again, it must be remembered that Derrida is not denying that there is a *sense* of a meaning, or a sense of an intention, present when "writing is read". These 'senses' however are situated by Derrida as being effects produced by the disseminative play of writing. The dissemination of meaning is itself without ending or closure. Derrida's point is that the graphematic structure of the mark once again renders any such closure as being structurally impossible. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Derrida places the phrase "in the last analysis" in inverted commas; for the "last analysis" is not only *deferred* by *dissemination*, it is placed forever out of reach as a closure, or ending, which can never be achieved.

What remains, given Derrida's critique of the sign, of meaning, and of intention, of 'authorial intention'? As Derrida's reading of Rousseau in the latter half of *Of Grammatology* demonstrates, the 'concept' of *différance*, along with the maxim that 'there is nothing outside the text', does not seek to invalidate the notion of authorial intention. Derrida's position concerning authorial intention is characteristically double handed. *On the one hand* it involves the recognition that a reading of a text can never hope to reproduce the intentions of the author. *On the other hand* authorial intention is retained as a strategy of reading. In this strategy, authorial intention acts as a guardrail which limits the number of readings which can be generated from the dissemination of the text. Derrida therefore sees authorial intention as being a strategically necessary device or ruse in his critical practice. Without the guardrail of authorial intention the disseminating play of the text could overwhelm the critic, rendering his or her text rhetorically ineffective. Furthermore, such a rhetorically ineffective text would be incapable of deconstructing the values of meaning and of intention,

as it would be all too easy to dismiss such a text as being a non-serious work unworthy of serious attention.

While retaining authorial intention as a worthwhile guardrail necessary for a critical reading of a text, Derrida isolates the ways in which the differential play of the text always escapes, or exceeds in meaning, the conscious intentions of the author. Because the writer writes in a language which he or she cannot hope to dominate absolutely, language will always contain an excess of meaning which is other than what the author intended. If authorial intention is at work in language, then it is an intention which is always to some extent foiled by the processes of language itself. As a critical discipline, Deconstruction frequently seeks to locate the sites within the text where the excess of meaning generated by the play of the text itself actively works against the intentions of the author in question.

As Derrida's argument in *SEC* hopes to demonstrate, once authorial intention is designated as being that which is unable to control the production of a text's meaning, it becomes necessary to acknowledge that there are no absolute rules which can be formulated concerning the production of meaning. Indeed, the notion of 'meaning' is itself something akin to a 'ghost' - a 'ghost' because meaning is not fully present within the text, although neither is meaning fully absent. What is left within the text is the play of *différance* - a play which is a *dissemination* of meaning which exists beyond the confines of any set determinable meaning. It is the 'concept' of *différance*, and of *dissemination*, which clearly separates Derrida from structuralist critics. While the structuralists maintained that the meaning of a text was not to be found

in the intentions of its author, they sought to formulate the rules which governed the production of a text's meaning. Derrida's position is that there is no meaning which can be said to be *produced* by these rules. Furthermore, Derrida's critique of the unscientific value of the context demonstrates that the iterable nature of writing itself breaches the confines of any established context. A piece of writing, while being 'context bound', is always open to re-contextualisation. Derrida offers a new conception of *writing* in which all *final* meaning is forever held at bay because the possibility of such a 'final meaning' is itself impossible due to the nature of writing. In this way, the meaning of the text is paradoxically both inexhaustible and simultaneously inaccessible. *Dissemination* punctures any semantic horizon which hopes to contain and totalise all of the text's generative play into a singular reading or a polysemic meaning.

Afterword

The argument about intention as a focal point for literary theory goes on. In 1982, for instance, Stephen Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels published an article called "Against Theory", in which they argued that all contemporary theory was founded upon a mistake:

The mistake made by theorists has been to imagine the possibility or desirability of moving from one term (the author's intended meaning) to a second term (the text's meaning), when actually the two terms are the same.⁸⁴

The question of how, or why, the text's meaning is indivisible from the author's intention is never answered by Knapp and Michaels. Their reading of E. D. Hirsch's *Validity In Interpretation* serves as a lever to switch the line of argument, so that the issue instead becomes a discussion about whether or not there can be intentionless meanings. This subtle shift of argument is justified by Knapp and Michaels on the grounds that it is theory - a term still vaguely defined - which seeks to imagine intentionless meanings:

In debates about intention, the moment of imagining intentionless meaning constitutes the theoretical moment itself. From the standpoint of an argument against critical theory, then, the only important question about intention is whether there can in fact be intentionless meanings.⁸⁵

In the hope of convincing the reader that there can never be intentionless meaning, Knapp and Michaels present the following example:

Suppose that you're walking along a beach and you come upon a curious sequence of squiggles in the sand. You step back a few paces and notice that they spell out the following words:

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

This would seem to be a good case of intentionless meaning: you recognize the writing as writing, you understand what the words mean, you may even identify them as constituting a rhymed poetic stanza - and all this without knowing anything about the author and indeed without needing to connect the words to any notion of an author at all. You can do all these things without thinking of anyone's intention. But now suppose that, as you stand gazing at this pattern in the sand, a wave washes up and recedes, leaving in its wake (written below what you now realize was only the first stanza) the following words:

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.⁸⁶

Knapp and Michaels then suggest that as the witness of such a remarkable event you will begin to formulate numerous hypotheses to account for what you have just seen. While such a list of hypotheses or explanations could be expanded indefinitely, Knapp and Michaels suggest that all of the explanations would neatly fall into one of two categories:

You will either be ascribing these marks to some agent capable of intentions (the living sea, the haunting Wordsworth, etc.), or you will fount them as nonintentional effects or mechanical processes (erosion, percolation, etc.). But in the second case - where the marks now seem to be accidents - will they still seem to be words?⁸⁷

It is pertinent to note that Knapp and Michaels never

question the *readability* of the writing in the sand. In the sense that it is readable, the writing in the sand is a piece, or segment, of language. To the extent that it *is* readable, it is language, and Knapp and Michaels acknowledge that this readability occurs whether or not the reader entertains any notion of the author at all. However, while Knapp and Michaels acknowledge the unquestionable readability of the writing on the beach, they seek to assert that it could be rendered totally meaningless - a state which would have to be equivalent to being devoid of any informational content - by the reader viewing such a 'writing', *after it has been read*, as being intentionless, accidental squiggles.

Their answer to their question about whether the 'accidental marks' of the 'writing on the beach' will be seen as words is "clearly not", and their explanation follows:

It isn't poetry because it isn't language; that's what it means to call it an accident. As long as you thought the marks were poetry, you were assuming their intentional character. You had no idea who the author was, and this may have tricked you into thinking that positing an author was irrelevant to your ability to read the stanza. But in fact you had, without realizing it, already posited an author. It was only with the mysterious arrival of the second stanza that your tacit assumption (e.g. someone writing with a stick) was challenged and you realized that you had made one. Only now, when positing an author seems impossible, do you genuinely imagine the marks as authorless. But to deprive them of an author is to convert them into accidental likenesses of language. They are not, after all, an example of intentionless meaning; as soon as they become intentionless they become meaningless as well.⁸⁸

However, it is possible to reach a conclusion other than that presented by Knapp and Michaels about the 'writing on the sand'. Rather than arrive at the conclusion

that as soon as the writing is considered to be intentionless it thus becomes meaningless, one can consider the fact that even without a postulated author, or intention, the writing remains legible, even to the degree of having a recognizable poetic form. In what way does any *readable* 'text' become *meaningless* as a result of speculations concerning whether or not intentions reside 'behind' the text? Instead of tackling the question of the readability of the writing of the text, Knapp and Michaels concern themselves with the question of whether or not the writing is *mimetic*, or representational, in the sense that it represents the intentions of its author. For Knapp and Michaels, the only meaning a text is permitted to have is a mimetic one; the text either represents an authorial 'meaning' or it does not. If the latter of these two options is the case, then the marks in question merely resemble language and one is to forget everything about them, including how one was able to read them in the first place. But the reader can read the writing on the beach as being a *likeness* of language, *as if* authored, and so experience a *simulation* of meaning and of authorial intention.⁸⁹ Indeed, there would be no discernable difference between such a 'simulated' intention and a 'real' one, which is why the writing on the beach - as an example of all writing - remains legible regardless of such considerations as whether or not it is 'real' or a simulation, or whether or not represents an authorial intention etc. As a general condition of such a readability, Knapp and Michaels are quite correct to assert the possibility of a mimetic reading as one which postulates the representation of an authorial intention. It is always possible to posit an intention for a piece of writing, and this possibility is part of the graphematic structure of the mark. Meanings, in this way, can always be considered to be mimetic. Readability, however, occurs whether or not any consideration of intention is performed by the reader.

The argument of "Against Theory" is that a reading which considers the meaning of the text to be merely the representation of an authorial intention is, in itself, somehow a non-theoretical one. Literary criticism, however, has consistently displayed a concern with the relationship between authorial intention, the language of the text, and the production of meaning, a concern which has often been expressed in a theoretical manner. To claim that works which assert the priority of authorial intention in the determination of a text's meaning - Hirsch's *Validity In Interpretation*, for example - are somehow non-theoretical projects is to misread contemporary literary criticism. Commenting on "Against Theory", Adena Rosmarin notes that "Their choice of premises displays - or assumes - an ignorance of the historical and contemporary contexts in which they write".⁹⁰ A part of this 'ignorance' of 'historical and contemporary contexts' is Knapp and Michaels's failure to investigate the metaphysical basis of their own argument.

The effect of deconstruction on literary criticism has been to bring about a rigorous questioning of the metaphysics of presence, and of the way in which such a metaphysics is embedded in Western conceptions of meaning and language. Within literary criticism, deconstruction has sought to demonstrate how claims for a return to 'authorial intention' as a ground for determining the meaning of a text are themselves constituted by a 'logocentric' metaphysics. Deconstruction demonstrates that any notion of a choice between 'authorial intention' and 'literary theory' as being between mutually exclusive options is illusory, since to affirm authorial intention as a ground for interpretation is to engage in a theoretical activity.

While it is still too early to determine the extent of deconstruction's effect on literary criticism, it is clear by now that there can be no return to any so-called 'non-theoretical' practice. Deconstruction

is neither for nor against theory *per se*; it rather questions the metaphysical basis and limits of theory in general. Deconstruction states that there can be no theory which could fully account, or totalise, the 'meaning', or play of 'meanings', within the text, since the play of *différance* would always punctuate and exceed such a proposed totalisation. Above all, deconstruction offers a new vision of the text as being more than a representation of authorial intention or as being a structure open to a complete formalization of the rules which might 'determine' the 'meaning' of the work. Rather, the meaning of 'meaning' and of intention as pure presence is questioned. Deconstruction, above all else, offers a fresh conception of the text as *différance*, and as *dissemination*.

Notes

¹Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (London: Methuen 1982), p.67.

²Speaking of the *événements* of 1968, Jacques Derrida says in "The time of a thesis: punctuations," in Philosophy in France Today, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge University Press, 1983), that "Things were so intertwined and overdetermined that I cannot even begin to say what was the impact on me, on my work and my teaching, on my relationship to university institutions or to the domain of cultural representation of that event which one still does not know how to name other than by its date, 1968, without ever having any very clear idea of just what it is one is naming in this way" (pp.43-44).

³As an example of a 'crude' dismissal of deconstruction, consider this statement by Geoffrey Thurley in his book Counter-Modernism in Current Critical Theory (London: Macmillan, 1983): "De-constructionism is less a philosophy than the decadence of a philosophy. It retails the metaphysics of silence and inexpressibility adumbrated by the symbolist poets and Henri Bergson. Like the decadent idealists who trailed along in the wake of Schopenhauer at about the same time as symbolism arose, deconstructionism leaves the world unapproached: the world and its concerns must wait while the logomaniac de-constructionist goes through his mantric rituals, rather as an indulgent grown-up might wait dumbly upon the whims of an autistic child" (p.200).

⁴For a concise introduction to the New Critics see David Robey, "Anglo-American New Criticism," in Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction, ed. Ann Jefferson and David Robey (London: Batsford Academic, 1982), pp.65-83.

⁵W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Internationalist Fallacy," in W. K. Wimsatt, The Verbal Icon (New York: The Noonday Press, 1954), pp.2-18 (rpt. from Sewanee Review, 54 [Winter, 1946]).

⁶Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy," in The Verbal Icon, pp.19-39 (rpt. from Sewanee Review, 57 [Winter, 1949]).

⁷Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.107.

⁸For a concise distinction between the iconic and the symbolic sign, see The Verbal Icon, p.x.

⁹E. D. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p.5.

¹⁰Hirsch, p.24.

¹¹Hirsch, p.25.

¹²Hirsch, p.51.

¹³Hirsch, p.66.

¹⁴Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, trans. Wade Baskin (London: Peter Owen, revised edn. 1974), p.120.

¹⁵Saussure, p.116.

¹⁶Of course, we presume that there is a pre-existing object which is being differentiated as part of the continuum. For Derrida, what is of importance here is that language need *not* refer to a pre-existing object for language to have a certain sense. Speaking of the non-referential capacity of language, Jacques Derrida says in a discussion of Roland Barthes's essay "To Write: Intransitive Verb?," in The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1970), that "When I say, 'the worm is off,' it is obvious that this sentence does not make sense, because it is not in accordance with what Husserl called the rules of pure logical grammar. Husserl would say that it is not language. But when I say 'the circle is square,' my sentence respects the rules of grammaticality, and if it is a *contre-sens*, at least it is not nonsense. The proof is that I can say that the sentence is false, that there is no such object. The rules of pure grammaticality are observed and therefore my language signifies, in spite of the lack of object. That means that the power of meaning of language is, to a point, independent of the possibility of its object. 'I am dead' has a meaning if it is obviously false. 'I am dead' is an intelligible sentence. Therefore, 'I am dead' is not only a possible proposition for one who is known to be living, but the very condition for the living person to speak is for him to be able to say, significantly, 'I am dead'" (p.156).

¹⁷Saussure, p.113.

¹⁸Jacques Derrida, Positions, trans. Alan Bass (London: Athlone Press, 1981), pp.19-20. Parentheses added.

¹⁹Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and

Kegan Paul, 1978), p.281.

²⁰Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.73.

²¹Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification," in Writing and Difference, p.16.

²²Derrida, "Force and Signification," p.26.

²³Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," p.279.

²⁴Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," p.280.

²⁵Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," p.289. This passage is also translated in The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1970), as "If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infinity 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 fact that of *freeplay*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble. This field permits these 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 centre which arrests and founds

the freeplay of substitutions" (p.260). In his Introduction to Derrida's Writing and Difference Allan Bass states that his translation of "Structure, Sign, and Play" is a revision of the translation presented by Macksey and Donato in The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy.

²⁶For a general introduction to the post-structuralist position, see Robert Young's introduction to Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp.1-28.

²⁷Derrida, Positions, p.49.

²⁸For Derrida's reading of Rousseau's Essay on the Origin of Languages, see Of Grammatology, pp.141-316.

²⁹Derrida, Of Grammatology, pp.303-304.

³⁰For a concise account of the 'supplement', see Josué V. Harari's Introduction to Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism, ed. Josué Harari (New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp.33-38.

³¹I am indebted to Jonathan Culler's point in his book On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), that critics "... invoke the hope of saying the last word, arresting the process of commentary. In fact, this hope of getting it right is what inspires critics to write, even though they simultaneously know that writing never puts an end to writing. Paradoxically, the more powerful and authoritative an interpretation, the more writing it generates" (p.90).

³²Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.158. The phrase can also be translated as "There is no outside-text".

³³Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.159.

³⁴Jacques Derrida, "Living On: Borderlines," in Deconstruction and Criticism, Bloom et al. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp.75-76.

³⁵Derrida, "Living On: Borderlines," p.84.

³⁶I am indebted to Alan Bass for pointing out, in an excellent note to his translation of Derrida's Writing and Difference, Derrida's critique of Structuralism's totalitarian nature: "Throughout Writing and Difference Derrida links the concept of *différance* to his play on the words *totalitarian* and *solicitation*. He sees structuralism as a form of philosophical totalitarianism, i.e. as an attempt to account for the totality of a phenomenon by reduction of it to a formula that governs it *totally*" (p.xvi).

³⁷In his essay "Signature Event Context," Glyph 1 (1977), 172-197, rpt. in Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), Derrida states that "Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practise an *overturning* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system" (p.329).

³⁸It is my opinion that this rhetorical figure owes something to M. C. Escher's Drawing Hands (lithograph, 1948).

³⁹Derrida, Positions, pp.41-42. The word 'reestablishes' is spelt as in the Athlone Press edition.

⁴⁰For a full account of the difficulties involved in Saussure's recourse to speech, see Derrida, Of

Grammatology, pp.30-44.

⁴¹Saussure, p.24. The italics are Derrida's; see Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.36.

⁴²Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.36.

⁴³Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.5.

⁴⁴Henceforth referred to as the Essai.

⁴⁵There is an obvious similarity here between Rousseau's preference for speech over writing and that of Saussure's. In drawing out Rousseau's preference for speech, Derrida hopes to show that Saussure, despite his revolutionary break with other theorists of language before him, is himself a member of the logocentric tradition.

⁴⁶For the sake of concision I have reduced the argument of Rousseau's Essai to its barest essentials. For a more detailed account of Rousseau's argument, see the latter half of Of Grammatology.

⁴⁷Derrida, Of Grammatology, pp.144-145. In French the word *supplément* means both a substitute and an addition.

⁴⁸Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.245.

⁴⁹Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.157.

⁵⁰"... the methodological considerations that we risk applying here to an example are closely dependent on general propositions that we have elaborated above; as regards the absence of the referent or transcendental signified. *There is nothing outside of the text*

[there is no outside text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]" (Of Grammatology, p.158).

⁵¹Paul de Man's reading of Derrida's reading of Rousseau constitutes just such another deconstructive reading. For de Man the aporia of Derrida's reading of Rousseau lies in Derrida's construing of Rousseau's intention. See Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), Chapter 7, "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau".

⁵²Derrida, Of Grammatology, pp.157-164.

⁵³Derrida, Of Grammatology, pp.157-158.

⁵⁴This strategy is repeated in Derrida's reading of the word *pharmakon* in Plato's Phaedrus, in Dissemination (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982): "The word *pharmakon* is caught in a chain of significations. The play of that chain seems systematic. But the system here is not, simply that of the intentions of the author who goes by the name of Plato. The system is not primarily that of what someone *meant-to-say* (*un vouloir-dire*). Finely regulated communications are established, through the play of language, among diverse functions of the word and within it, among diverse strata or regions of culture. These communications or corridors of meaning can sometimes be declared or clarified by Plato when he plays upon them 'voluntarily,' a word we put in quotation marks because what it designates, to content ourselves with remaining within the closure of these oppositions, is only a mode of 'submission' to the necessities of a given 'language'. None of these concepts can translate the relation we are aiming at here. Then again, in other cases, Plato can *not* see the links, can leave them in the shadow or break

them up. And yet these links go on working of themselves. In spite of him? thanks to him? in *his* text? *outside* his text? but then where? between his text and the language? for what reader? at what moment? To answer such questions in principle and in general will seem impossible, and that will give us the suspicion that there is some malformation in the question itself, in each of its concepts, in each of the oppositions it thus accredits" (pp.95-96). In a footnote Derrida adds, "With a few precautions, one could say that *pharmakon* plays a role analogous, in this reading of Plato, to that of *supplement* in the reading of Rousseau" (p.96).

⁵⁵For de Man, in Blindness and Insight, the question is rather one of how Derrida knows that the text does not 'know' that it will be both misread and misunderstood, see Blindness and Insight, p.136.

⁵⁶Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.158.

⁵⁷Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.158.

⁵⁸Anthony Easthope writing on the classic addresser-addressee model of communication in his book Poetry as Discourse (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1983) states that "The classic diagram of language as communication is offered by Jakobson. His 'concise survey of the constitutive factors in any speech event, in any act of verbal communication' specifies six factors. Three ('CONTEXT', 'CONTACT', 'CODE') function as 'means' by which the act of communication takes place and three define the event itself, 'The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE' (Jakobson, 1960, p.353). All these factors are schematized as follows:



There are two necessary conditions for this model. One is that language should be conceived as a more or less transparent 'medium' for communication. The other is that the subject, whether as 'addresser' or 'addressee', should be assumed to be a self-sufficient 'individual', given prior to language, standing outside language, and so be able to intend and communicate a message *through* it" (pp.10-11). The text to which Easthope is referring is Roman Jakobson's "Concluding statement: linguistics and poetics," in T. A. Sebeok (ed.) Style in Language (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960).

⁵⁹J. L. Austin How to Do Things with Words (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

⁶⁰These texts being John R. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," Glyph, 1 (1977), 198-208, and Derrida's subsequent reply to Searle, "Limited Inc: abc.," trans. Samuel Weber, in Glyph, 2 (1977), 162-254. The context is open ended because the number of texts contributing to this debate continues to grow, making it one of the most lively debates in contemporary criticism. These other texts include Stanley E. Fish "With the compliments of the Author: Reflections on Austin and Derrida", Critical Inquiry, 8, 4 (Summer 1982), 693-721; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model: Derrida's Limited Inc.," Diacritics, 10, 4 (1980), 29-49; Samuel Weber, "It," Glyph, 4 (1978), 1-29.

⁶¹Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in Margins of Philosophy, p.309. Hereafter referred to as 'SEC'.

⁶²Derrida, SEC, p.309

⁶³Derrida, in SEC, writes "Is there a rigorous and scientific concept of the *context*? Does not the notion of context harbor, behind a certain confusion,

very determined philosophical pre-suppositions?
 To state it now in the most summary fashion, I would like to demonstrate why a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather in what way its determination is never certain or saturated" (p.310).

⁶⁴Derrida, SEC, p.315.

⁶⁵Derrida, SEC, pp.310-311.

⁶⁶It is not the aim of this thesis to discuss, in depth, the work of J. L. Austin. What is of importance here are the issues of authorial intention, the production of meaning, the value of context, and the discussion of these issues in Derrida's reading of Austin's How To Do Things with Words. For an account of Derrida's reading of Austin see Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction, pp.110-134.

⁶⁷Commenting on the difference between the performative and the constative utterance Derrida, in "Signature Event Context," writes "Differing from the classical assertion, from the constative utterance, the performative's referent (although the word is inappropriate here, no doubt, such is the interest of Austin's finding) is not outside it, or in any case preceding it or before it. It does not describe something which exists outside and before language. It produces or transforms a situation, it operates; and if it can be said that a constative utterance also effectuates something and always transforms a situation, it cannot be said that this constitutes its internal structure, its manifest function or destination, as in the case of the performative" (p.321).

⁶⁸Derrida, SEC, p.322. Given Derrida's remarks concerning *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* determination a definition of these terms is required. Jonathan Culler,

in On Deconstruction, concisely points out that Austin "... proposes a distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. When I say 'This chair is broken', I perform the *locutionary* act of uttering a particular English sentence and the *illocutionary* act of stating, warning, proclaiming, or complaining. (There is also what Austin calls a *perlocutionary* act, the act I may accomplish by my performance of the locutionary and illocutionary acts: by arguing I may *persuade* you, by proclaiming something I may *bring you to know* it.) The rules of the linguistic system account for the meaning of the locutionary act; the goal of speech act theory is to account for the meaning of the illocutionary act or, as Austin calls it, the illocutionary force of an utterance" (pp.113-114).

⁶⁹Derrida, SEC, p.322.

⁷⁰Derrida, SEC, p.323.

⁷¹Derrida, SEC, p.323.

⁷²Derrida, SEC, p.325.

⁷³Derrida is quick to point out in SEC that the citational nature of the performative is *not* of the same type as "... in a play, a philosophical reference, or the recitation of a poem" (p.326). Derrida acknowledges within SEC that there is a difference between the word by word recitation of a poem, or a speech from a play, and the general iterability involved in the execution of the pure performative. This relative purity, however, is "... not constructed *against* citationality or iterability, but against other kinds of iteration within a general iterability which is the effraction into the allegedly rigorous purity of every event of discourse or every speech act" (p.326).

⁷⁴For example, there is a joke in which a judge goes to a dentist complaining of a sore wisdom tooth, which obviously needs to be pulled. "Make sure you get the whole tooth out, roots and all," instructs the judge. "Don't worry, Judge," replies the dentist, "I promise to pull the tooth, the whole tooth, and nothing but the tooth." In this joke, the success of the punch-line lies in its correspondence to a performative utterance with which it is similar though not identical. The point here is that the absolute context of the joke is somewhat indeterminable as the success of the punch-line resides in its degree of correspondence to *another* performative utterance which is not 'present' within the punch-line itself. Austin would most probably denounce this joke as being a *non-serious*, parasitical use of language. However the immediate *context* surrounding this joke, which is one of its being 'used' to help clarify an academic and unquestionably *serious* assertion concerning the iterable structure of writing, itself would disrupt any attempt at convincingly labelling the joke 'non-serious'. Derrida's argument in SEC is that it is this ability to be re-contextualised which structures writing and which renders the opposition serious/non-serious as one fraught with a variety of difficulties. Given the nature of the joke, and the account of the joke as an *example*, is this footnote serious or non-serious? For a further discussion of the difficulties inherent in the serious/non-serious opposition, and the way in which these difficulties relate to the iterable structure of writing, see Derrida's Limited Inc..

⁷⁵Derrida, SEC, p.326.

⁷⁶Derrida, SEC, p.326.

⁷⁷In Limited Inc., Derrida writes that "... the unique character of this structure of iterability, or rather of

this chain, since iterability can be supplemented by a variety of terms (such as *différance*, grapheme, trace etc.), lies in the fact that, comprising identity and difference, repetition and alteration etc., it renders the *project* of idealization possible without lending '*itself*' to any pure, simple, and idealizable conceptualization" (p.210).

⁷⁸A repetition cannot, by definition, be a 'thing' fully present to 'itself'. See Samuel Weber, "It," Glyph, 4 (1978), 1-29.

⁷⁹Derrida, "Signature Event Context," p.318.

⁸⁰Derrida, "Limited Inc.," p.213. Obviously it is not within the confines of this thesis to discuss, at length, what is rapidly becoming known as 'Post-structuralist psychology'. What is of concern is Derrida's critique of intention, a critique which uses, as one of its strategies, Freud's situating of the ego as a *riposte* against any concept of the individual as a *fully present* subject.

⁸¹Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model: Derrida's Limited Inc.," Diacritics, 10, 4 (1980), 33.

⁸²Derrida, "Signature Event Context," p.329. The word *dissemination* itself implies a dispersal of *semes* like semen, an explosion of a generative and of a sexual nature.

⁸³Derrida, Positions, p.45.

⁸⁴Stephen Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," Critical Inquiry, 8, 4 (Summer 1982), 724.

⁸⁵Knapp and Michaels, p.727.

⁸⁶Knapp and Michaels, p.727.

⁸⁷Knapp and Michaels, p.728.

⁸⁸Knapp and Michaels, p.728.

⁸⁹I am indebted to my tutor, Dr. Warwick Slinn, for this point.

⁹⁰Adena Rosmarin, "On the Theory of 'Against Theory'," Critical Inquiry, 9, 4 (June 1983), 779.

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