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## The Meaning of Being in Speech: Language, Narrative, and Thought

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MEANING OF BEING IN SPEECH: LANGUAGE, NARRATIVE, AND  
THOUGHT

by

LEAH KAPLAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for  
the Honors in the Major Program in Philosophy  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I will follow the works of Jacques Derrida and Hans-Georg Gadamer, reconciling both thinkers by providing a reflection on the necessary and foundational conditions for the experience of meaning. A reflection on Jacques Derrida's formulations on *différance*, trace, absence, presence, clôture, and hospitality, alongside Gadamer's critical hermeneutics on the aesthetics of play and interpretation will open up this tension and provide a new relation for the possibility for meaning.

By reconciling these two philosophers it will become apparent that the Self-Other relationship, the activ-ity of *difference*, and the trace, all condition a space for heterogeneity within linguistic, hermeneutic, and narrative meaning. It is my case here that we must submit to the multiplicity of identities of meaning in language and reformulate the idea of meaning as a development that emerges not from a radically subjective consciousness, but constituted by absence, history as trace, and most importantly the 'Other.'

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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These individuals are “the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes ‘Awww!’”

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## INTRODUCTION

In the post-metaphysical era we are confronted with the challenge of anti-foundational thought, one in which absolute and essential meaning are torn from structures and critically examined for flaws, its affinity to exclude, and failure to reconcile its assumptions of pure presence. It is here that my project continues the task of critical examination of the structures in question, analyzing what one can say after the departure from the hegemony of Western metaphysical thought and furthermore, and more importantly how are *we* to *speak* of being as meaning-ful after the vessel has been emptied.

Following the ideologies of Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche, the task of actively creating meaning has posed a challenge for language in philosophical discourse. This thesis will provide a perspective on the phenomenological, epistemological, and ontological implications of meaning as reflected in language and narrative. It is my case here that we must submit to the multiplicity of difference of identities in language and reformulate the idea of the meaning as a development that emerges not from a radically subjective consciousness, but is constituted by absence, history as trace, and most importantly the hospitality of the 'Other.'

Both the projects of hermeneutics and deconstruction represent the various positions of understanding by overcoming authority, institutionalized conventions, norms, and beliefs, asserting that conflicting interpretations give way to a plurality of thought. Hannah Arendt explained this "action necessary to create a public realm in which individuals coexist freely while protecting the private space required for personal development" (Hermeneutic

Communism 77). The project of interpreting texts has been imbued with the patriarchy of Western metaphysics, assuming a final and essential meaning that urges us to unveil it from its central location. However, the departure from the metaphysical assumptions of presence in language is where deconstruction and hermeneutics depart from the classical philosophical tradition of metaphysics, opting for a critical examination of language, while submitting to the inescapable nature of discourse as metaphysically absent.

The standard interpretation of symbolic language within myth and fable has given way to major narratives that have since become problematic, bringing forth Gayatri Spivak's Post-Colonial Theory that illuminates the problems of the marginalized such as the post-colonial subject. The exclusive nature of language throughout Western tradition has made a victim of alterity, the 'Other,' where cultural piracy has taken place and the images and narratives of the subaltern emerge not from the groups themselves, but from the power of the culturally dominant.

Following the emergence of the practices of Hermeneutics and Deconstruction, philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Hans Georg Gadamer have brought forth the importance of a critical and close examination of the word/world as produced by the speaker and interpreted by the reader in the 20th and 21st century, calling for a form of emancipation and freedom from the philosophy that restricts personal thought within the practice of active and passive interpretation. While both philosophers make known the inability to escape the historical situatedness of the subject, Derrida presents a critical lens of the past, while Gadamer attempts to provide a practice of 'reading' for the future.

I will outline the principal works of Jacques Derrida and Hans Georg-Gadamer in an attempt to elucidate ‘what’ we mean, ‘how’ we mean, and ‘why’ we mean through narrative in order to derive a concept of understanding and meaning amongst the data of the world in which we, as both individuals and communal beings, belong.

I will reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Derrida, bringing them together under the assumptions that both deconstruction and hermeneutics overlap in their critical assessment of the text and provide the conditions for the interpretation of meaning outside of objective and standard understanding and amongst the difference of the ‘Other.’

First, the question ‘what do you mean?’ Assuming that one has the faculties to convey ‘what’ an experience *is*, meaning serves to articulate, clarify, and further explicate the sensed phenomena that pervades the experience of auto-affection. The thing experienced as such is always already absent, which goes to say that what we encounter in the world is never fully present or available to be fully explicated. You, the personal experiencer, the individual who in part interprets an experience in order to summarize and communicate a sense of understanding, serve to mediate between the experience as experienced and the language used to convey it

How the author/speaker means when he or she re-presents mental content through speech/writing is the communicative medium of language through ‘text’ inundated with signs, symbols, metaphors, tone, and other figurative language to express an abstract thought. The author of the text inscribes thought into the world for the reader to interpret, a permeable relationship between speaker and listener. From here, the reader/listener assumes the position of

translator, burdened with the task of deciphering the words and taking note of each symbol and acknowledging the multiple and infinite understandings that may be derived from the text. What does it mean to have knowledge of meanings and discern from syntax the semantics of words? Does an interpretation of an expression reveal the truth of its content?

The practices of Hermeneutics and Deconstruction assume dangerous implications, as the various experiences within the phenomena of the world, such as the speaker/interpreter relationship, risk applying too much or too little meaning or power to the text, marking the impossibility of speech/writing as a complete and totalizing system. This is the point of departure from metaphysics for both Derridean Deconstruction and Gadamerian Hermeneutics, as they both see the impracticality of promoting universal and objective truths.

The most ambiguous question to be explored in this thesis is why we mean? Why do we as finite beings, express thought through the limits of language, and choose to symbolize the world through myth and fable as a means of communicating the variety of experiences we encounter as cultural beings? Can we derive a sense of meaning in the world without being *under* a structure of master interpretations, but rather within or amongst varied interpretations?

What things may we I-identify, how are we able to communicate the feelings we experience and how are they meaningful? Reflecting on these statements we will come to understand that the process of I-identification is not isolated to the subjective experience, but plural and varied in relation to an 'Other.'

The process of identification is not isolated and as the word cannot exist as a singular term, the being that 'means' must do so amongst other meanings. Although these abstract

emotive sensations have no tangible identities, we must feel compelled to bring forth the question of what it means to experience (phenomenology), judge (hermeneutics), and come to understand these experiences in the world, not singularly but communally.

As authors and interpreters of experience we are provoked into action by experience. As all experience is varied, the problem of understanding and re-presenting the world poses an obstacle for an argument for universality and thus one must seek out alternative ideologies to free ourselves from the grips of objectivity through consulting the 'Other.'

The art of speech/writing, as we will come to see, is not an exclusive non-event, as it veils and unveils something about the world, through a process of de-identification and re-identification, communicating and coming together in a space that relies on the hospitality of exchange. The relationship with the 'Other,' that which is not same but distinct from the 'I' reveals the plurality of existence while providing an understanding of the pre-expressive elements of the world, ones that we translate into language in order to move from a space of human experience to interplay of thought.

To trace the search for meaning, I will initially explore the limits of language and the metaphysical challenges to *presence*. The concept of presence is one that is associated with the immediacy of the text and becomes a major topic of discussion for Derrida in his arguments on the *absence* in speech. Furthermore, I will discuss the implications of polysemy, plurality of senses for a name within the tradition of post-metaphysical thought. As the word is always exceeded by the senses that it may portray, the reader/interpreter must always account for that which cannot be said.

I will use Jacques Derrida's early literature of the 20th century to provide reflections on *différance*, trace, clôtüre, absence, presence, and later works of the 21st century to analyze his concept of 'unconditional hospitality.' In order to provide a phenomenological approach to being at the behest of differences, this thesis will accept the limits of language, incomplete history, and the absence of the 'Other' in order to provide an argument for meaning through differences.

In the following sections I suggest a meaning through interpretation, a practice of symbolic discourse proposed by practitioners of hermeneutics. I will analyze the tradition of hermeneutics, and assess the practice as a mode of understanding that generates an open discourse for interpretation through symbolic thought. Moreover, in reviewing Gadamer's phenomenological formulation of *play* and interpretation, I will illuminate the parallel of aesthetic play within the ontology of the work of art, to Derrida's *différance* as the structural foundation for heterogeneity within the aesthetic and linguistic consciousness. In addition, I will provide a review of Gadamer's fusion of horizons, providing the foundations for the following sections on the hospitality of the 'Other.' The democratic phenomenon of play suggested by Gadamer provides a similar space of differences as suggested by Derrida in his formulations on *différance*.

To bring this discourse to a near-closure, I will engage the phenomena of meaning-through-narrative as a symbolic form of understanding in the world. Paul Ricoeur will be summoned in an attempt to formulate a fragile, yet effective notion of narrative identity.

The search for meaning will continue in the 'conclusion' in the form of welcoming the 'Other' through hospitality. While providing an understanding of the wholly 'Other' as a guide

to identifying the self I will reference Derrida's later texts on hospitality as a form of preserving differences, which will furthermore bring the 'Other' to light as a victim of what Derrida calls 'the worst.' Finally, later works by Derrida on politics and discourse allow for a reconciliation of his ideas on language and personal perspectives on hospitality and forgiveness, providing the breath from which I bring life to meaning through the 'Other.'

## THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

### The Mark of Difference

Whence we embark on the journey through language we find ourselves in a space of ambiguity, suspended in the milieu of irreducible words while grasping to interpret and understand the phenomena presented to us in the world. Further, the encounter with the world is always already subject to the symbolic representation through the encounter with the text, leaving open the possibility for multiple interpretations and analyses of being in language.

Jacques Derrida, the philosopher known for his participation in the formulation and development of deconstruction, brought the world of ideology (psychoanalysis, sociology, history, and philosophy) under scrutiny in the 1960s for its over-determinacy of essential meanings of terms, ultimately opening the field for the abandonment of logocentric thought. Derrida rejects language as the ultimate understanding of something as something, the assumption that under specific epistemological premises, the meaning of the uttered word may be grasped as a universal and rational truth no matter the unique historical context.

Deconstruction invites the reader to acknowledge the textual indeterminacies within language and the failure of speech/writing to effectively encompass the totality of one's experiences, thoughts, and ideas. Within the discipline of philosophy and the practice of deconstruction one is left with the responsibility of reexamining *all* ideological concepts and

“unsewing the symbolic order in its general structure and in its modifications, in the general and determined forms of sociality.”<sup>1</sup>

Deconstruction *is* a phenomenon, a “happening” in which one attempts to depart from the standard interpretation within supposed systems while simultaneously looking back to the origin (trace) to understand where *we* came from. We have to analyze the history and the historicity of the breaks which have produced our current world out of Greece, for instance, out of Christianity, out of this origin, and breaking and transforming this origin, at the same time. So, there is the tension.<sup>2</sup>

Deconstruction *is* a phenomenon amongst which the conditions of the text are always already found. It is not under, but within the structures of *différance*, along the lines of the *trace*, and towards *clôture*, that deconstruction of the text operates. Deconstruction proceeds from and at the limit of the text.<sup>3</sup> In reconciling the hermeneutic and deconstructive practice we find a parallel between the tension of Derridean theories of language and Gadamer’s elemental theories of hermeneutics, allowing for the departure from the assumption that de-construction is an annihilation, acknowledging the limits of unity while bringing forth the condition of heterogeneity. “We need unity, some gathering, some configuration. You see, pure unity or pure

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida, Jacques, Alan Bass, and Henri Ronse. *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 85.

<sup>2</sup> Derrida, Jacques and John D. Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell : A Conversation with Jacques*. Edited by John D. Caputo New York : Fordham University Press, 1997,8.

<sup>3</sup> Rodolfe Gasché. *Inventions of Difference : On Jacques Derrida*. (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press), 1994.

multiplicity — when there is only totality or unity and when there is only multiplicity or dissociation — is a synonym of death.”<sup>4</sup> Derrida situates the multiple within the total, calling upon singularity as neither total nor fragmented. Gadamer expresses similar sentiments in *Truth and Method*:

That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us — not just what is clearly grounded-always has power over our attitudes and behavior.<sup>5</sup>

The Gadamerian pursuit of knowledge through interpretation allows one to realize the relevance of Derrida’s philosophical assertions as a discourse on traditional thought as a means of liberation from the system of hegemony while working *within* the tradition. Searching for incompatibilities and questioning the certainty of textual interpretation allows for the infinite task of reformulating our attempts to understand the data belonging to the world.

### **Language and Thought**

The structure of language historically founded upon the tradition of metaphysics, argues Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, suggests a metaphysics of presence, an instance in which language

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<sup>4</sup> Derrida, Jacques and John D. Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell : A Conversation with Jacques Derrida / Edited with a Commentary by John D. Caputo*. (New York : Fordham University Press, 1997), 38.

<sup>5</sup> *Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989; 2nd rev., 1989), 281.

holds essential meaning and directly corresponds to the word. The science of writing, signified by the word “Grammatology,” is the challenge Derrida brought in 1967 to the human sciences, suggesting that “either writing was never a simple ‘supplement,’ or it is urgently necessary to construct a new logic of the supplement.”<sup>6</sup>

Here we will trace back to the Structuralist theory within the field of Linguistics. Ferdinand De Saussure, a Swiss linguist suggested that “the world consists of independently existing objects, capable of precise objective observation and classification.”<sup>7</sup> Signs, according to Saussure’s study of language, can be scientifically reduced to a model of signifier (sign or word) directly referring to a signified (object). The sign, as detailed in semiology, the study of signs, provides a bond between the origin, the referent (signified) and the end (meaning), creating a tripartite relationship between object, word, and meaning. The epistemological phonologism of Structuralist thought establishes language as a science, a master-model presupposing a linguistic and metaphysical phonologism that raises speech above writing. Accordingly, Saussure accounts for the structural and historical dimensions of language that allow for an emergence of two concepts, *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is characterized by the abstract, homogenous system of ‘language,’ while *parole* refers to the speech act<sup>8</sup>, the application of the abstract structure of the *langue*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; 1st American ed, 1976), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Terrence Hawkes, *Structuralism & Semiotics* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1977), 19.

<sup>8</sup> J.L Austin, Marina Sbisa, and J. O. Urmson. *How to do Things with Word:* (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 1975), 10. J.L Austin’s Speech Act Theory in *How to Do Things With Words*, describes locutionary, perlocutionary, and illocutionary acts. Locutionary acts are those defined by performance (meaningful), the act in

Saussure argues that the deployment of words exists within a structure that relates sign and meaning, and what makes a single term ‘meaningful’ is not its individual quality, but the difference between one term and another. The system of oppositions is linked within a chain that creates a fundamental relationship between words like cat and hat, phonetically distinguishable from one another to allow for different meanings to arise.<sup>10</sup> Saussure was the first to make known the arbitrariness of the word, revealing that the network of oppositions between signs allows for their differential and distinct character. Derrida adopted the tradition of Structuralism, giving way to his movement of *différance* within the ‘happening’ of deconstruction.

*Différance* is a spacing, a “possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system, and process in general.”<sup>11</sup> I will further explain *différance* in the ensuing sections, for now on to Semiology. Derrida has often been held accountable for starting the movement of Neo-structuralism, as he rejects the *structure* of linguistics, the systematic arrangement of signs to meanings as a *presence* of relationships that govern each other, for failing to account for the limitations of the *form* of language, opting instead for a spacing of nested oppositions *between* words. The emphasis on the locus *between* signs is the effort on Derrida’s part to abandon the Structuralist’s binary system of oppositions, bringing a wider scope to the structure of

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saying something in terms of convention the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act is one of non-convention that brings about affect. “We can similarly distinguish the locutionary act ‘he said that . . .’ from the illocutionary act ‘he argued that. . .and the perlocutionary act ‘he convinced me that . . .’”

<sup>9</sup> Terrence Hawkes, *Structuralism & Semiotics* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1977), 19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference, Translated by Alan Bass* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 140.

differences, opening up the strict dichotomy, while making room for the infinite possibilities of meanings within language. The implications of assuming immediate *presence* in the sign gives authority to the “form-of-presence, presence-in-form, form-presence,” overlooking the plural nature of the word when deployed within different contexts which is always subject to substitution and re-appropriation.<sup>12</sup>

Language itself is menaced in its very life, helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness, brought back to its own finitude at the very moment when its limits seem to disappear, when it ceases to be self assured, contained, and guaranteed by the infinite signified which seemed to exceed it.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the linguistic sign according to Derrida is one that always already fails at its attempt to wholly signify the signified. In utilizing the medium of language, one attempts to accept *sense* and construct it into *form*, bringing forth the problem of such a medium in its attempt to signify a lower stratum of experience in its *essential* nature, implying a transparency of thought and language. As a phenomenological practice, language is seen as a medium to communicate or express, burdened with the infinite task of finding the words to articulate a *feeling* and in doing so, the words fail to duplicate the *feelings* and thus the entire problem of language is its habitual incompleteness at finding absolute representation in meaning. *Margins of Philosophy*, a work that examines the relevance of the *limit* of philosophy, that the deficiency of language is its limited

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Margins of Philosophy*, Translated by Alan Bass Chicago : (University of Chicago Press, 1982), 172.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; 1st American ed, 1976), 6.

capacity to communicate what Edmund Husserl, the principal founder of Phenomenology calls, “the preexpressive stratum.” In his analysis of Husserl’s phenomenology of meaning, Derrida explains that “it lies in the meaning of the generality that belongs to the essential nature of the expressing function that it would not ever be possible for all the specifications of the expressed to be reflected (*sich reflektieren*) in the expression.”<sup>14</sup>

Gadamer expresses similar sentiments in his departure from essential meanings, as he asserts the difficulty of interpreting language as a problem of understanding. Gadamer states that we can no longer hold on to the idea that meaning lay ready in the latent content of the text, rather, he states that the “problems of verbal expression are themselves problems of understanding.”<sup>15</sup>

Gadamer refers to all ‘texts’ as alien and abstract expressions, further concluding that language belongs to a process of understanding which always implies misunderstanding. Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, utilizes the same lexicon to convey the ‘alien’ nature of the text, as it is secondary from the moment we think a thing, symbolically represent it in speech, and further abstract the mental experience in written words.<sup>16</sup> Here we find that both Derrida and Gadamer focus on the nebulous nature of language, which lends itself to misunderstanding and

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<sup>14</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy / Jacques Derrida ; Translated, with Additional Notes, by Alan Bass* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1982, 168

<sup>15</sup> *Philosophical Hermeneutics / Hans-Georg Gadamer ; Translated and Edited by David E. Linge* Berkeley : University of California Press, 1976, 390.

<sup>16</sup> *Of Grammatology* introduces us to the idea that speech and writing are not exclusive but the same in their ability/inability to rep-present the mental experience. “From the moment that one considers the totality of determined signs, spoken, and a fortiori written, as unmotivated institutions, one must exclude any relationship of natural subordination, any natural hierarchy among signifiers or orders of signifiers. The grapheme and the phoneme are not to be distinguished from one another, but speech is to be considered a writing. *Of Grammatology* Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; 1st American ed, 1976,44.

uncertainty. Although Gadamer seeks to overcome the inevitability of writing as alienation from understanding, an isolation that loses something along the journey of translation, he never fails to acknowledge that the search for original meaning is exceeded by the language that seeks to encompass it. The phenomenon that simultaneously guards us within and frees us from the metaphysical enclosure is the process of language, where the presence of absence is made known through *différance*.

### **Presence and Absence**

The field of language *is* always at play between terms and the sign “will always lead to sign, one substituting the other (playfully, since ‘sign’ is ‘under erasure’) as signifier and signified in turn.”<sup>17</sup> Derrida’s criticisms of logocentrism within the field of metaphysics give way to the question of whether one uncovers truth in the text, a central and problematic theme throughout the discipline of Western philosophy. For the sign to ‘remain under erasure’ implies a continuous process of liberation from the idea that language is static, allowing us to account for the inaccuracy and structural limitations of the word, all the while, engaging in rigorous close-readings. John Caputo argues:

the very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things — texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need

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<sup>17</sup> *Of Grammatology* Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; 1st American ed, 1976,xix.

— do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy.<sup>18</sup>

Imagine this excess or overflowing of meaning as water being poured into a glass, due to the limited volume of the receptacle, the water runs over, leaving only what can fit. That which remains unaccounted for *is* what Derrida holds to be the task of philosophical investigation, addressing that which is absent.

Derrida argues that the metaphysics of presence, language understood as being near and purely available in its immediacy, *is* limited and thus thought is always escaping the fixedness of meaning. The spacing that takes place between terms and in “becoming-space of time” is that which is “unperceived, the nonpresent, and the nonconscious.”<sup>19</sup>

Sense (in whatever sense: as essence, as the meaning of discourse, as the orientation of the movement between arche and telos) has never been conceivable, within the history of metaphysics, otherwise than on the basis of presence and as presence...To put it quite summarily, one seeks in vain to extract the question of meaning as such from metaphysics, or from the system of so called ‘vulgar’ concepts.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Derrida, Jacques and John D. Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell : A Conversation with Jacques Derrida / Edited with a Commentary by John D. Caputo* New York : Fordham University Press, 1997,31.

<sup>19</sup> *Of Grammatology* Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; 1st American ed, 1976,68.

<sup>20</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy / Jacques Derrida ; Translated, with Additional Notes, by Alan Bass* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1982, 51.

Within his criticism of logocentrism as the foundation for metaphysical thought, Derrida describes the danger in assuming language as an original locus of meaning, leading him to caution against the violence of deceiving ourselves into believing that language *is* without fault. In fact, Derrida finds that language contaminates that which is non-present, placing the unrepresentable into a confined space. “The absolute present, Nature, that which words like ‘real mother’ name, have always already escaped, have never existed...what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence.”<sup>21</sup> Derrida again argues here that the metaphysical tradition of presence is akin to the history of logocentrism which fails to take into account the absence of thought in speech. Instead of an atomism of presentation in speech, he offers an idea of representation. “Self-representation is itself already the representation of a self-representation.”<sup>22</sup> According to Derrida, it is an illusion to think that we have access to the contents of signs in conscious thought. To think of signs without fault and to subscribe to an innocence of language holds dangerous implications. The argument for a radical essence of speech aligns with metaphysical logocentrism, further perpetuating the idea that thought is purely accessible and presentable in language. Derrida speaks of the system of representation in dealing with the traces of thought presented in a text, but absent to the reader, akin to roots that never seem to touch the soil, where the roots become intertwined over time and the truth is never fully given as such.

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<sup>21</sup> *Of Grammatology* Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; 1st American ed, 1976,159.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 154.

In acknowledging the innocence of ignorance in speech, Derrida explains that to “simply recognize that one is shaped by difference, to recognize that the ‘self’ is constituted by its never-fully-to-be-recognized-ness, is enough.”<sup>23</sup> Derrida does not assume an essential presence of meaning to be attained, but rather concedes to the limitations of the human capacity to understand the entirety of the text, allowing the space of difference to account for extra-textual factors, thus leaving us with a trace or track to follow.<sup>24</sup>

The active deployment of terms is used to signify the content of thought, a partially experienced phenomenon that presents a breaking-off from the interior, an exiling of the experiences into words. The content of thought *is* only partially communicable, thus spacing of understanding or misunderstanding *is* always already in motion. The spaces between the self (author/speaker) and the self, and the self and the other (reader/listener) make known the lack of intelligibility of language through signs. Derrida explicates this internal phenomena further in *Writing and Difference* as the operation of creative imagination where “one must turn oneself toward the invisible interior of poetic freedom” and be separated from oneself “in order to

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid,xliv.

<sup>24</sup> In Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* the analysis of the history of logocentrism begins with that of Descartes and the power of the Cartesian ego to assume the validity of thought through reason. “Consciousness is the experience of pure auto-affection” (151). The infallible nature of the mind, according to Descartes’ *Meditations*, proves the existence of God in relation to thought. The purity of thought and the access to such thoughts mediate the conclusion that ones natural reason provides a foundation for certainty. Logos is that which is equated with self-presence, that which is purely and wholly accessible. The Cartesian self does not borrow from the external world, but rather is the origin from which all thought is produced. “The experience—or consciousness—of the voice: of hearing (understanding)- oneself-speak [s’entendre-parler]. That experience lives and proclaims itself as the exclusion of writing, that is to say of the invoking of an “exterior,” “sensible,” “spatial” signifier interrupting self-presence”

*Of Grammatology* Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; 1st American ed, 1976,151.

reunite with the origin of the work in darkness.”<sup>25</sup> The nature of language as abstract lends itself to the idea that constructing the world depends on a lack of intelligibility, a journey into darkness.

### **LANGUAGE AS AESTHETIC PLAY**

On the one hand, we must traverse a phase of overturning. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with a peaceful coexistence vis-a-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. 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.”

Jacques Derrida: *Positions*

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<sup>25</sup> *Writing and Difference / Jacques Derrida ; Translated, with an Introd. and Additional Notes by Alan Bass*  
Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978, 8.

## **Overturning *Différance***

Intelligibility is always already escaping the reader and this fleeting notion of understanding leads us next into the shift of *différance*, the phase of overturning.

*Différance* is the movement of language which erases itself and pulls apart the fabric from which the word is sewn, continuously offering itself to be dismantled. This dissemination is critical to the ceaseless activity of play which *is différence*.

First, I must exercise caution when attempting to define any Derridean concept, as it would contradict the entirety of the practice of deconstruction; however, I will attempt to take into consideration the *trace* of Derrida's texts in which most of these concepts have been elaborated.

In an interview with Henri Ronse in *Implications*, Derrida makes known the movement of *différance* in three separate concepts. First, the term *différance* serves as an active and passive movement "that consists in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving."<sup>26</sup> That which is delayed or postponed never wholly arrives and thus we are left with *traces* of thought.

The movement of differing from the 'what *is*' and what *is* transcribed through language endures a process of translation, one that eliminates the initial material of the interior, leaving only a *trace* of the primary and introducing the secondary or even tertiary expressive substances.

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<sup>26</sup> Derrida, Jacques, Alan Bass, and Henri Ronse. *Positions / Jacques Derrida ; Translated and Annotated by Alan Bass* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1982,8.

Second, the movement of *différance* is that which gives way to opposing concepts, those that serve as dichotomous relationships within language. *Différance* may be interpreted as the “possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual process and system in general.”<sup>27</sup> The endless substitution that takes place with the movement of *différance* re-presents the sign, overturning the dominant concept, opening up the field of language to a multiplicity of conceptuality. *Différance* is not itself a concept but a condition for conceptuality to take place.

The hermeneutic practice seeks to conduct dialogue in which the multiple implications presented by the author in the text exist within a field of ‘play.’ The structure of the game is one in which play emerges through presentation where the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself.<sup>28</sup> Gadamer’s field of play consists of a free movement of possibilities, one that responds to the players involved, all the while appearing to do surprising things of its own accord.<sup>29</sup> The independent nature of both *différance* and Gadamerian aesthetic ‘play’ allow for the freedom in which the game controls the players, metaphorically representing the interplay between words and multiple meanings, constantly at work without the consideration of speaker or listener. The nature of language reflected within the game represents the playing of something, the play of differences *between* signs. Gadamer and Derrida make it a point to describe play as existing

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>28</sup> *Truth and Method / Hans-Georg Gadamer* New York : Crossroad, 1989; 2nd rev. ed. / translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 1989,109.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 106.

*between* the event that surpasses the player and acts as openness toward variety. “Thus we speak of the play of colors and do not mean only that one color plays against another, but that there is one process or sight displaying a changing variety of colors.”<sup>30</sup> The event of meaning is something that cannot happen, as it is always fleeting creating a non-stop activity of play.

We see that the practitioner of hermeneutics is weary not to ‘get inside another person and relive his [her] experiences,’ but to democratically and openly provide the ‘Other,’ in all their alterity, with the opportunity to be understood. Gadamer expresses in *Truth and Method* that the character of language is one that always already involves the suppression of ‘Other’ features and highlighting of others. This is the case Derrida attempts to bring against the system of logocentricity within Western philosophy, bearing in mind the exclusivity of language in the text that re-presents a totality of classical philosophical opposition and overturn it so as to anarchically undo the hierarchical structure.

Third, *différance* produces differences outside the phenomena of subject re-presentation; it is the emergence of opposing relationships amongst terms that keep the movement of *différance* both active and passive. Both Gadamer, through his description of play, and Derrida, in his practice of *différance*, describe these movements as primordial to language. “Play clearly represents an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself. It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort.”<sup>31</sup> Without our consent, the phenomena of alterity, linguistically and sociologically, takes place within the structure of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>31</sup> *Truth and Method / Hans-Georg Gadamer* New York : Crossroad, 1989; 2nd rev. ed. / translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 1989,105.

play or *différance*, infinitely renewing itself as more content arises. As Gadamer explains, the ‘meaning’ of play does not find its significance in being achieved, but in ‘spending oneself on the task of the game.’<sup>32</sup>

In the preface of *Speech and Phenomena*, Newton Garver describes *différance* as “a complex essential characteristic of signs, being composed of an actual difference which makes the sign possible, but which can be instituted and understood only in terms of other times and circumstances in which the instituted difference systematically appears. This makes meaning and linguistic significance.”<sup>33</sup> The interpretation made by Garver displays Derrida’s *différance* as the movement of concepts from one understanding to another, as plural and without a fixed conceptual identity. At its most basic, the leap into the field of play (*différance*) in which oppositions emerge and the linguistic significance is compromised and the theological presence of a center experiences a fissure, prevents generalizations and summarization of the space of differences to take place. Gadamer places his concept of play within the hermeneutic significance as a “to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end...rather, it renews itself in constant repetition.”<sup>34</sup> Gadamer’s sense of play as ‘the movement as such’ is similar to the play of differences within the space of *différance*, serving as a medial ‘happening’ without the permission of the subject, effortless, purposeless, and without exertion,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>33</sup> *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs. Translated, with an Introd., by David B. Allison. Pref. by Newton Garver* Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973,xxiv.

<sup>34</sup> *Truth and Method / Hans-Georg Gadamer* New York : Crossroad, 1989; 2nd rev. ed. / translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 1989,104.

‘we say that something is playing (spielt) somewhere at some time, that something is going on (im Spiele ist) or that something is happening (sich abspielt).’<sup>35</sup>

The hermeneutic and deconstructive conversation never ends and no word is first or last, but always an answer that gives way to new questions.<sup>36</sup>

## **Trace**

In his 1967 essay “Différance,” Derrida states that *différance* is distinct from difference in that it produces the space for differences or differing to take place. Derrida provides an understanding of *différance* by referencing Freud’s analysis of the perception of the psyche. The structural limits of language, described through *trace* and *différance*, may be paralleled with the Freudian conscious and unconscious psyche. Just as Freud makes a departure away from a unified theory of agency of the psyche into an idea of a latent and inaccessible unconscious, Derrida criticizes the claims of Western Metaphysics for grounding knowledge in presence, opening up the world of *trace* within writing.

The trace *is* that which Derrida elaborates on in several texts such as *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena*, *Différance*, *Margins of Philosophy*, *Writing and Difference*, and several others, thus one must note its import as it relates to the project of deconstruction.

A trace *is* a “track, a footprint,” something that possesses an impression of an anterior presence.”<sup>37</sup> The trace of the text *is* partial and escapes enclosure, ultimately failing to provide a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 104-105.

<sup>36</sup> Palmer, Richard E. and Diane P. Michelfelder. *Dialogue and Deconstruction : The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* Albany : State University of New York Press, 1989,95.

complete and full account, and in turn leading us to inexplicable phenomena. Writing is always already inhabited by the trace, thus, perception of the world *is* never a complete process and just as the psyche *is* removed from the time of reception of phenomena, so *is* the language utilized to communicate the external world. Derrida makes a point to make known that trace lies outside and inside the *clôture* of metaphysics. Derrida traces the footsteps of Heidegger and Nietzsche in departing from the finality of metaphysics while acknowledging that language always already operates within the *clôture* of metaphysics.

Following the Derrida and Gadamer encounter of 1981, Gadamer reflects on the encounter in his 1985 essay *Destruktion and Deconstruction*, where he agrees with Derrida's criticism of Heidegger's assumption that one can start from the beginning of Western Metaphysics and de-structure it. Rather, Gadamer finds himself in the Derridean vein of thought stating that "to come closer to the beginning always means to become aware, in *retracing* the path from whence one came, of other open possibilities."<sup>38</sup> In *Speech and Phenomena* Derrida revokes the absolute presence of the signifier in metaphysics, and states that alterity *is* the condition for presentation and *trace is* the possibility of the something more primary that

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<sup>37</sup> *Of Grammatology* Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; 1st American ed, 1976,xv.

<sup>38</sup> Palmer, Richard E. and Diane P. Michelfelder. *Dialogue and Deconstruction : The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* Albany : State University of New York Press, 1989,105.

presence, it *is* in fact the openness that prevents one from speaking about self-identity as simplistic and self-present.<sup>39</sup>

Gadamer's hermeneutics has often been criticized for assuming a metaphysics of presence within language, a claim he rejects in the same essay, commenting that "even when *tracing* one's own ancestry one can never reach back to its beginning. It always slips away into uncertainty."<sup>40</sup>

The transcendental present is that which is absent and the differences amongst terms derive their meanings from the possibility of *trace*.<sup>41</sup> It is so often assumed that Derrida refuses the past projects within the field of metaphysics and Western philosophy; however, in *Of Grammatology* we find that in order for future mediation to take place, the value of the transcendental *arche* must make itself felt before being erased.<sup>42</sup> The *trace* is not only the disappearance of origin, but the origin was only constituted by a non-origin, thus the *trace* becomes the origin of the origin, giving way to the *arche-trace*.

At this point Derrida *is* eager to formulate new disciplines *through* a critical analysis of the traditional model of Western metaphysics. In reading Derrida, one may mistake his theories of *différance* as radical abandonment of the structure, thus resulting in the false interpretation of

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<sup>39</sup> *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs. Translated, with an Introd., by David B. Allison. Pref. by Newton Garver* Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973, 67-68.

<sup>40</sup> Palmer, Richard E. and Diane P. Michelfelder. *Dialogue and Deconstruction : The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* Albany : State University of New York Press, 1989,105.

<sup>41</sup> *Of Grammatology* Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; 1st American ed, 47.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

his deconstruction as the dismantling of institution. However, we find that in his interview with John Caputo, Derrida explicitly states “I love the institutions...At the same time, I try to dismantle not institutions but some structures in given institutions which are too rigid or are dogmatic or which work as an obstacle to future research.”<sup>43</sup> The relationship to the past is always already imprinted in speech and the *trace* back is always incomplete. For Derrida, the past is always present, but the present is always absent and thus we are left with the *trace*.

The import of shaking the ‘foundation’ of the structure of language lies in the *arche-trace* which allows for future meditation, one that emerges not from and one reducible and simplistic function, but from a *pure* movement where the retention of the minimal unit of temporal experience occurs and trace retains the *other as other* and meaning appears. Derrida refers to this as the hinge, “the impossibility that a sign, the unity of a signifier and signified be produced within the plentitude of a present and absolute presence.”<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the question of meaning as it departs from the absolute is one that may be the question of *trace* as the origin of differences and its enigmatic relationship of I and Other and inside and outside, as they would not exist without the appearance of difference. “The trace is nothing, it is not an entity, it exceeds the question *What is?* and contingently makes it

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<sup>43</sup> Derrida, Jacques and John D. Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell : A Conversation with Jacques Derrida / Edited with a Commentary by John D. Caputo* New York : Fordham University Press, 1997.

<sup>44</sup> *Of Grammatology* Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; 1st American ed, 69.

possible.”<sup>45</sup> The trace sets the conditions for the ontological curiosity of *what is?* further creating a space for engaging the search for what is meaning-ful.

### **Clôture and Closure**

“Where a translation is necessary, the gap between the spirit of the original words and that of their reproduction must be taken into account. It is a gap that can never be completely closed.”<sup>46</sup>

Gadamer treats the project of hermeneutics as a practice where one must accept the incomplete nature of the word and infinitely engage the task of understanding. Similarly, Derrida rejects the origin as the final destination of meaning and suggests that one partake in a field of play that never finds an end but encounters ‘closure’ or ‘clôture.’ Closure here does not imply an end but rather a process that may continue indefinitely.

The meeting between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Derrida at the Goethe Institute in 1981 allows for an assessment of both deconstruction and hermeneutics as both players in the field of interpretation and meaning in language. Both philosophers deny the credibility of the metaphysics of presence in an effort to make known the limited expressive nature of language, however, they simultaneously submit to the contingency of language to always already be inscribed within metaphysics. Gadamer’s desire throughout his project of hermeneutics aligns with that of Derrida’s liberation movement, to “open up a dimension of communicative

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>46</sup> *Truth and Method / Hans-Georg Gadamer* New York : Crossroad, 1989; 2nd rev. ed. / translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 1989,386.

understanding which goes beyond linguistically fixed assertions.<sup>47</sup> The departure from the oppressive truth claims of Western metaphysics allows both hermeneutics and deconstruction to move between discourse that is always already subject to indeterminacy, both having faith in the mysterious character of the word.

Within Derrida's scholarship, we find in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, that Derrida analyzes and rejects the assumption that hermeneutical horizons arrive at some assurance of the meaning of the text, or what he calls 'flat intelligibility.'<sup>48</sup> What Derrida fails to acknowledge, however, is the departure that Gadamer makes from this pure scientific hermeneutic assurance of Schleiermacher, into a hermeneutic that acknowledges the inability of the aesthetic consciousness to grasp an essential truth of the text.

### **Interpretation: A Structure of Experience**

Little by little [we] modify the terrain of our work and thereby produce new configurations...Breaks are always, and fatally, reinscribed in an old cloth that must continually, interminably be undone. This interminability is not accident or contingency;

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<sup>47</sup> Palmer, Richard E. and Diane P. Michelfelder. *Dialogue and Deconstruction : The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* Albany : State University of New York Press, 1989,7.

<sup>48</sup> Derrida, Jacques and Stefano Agosti. *Spurs : Nietzsche's Styles = Eperons : Les Styles De Nietzsche / Jacques Derrida ; Introd. by Stefano Agosti ; English Translation by Barbara Harlow ; Drawings by François Loubrieu* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1979, c1978; 1st American ed, 1979,129.

it is essential, systematic, and theoretical. And this in no way minimizes the necessity and relative importance of certain breaks, of appearance and definition of new structures.

Jacques Derrida, *Positions* 24

Derrida's critique on the structures of language and meaning parallel the arguments of Donald Davidson in favor of the indeterminacy of translation and interpretation. Donald Davidson, an analytic philosopher of language, critically examines the question: how do we know whether or not an interpretation is correct?, revealing that in meaning something, we perform utterances under certain conditions that hold some sort of intent. To 'know' the speakers intentions creates a sort of confusion where "linguistic and semantic concepts are part of an intuitive theory for organizing primitive data," resulting in the treatment of concepts as having a life of their own.<sup>49</sup> This kind of application of meaning as essential and statically structured is both problematic for contemporary studies of analytic philosophy, as well as continental criticisms within deconstruction and hermeneutics.

As I have shown, the ideologies of both Gadamer and Derrida acknowledge no escape from finitude and thus the value in expressing being through language does not come from a transcendental meaning, but what Richard Palmer calls "infinitely perspectival interpretation" in his essay the "Limits of Human Control of Language: Dialogue as a Place of Difference Between Neostructuralism and Hermeneutics."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Davidson, Donald. *Belief and the Basis of Meaning* Oxford University Press, 200,4.

<sup>50</sup> Palmer, Richard E. and Diane P. Michelfelder. *Dialogue and Deconstruction : The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* Albany : State University of New York Press, 1989,151.

While several criticisms have drawn clear distinctions between hermeneutics and deconstruction, Richard Palmer brings them together under “a consciousness of the fundamental uncontrollability of a conversation [der prinzipielle Nicht-Beherrschbarkeit eines Gesprächs]; of the non-prescribability [Nicht-Festlegbarkeit] of the sign, which we exchange with each other; the non-identity of the meanings on which we agree; the fundamentally hypothetical nature of every conceivable consensus.<sup>51</sup> The nature of variety within the experience of the world creates a space in which ideas or interpretations may come near to one another without concrete definition.<sup>52</sup>

“This search may even lead us to the understanding that human meaning consists in assuming and accepting ontico-literal, effective, patent meaninglessness, so as to thrust it open to ontologico-symbolic, affective meaning”

Luis Garagalza, “In the Footsteps of Hermes: The Meaning of Hermeneutics and Symbolism”

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Topological Spaces contain properties that may draw a parallel between language as a space. The properties of a topological space include 1. the empty set is both open and closed 2. the set X that the topology is defined on is both open and closed 3. the union of any number of open sets is open 4. the intersection of a finite number of open sets is open. The concept of topological spaces (continuous and connected) are analogous to the space of différance in that the space of language is both open and closed, creating a movement of convergence and divergence. Mendelson, Bert. *Introduction to Topology* Boston, Allyn and Bacon 1968]; 2d ed, 1968.

## A Hermeneutical Inquiry

As transmitter of announcements from Mt. Olympus, Hermes was the vehicle that made known to humans what was beyond their interpretation, the thoughts of the Gods. In the activity of transmission through language, Hermes was often accused of delivering inaccurate messages, altering their 'original' meanings, giving way to the ambiguity of interpretive development.

### The Hermeneutic Studies of Hans-Georg Gadamer

Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* asserts that in reconciling the phenomenological and ontological structure of understanding, hermeneutics serves to unveil the significance to which the text speaks. Gadamer embarks on a philosophic journey, questioning what happens to us above our wanting and doing.<sup>53</sup>

Gadamer worked within the problems of interpretation throughout the twentieth century, bringing language and symbol to the arena of discourse. As a liberator from the oppression of restricted interpretation, Gadamer takes the task of hermeneutics to overcome the 'epistemological truncation' so often associated with the traditional science of hermeneutics and assumes a position of critical hermeneutics. Western philosophy argues for universality, perpetuating the exclusive nature of truth claims, which the practitioner of Gadamerian hermeneutics sees as a form of oppression.

Our task, it seems to me, is to transcend the prejudices that underlie the aesthetic consciousness, the historical consciousness, and the hermeneutical consciousness that has

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<sup>53</sup> *Truth and Method / Hans-Georg Gadamer* New York : Crossroad, 1989; 2nd rev. ed. / translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 1989, xiv-xvii.

been restricted to a technique for avoiding misunderstandings and to overcome the alienations present in them all.<sup>54</sup>

The experience of interpreting the text, whether it be a work of art or the work of Being, presents the task of interpreting that Gadamer encourages us to engage with. The task of the individual who practices hermeneutics is to welcome and admit the guest who promises something new to our curiosity.<sup>55</sup> It is this hospitality that welcomes both the distinct character of the subjective interpretation and ‘interhuman’ communication, a sort of intersubjective emancipation that unhinges tradition while working within ones historical disposition.

Gadamer engages the practice of hermeneutics in *Truth and Method*, by mediating the phenomenon of understanding in interpretation along with comprehension of the text.

Within the historical gap between the author’s intention and the individual’s various cultural influences embedded in current traditionary practices of present expectations, there lies a tension between the text and the reader.

The historically situated individual, referred to as the ‘effective historical consciousness,’ is one that is finite in the understanding of signs and their traditional contexts, distancing the reader from the original meaning and placing the task of hermeneutics at the foreground of interpretation. “A genuine dialogue has as its main objective a sincere attempt by each partner to

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<sup>54</sup> *Philosophical Hermeneutics / Hans-Georg Gadamer ; Translated and Edited by David E. Linge* Berkeley : University of California Press, 1976, 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Truth and Method / Hans-Georg Gadamer* New York : Crossroad, 1989; 2nd rev. ed. / translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 1989,9.

unravel the ‘truth’ with regard to the subject matter.”<sup>56</sup> Gadamer suggests that one should enter a conversation with the aim of gaining insight into a particular subject matter, not merely to confirm one’s own notions about it. Because an interpreter is always bringing the past into the event of interpretation, coming to understand the subject matter of a text is never pure or complete. It is this limitation on understanding that inhibits the hermeneutical practice to establish fixed meaning. In the evolution of language, a sign’s meaning is reconstructed and reinterpreted each time concepts undergo paradigmatic shifts. Richard Kearney successfully summarizes the project of critical hermeneutics:

As soon as we acknowledge that tradition is not some monolith of pre-established dogma but an ongoing dialectic of continuity and discontinuity made up of different rival traditions, internal crises, interruptions, revisions, and schisms-as soon as we acknowledge this, we discover that there exists an essential dimension of distance at the very heart of tradition, a distance which actually invites critical interpretation.<sup>57</sup>

Within a particular historical context, signs designate meaning for certain objects, making language historically contextualized and meaning incapable of being universalized. The difficulty in making truth claims is overcoming the ‘effective-historical consciousness’ that is so radically finite that the ability to have knowledge of the text from its origin or in its presence

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Wood, David and David Wood. *On Paul Ricoeur : Narrative and Interpretation* London ; New York : Routledge, 1991,61.

inevitably fails. The ideological distortions that emerge from historical language must rely on the critical analysis of hermeneutics.

A soberness of judgment emerges through the deployment of a hermeneutics of suspicion to effectively analyze, deconstruct, and reconfigure 'meaning' in the world. An exclusion of thought is a matter of incoherent and false absolutism stemming from the intoxication of the isolated individual reflecting only the personal experience of a higher caste that retains the power to universalize it.

Alternatively, a public forum of knowledge is necessary in order to garner an understanding and bridge the gap of meaning through laying a foundation supported by multiple ideas and perspectives. Gadamer's fusion of horizons lobbies for such a method to mediate the thoughts of the individual forcing one to undertake a critique of aesthetic and historical consciousness, while inquiring into the infinite meanings of the text. This interplay of interpretation allows for a liberal authority in thought to be refined, reshaped, and open to a variety of judgments while paying close attention to avoid the marginalization of any one possible interpretation.

It is this fusion of horizons that allows for the self-reflexive, self-understanding subject to be abandoned by the practitioner of hermeneutics, opening up dialogue where the subject is always being referred to the speech of the Other, leaving the encounter with the text changed, for it has fused its horizons in an exchange of reciprocity to understand that which cannot be anticipated in advance.

A world in which many observe and experience events opens up the possibility for multiple interpretations about the world and its internal and external phenomena. “It is from democracy that the spirit of criticism borrows its intolerance of dogmatic authority.”<sup>58</sup> The liberation from both accepting one group's oppressive establishment of ‘thought-language’ and integrating multiple and varied perspectives, gives way to a freedom to deploy a more possibilities in judgment and interpretation within the realm of aesthetics. The practice of sovereignty in philosophy is reflected on by literary author Oscar Wilde who writes:

It is part of that complex working towards freedom which may be described as the revolt against authority. It is merely one facet of that speculative spirit of an innovation, which in the sphere of action produces democracy and revolution, and in that of thought is the parent of philosophy and physical science; and its importance as a factor of progress is based not so much on the results it attains, as on the tone of thought which it represents, and the method by which it works.<sup>59</sup>

Related ideas, thoughts, and meanings, provide an opening to develop multiple understandings of the text and the external world. Both Hermeneutics and Deconstruction direct

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<sup>58</sup> Wilde, Oscar. "The Rise of Historical Criticism." *Essays & Lectures* (3, 2006): 5,2.

<sup>59</sup> Wilde, Oscar. "The Rise of Historical Criticism." *Essays & Lectures* (3, 2006): 5,1.

awareness of excluded and oppressed interpretations that must be liberated again and again to critically examine the traditions upon which the text has been founded.

The purpose of interpretation is to acquire approximate understanding of text in order to implement a democratic authority on exceptional authorial practice provides an opening where both author/speaker and reader/listener always already produce each other. This idea aligns with Gadamer's concept of "fusion of horizons," which belongs to the relationship between observer and the observed. In the process of fusion, the old perspectives of tradition and the current understandings foregrounded by tradition combine into something of value without explicitly foregrounding one another.<sup>60</sup> The reciprocal relationship between interpreter and speaker, author and reader, is one that urges the being of aesthetic consciousness to exist between differences, within a space of alienness, allowing meaning to be symbolically represented by the event.

Luis Garagalza recently published an article called "In the Footsteps of Hermes: The Meaning of Hermeneutics and Symbolism," providing a well formulated perspective on Gadamer's hermeneutics in light of postmodernity. Garagalza argues that "meaning, which actually is-not, happens in interpretation, re-creating or regenerating itself between the text and the interpreter, exceeding all fixing, be it dogmatic or methodical."<sup>61</sup> As ruptures are characteristic of postmodernity, Garagalza suggests that the discourse amongst interlocutors provide the space by which one can transgress that which is given and experience meaning within the difference of lived language.

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<sup>60</sup> *Truth and Method / Hans-Georg Gadamer* New York : Crossroad, 1989; 2nd rev. ed. / translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 1989,336-366.

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## Meaning as Non-Event

The experience of meaning<sup>62</sup> in being may be detailed as a non-event where value is not solely based upon the certainty of indeterminacy, or upon a finalized meaning based upon a single commonality. Derrida has often been associated with Maurice Blanchot, a French philosopher who is said to have influenced the movement of post-structuralism. In his book, *The Space of Literature*, Blanchot expressed the force of meaning that does not and cannot happen in the non-event of meaning as experience. Instead, he suggests that we live in the shadow of the event, rather than the event itself. "A language addressing itself to the shadow of events as well, not to their reality, and this because of the fact that the words which express them are, not signs, but images, images of words, and words where things turn into images."<sup>63</sup> Derrida assumes a similar position and relegates the non-event of meaning to a fallenness into a field of play, a space between the the non-event of uncertainty and misunderstanding, encountering a reformulation, an innocent task that involves both hermeneutics and deconstruction. The departure from sameness does not succumb to relativism, rather, it acknowledges the unique and distinct nature of being as multiple, while recognizing that variability overlaps and once again creates the tension of *différance*.

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<sup>62</sup> Paul Grice's Theory of Meaning suggests that facts about expressions may be equated with the speakers utterances and their intentions.

"A meant something by x" is equivalent to "A intended the utterance of x to produce some effect in an audience by means of recognition of this intention"

"x meant something" may be equivalent to "Somebody meant something by x"

"x means (timeless) that so-and-so" might at first shot be equated with some statement or disjunction of statements about what "people" (vague) intend (with qualifications about "recognition") to effect by x.

Grice, H. P. "Meaning." *The Philosophical Review* no. 3 (1957): 377.

<sup>63</sup> Blanchot, Maurice. *The Space of Literature* Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1982,26.

Each time the non-event of meaning emerges we are burdened with the task of reflecting on our internal condition with the tools of language. The linguisticity of the human experience is one that is both assisted by a Gadamerian hermeneutic language and challenged by a Derridean movement of *différance*, manifesting itself as a happening that is simultaneously understood and misunderstood. The overlapping of these linguistic circles allows for the emergence of understanding, directing the passages of thought into a medium that liberates the subject/other relationship from isolation and alienation, bringing understanding to a democratic space of relations.

These relations set the stage for mediation of identity by submerging into all ‘Other’ identities, separating the self from itself and revealing that itself is ultimately the Other. The “self” is a function amongst signs that differentiate from which both constitute and ultimately separate the self.

James Risser, commenting on the Derrida-Gadamer ‘non-encounter’ states that ‘understanding’ in the Gadamerian sense, is a form of dialogue where an agreement is based on a ‘structure’ of openness. As I have mentioned in previous sections the structure of openness for Derrida is that of *différance*, where the structure of language is always already creating a space of where possibility is always yet to come. The acceptance that we may differ in dialogue is a form of hospitality, one that grounds itself in accepting the Other as the self.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Philosophical Hermeneutics / Hans-Georg Gadamer ; Translated and Edited by David E. Linge* Berkeley : University of California Press, 1976.



## NARRATIVE IN LINEAGE

“The story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep coming into being”

Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Native, Woman, Other*

“The limits of the world and Being that can be understood is language.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

The attempt to structure all human thought under a system of signs has proven as a primary philosophical problem for both Gadamer and Derrida, as the encounter with language is an encounter with the limitations of human thought and subjectivity. The problem of ambiguity, semantic transformation, and identity of signs, all constitute the difficulties language faces in the crises of reflection and representation. It is here that narrative seems to be a relevant topic of discussion as it has faced criticism under the ‘linguistic turn,’ and furthermore, brings forth the question of whether we can consult narrative as a source of reflection on epistemic claims about meaning in the world and continue to entertain the tradition of narrative and myth as a meaningful and metaphorical representation of being.

The attempt to mythologize the phenomena of experience has a long tradition, one which humanity has sought to interpret as the history and fact. The problem with the attempt to generate an understanding of people through the use of myths is the presupposition that grounds *generalized* experience in Truth. Giambattista Vico, an Italian jurist, argued in *The New Science* in 1725 that humans are characterized by the faculty of ‘poetic wisdom,’ generating myths ‘at one remove’ or ‘poetically,’ to deal with the world of experience. Vico maintains that there must

be a mental language which “grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life and expresses it with as many diverse modifications as these same things may have diverse aspects.”<sup>65</sup> Vico early on addresses the potentials of myth to potentially express being through a fictional language, and Paul Ricoeur takes up a similar project in his practice of ‘critical hermeneutics.’

Critical hermeneutics addresses the dangers of myth as creating blind prejudices of history and marginalizing groups behind a veil of absolutism. In the process of generating myth, an emergence of criticisms within the institution of literary theory began from the critical theorists where challenges posed by philosophers such as Michel Foucault in the wake of post-metaphysical criticisms on text and narrative suggested that social institutions and discourse construct *episteme* that totalize social identities in an oppressive fashion, ‘placing’ individuals through discourse.<sup>66</sup> The epistemological implications of narrative in literature produce moral cruxes, linguistic systems, and character types that may falsely represent values and behavior that direct re-representation in the world, serving as an archive of the author’s perspective and reflection on the world.

Paul Ricoeur, a French philosopher whose projects range from linguistics to theology, states that in mediating the narrative function, the human life becomes more intelligible, or

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<sup>65</sup> Hawkes, Terence. *Structuralism & Semiotics / Terence Hawkes* Berkeley : University of California Press, c1977, 1977,15.

<sup>66</sup> Punday, Daniel. *Narrative After Deconstruction / Daniel Punday* Albany : State University of New York Press, c2003, 2002, 153.

rather, expressible.<sup>67</sup> In previous sections we have encountered the problem of language in its limited ability to express the inexpressible. The question that arises here is what makes the narrative function adept at narrating the unnarratable. How does one escape the dangers of applying general identities to persons or communities without falling subject to stereotype and prejudice?

Paul Ricoeur, in his short appendix “From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language,” makes known that in order for the word to be understood, we often turn to the intricate narratives in which these words are embedded, like the story of Genesis, all of which contain multiple senses.<sup>68</sup> Through a hermeneutics of suspicion, Ricoeur suggests that the interpreter must labor over myth in order both ‘listen’ and ‘suspect’ in order to critically examine the past and open ‘positive hermeneutics of myth’ to a project free from “doctrinal prejudice, nationalism, class oppression or totalitarian conformism,” doing so in the name of freedom.<sup>69</sup>

John McGowan suggests a theory of narrative identity that accepts the social contingencies of the subject, while refusing to submit to a total linguistic construction. Derrida

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<sup>67</sup> Wood, David and David Wood. *On Paul Ricoeur : Narrative and Interpretation* London ; New York : Routledge, 1991, 188.

<sup>68</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor : Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language / Paul Ricoeur ; Translated by Robert Czerny ; with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello* Toronto ; Buffalo : University of Toronto Press, 1977, 316.

<sup>69</sup> Wood, David. *On Paul Ricoeur : Narrative and Interpretation* London ; New York : Routledge, 1991.

provides some insight into narrative in an interview with John Caputo, bringing the relationship of differences to narrative as a source of openness to identity.

Sometimes the struggle under the banner of cultural identity, national identity, linguistic identity, are noble fights. But at the same time the people who fight for their identity must pay attention to the fact that identity is not the self-identity of a thing...but implies a difference within identity. That is, the identity of a culture is a way of being different from itself; language is different from itself; the person is different from itself. Once you take into account this inner and other difference, then you pay attention to the other and you understand that fighting for your identity is not exclusive of another identity, is open to another identity.<sup>70</sup>

Ricoeur contends that the self never knows itself immediately, just as the word is never completely present. Thus, through cultural and symbolic mediations, such as narrative, one is able to articulate action and the narratives of everyday life.<sup>71</sup> “Narrative interpretation brings precisely the figural nature of the character by which the self, narratively interpreted, turns out to

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<sup>70</sup> Derrida, Jacques and John D. Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell : A Conversation with Jacques Derrida / Edited with a Commentary by John D. Caputo* New York : Fordham University Press, 1997, 13.

<sup>71</sup> Wood, David. *On Paul Ricoeur : Narrative and Interpretation* London ; New York : Routledge, 1991, 198.

be a figured self-which imagines itself in this way.”<sup>72</sup> The narrative serves the human condition for identity, as the trace serves the word. The trace provides the possibility to ask what *is* the word, just as narrative identity provides the possibility to question what the world *is*.

Daniel Punday’s text, *Narrative After Deconstruction*, equates narrative with a discontinuous space where the ontological ambiguity of difference is the occasion of writing that challenges the textual space, as well as the means by which the space manifests and conflicts play out.<sup>73</sup> The renegotiation of discourse allows for the new articulations, ones that become more dependent on the ‘Other’ as the search for meaning comes into form. “Symbolism depends on a certain textual distance that allows us to recognize the ‘exchange’ and correspondence between elements.”<sup>74</sup> The textual space, which is referred to throughout this thesis as the space or distance created by differences, allows for the ambiguity of language to become destabilized and the narrative structure to fix itself on instability.

As language provides a medium for dialogue to exchange and bring forward and back again the phenomena of internal experience, the human condition often resorts to myth as a means of understanding and metaphorically symbolizing the world in which we live. Between narratives, we find the opportunity to make epistemic claims by consulting the ‘Other’ (the text, the embodied other, the experience of alterity) to engage and reformulate the question of ‘what it

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>73</sup> Punday, Daniel. *Narrative After Deconstruction* / Daniel Punday Albany : State University of New York Press, 2002, 30-33.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 72.

*means to be?* What we can speak of, what we can ‘know,’ what we choose to speak of, and how we speak of it, relying on the transmittance of information from self to ‘Other’ through myth.

The ‘otherness’ of narrative guides our understanding of ourselves, ‘the only kind that escapes the apparent choice between sheer change and absolute identity. Between the two lies narrative identity.’<sup>75</sup>

The various horizons that narratives suggest set the stage for unprecedented worlds that have either been oppressed or have yet to come to be. The spaces created by narrative are those that are always becoming, always rupturing to bring into form that which transcend the established limits. A critical hermeneutics of myth, as proposed by Paul Ricoeur, acknowledges the human condition to symbolically re-present the narratives of tradition; however, one must not forget to ‘distance’ the myth from claims of truth and absolutism, a constant pursuit of liberation while critically examining tradition.

### **Traces in Narrative**

The language of narrative describes the meaning through the feature of the text. The use of narrative trace here is not to be confused with contemporary assumptions on deconstructive criticisms, applying Derridean concepts to various disciplines. The purpose of trace here is used as a track to the ‘Other.’ The narrative is a story followed, a *trace* of the past poetically symbolized as a reflection of the human condition. “The significance of narrative stems from the

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<sup>75</sup> Wood, David. *On Paul Ricoeur : Narrative and Interpretation* London ; New York : Routledge, 1991, 33.

intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader.”<sup>76</sup> The world of the text and the world of the word come to a horizon of possible experiences that project other modes of understanding. In previous chapters I discussed writing as *différance*, the active and passive movement of speech. Here I will discuss narrative as both in passing and enduring, open and closed, reflecting the spacing of narrative within deconstruction.

The world of the text exists in an opening, mediating between man [woman] and the world, between man [woman] and man [woman], between man [woman] and himself [herself].<sup>77</sup> In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur refers to these relations as referentiality, communicability, and self-understanding, all of which constitute living within the text. Just as *différance* derives its power from the indeterminate nature of differences between terms, so does the text derive its significance from its infinite modes of reinterpretation. What constitutes narrative is its concordance and discordance; indeed it is the struggle between the two that allows for the narrative interpretation.

The search for meaning through narrative has been a quest by several cultures such as the Seneca and Navajo Indians. The Seneca have viewed the use of language as the manifesting of a powerful force. Certain words when spoken or sung affect the world, giving it shape and meaning. “Words can cause pain and suffering as well as create beauty and orderliness.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Wood, David. *On Paul Ricoeur : Narrative and Interpretation* London ; New York : Routledge, 1991, 26.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>78</sup> Gill, Sam D. *Native American Religions: An Introduction*. Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth, 1982, 27.

Thought and speech are personified as cosmic creators in Seneca tradition, the story goes as follows. The Seneca describe two twin brothers, Annikadel, the personification of speech, telling Apponahah, the personification of thought, that “thought alone is insufficient as a creator; that thought must be born into the world and that this requires an act of speech.” Similarly, Navajo describe thought and speech as the creators of life, bringing the personification of objects into the ‘womb of life.’ The youth and maiden are symbols of thought and speech in Navajo culture in which Long Life and Happiness join together as the force that propels life through time.

This translation of thought into form describes both the power and the obstacle of narrative that serves as a symbolic force for representation. Richard Kearney takes Paul Ricoeur’s assessment of time in relation to narrative to further define a space of narrative as a ‘plural unity,’ one that emerges from different perspectives, playing, and extending between being-effected by past and our projection of the yet-to-be future.<sup>79</sup>

Again we hear echoes and view traces of Derrida’s project of spacing between differences, allowing narrative to align with the departure from Meta-Narrative into a field of narrative play. As being is always being-effected-by-history or herstory, Ricoeur urges us to reopen the past and eliminate the idea that tradition of narrative is something impervious to change, in fact the narrative construction must always hold an expectation of discontinuity and continuity of history while critically reinterpreting the historically situated subject.<sup>80</sup> Spacing of historical time allows the conditions for the transmission of meaning to take place, thus the

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<sup>79</sup> Wood, David. *On Paul Ricoeur : Narrative and Interpretation* London ; New York : Routledge, 1991, 56.

<sup>80</sup> Wood, David. *On Paul Ricoeur : Narrative and Interpretation* London ; New York : Routledge, 1991, 58.

narrative understood is the narrative that which allows human action to be symbolically mediated.

Derrida questions the 'book' in a section in *Writing and Difference* on the Jewish poet "Edmond Jabes and the Question of the Book." He describes the book as both wealthy and impoverished in its efforts to signify that which is multiple and further beckons the act of literature to entertain the idea of Being without the book, without signifying. He poses his questions as follows: "What if the form of the book was no longer to be the model of meaning? What if the Being of the world, its presence and the meaning of its Being, revealed itself only in illegibility?"<sup>81</sup> The end of these chapters are left unanswered by Derrida, as he is one to leave his texts in aporia, however, we see that the text serves great import and when considering the space of the narrative, one considers that the world exists because the book exists, and to be is to-be-in-the-book.<sup>82</sup>

Do we answer these questions with more books? Indeed, we must. We must take the leap into the art of the word and continue to explore the house of the book and make sure to mark the word with interruption, to distance from totalizing within the book, and respect the relation to the other.<sup>83</sup> The text serves as a proposal of meaning, calling upon the community to take on the task to comprehend and interpret the echoes of the past. The past, as is the Other, *is* that which *is* absent, and calls upon the reader to engage and interpret with openness. The absence, the distance between the community and the text of the past is where Derrida states that the letter is

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<sup>81</sup> *Writing and Difference / Jacques Derrida ; Translated, with an Introd. and Additional Notes by Alan Bass* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978, 77.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

given the permission to signify, providing the letter with breath. “A poem always runs the risk of being meaningless and be nothing without this risk.”<sup>84</sup> To risk meaning too little and meaning too much, is the risk of narrative that brings about the beauty in the work of art.

### **The Author-Other**

The poet, in the very experience of his freedom, finds himself both bound to language and delivered from it by speech whose master, nonetheless, he himself is

Jacques Derrida: “Edmond Jabes and the Question of the Book”

In assuming the role of author one must function as a speaker, a narrator, an actor in the performative aspect of speech to stylize communication and effectuate the phenomena of experience. In utilizing the medium of the text to express the phenomena of experience one comes into contact with the profound attempt to elaborate and describe that which is absent and non-extensive. The author, in the process of narration, represses the obscure contents of the internalized experience and thus fails to embody the totality of phenomena. A process of neutralization occurs, thus escaping the totalizing structure, and the menacing moment when language becomes institution.<sup>85</sup>

The anxiety of the author is heavy with the inability to reveal, it is the nature of the medium of language to conceal, holding back what cannot be reduced. Everything within this phenomenon fails to be transparent and thus resides the power of our weakness. Derrida

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<sup>84</sup> *Writing and Difference / Jacques Derrida ; Translated, with an Introd. and Additional Notes by Alan Bass* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978, 74.

<sup>85</sup> *Writing and Difference / Jacques Derrida ; Translated, with an Introd. and Additional Notes by Alan Bass* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978, 6-7.

describes this power as the force of weakness that allows us to separate, disengage, and emancipate ourselves.

Thus, as a vehicle for experience, the author serves a function, what Michel Foucault calls, “author-function.” The author’s function emerges from the division of the actual writer and the fictional narrator. From the story teller and the story writer a tension emerges from which the author’s position arises.

In this process of writing, the concept of *écriture* emerges, what Jacques Derrida calls an interplay of that which is absent and present such that signs, that which point to the signified, “represent the present in its absence.”<sup>86</sup> The absence, of which Derrida speaks, is that which is lost in order to signify. Donald Marshall discourses on Blanchot’s ‘literary space,’ asserting an interminable and discontinuous opening where “the book does not present the writer’s experience of essential solitude in literary space, but fixes the impossibility of its presence not in a language of images, but in an image of language.”<sup>87</sup>

The terrain of the text folds upon itself, rather than unfolds, having no two substances completely separate from each other but always in a relationship, one of the author/reader, where the reader welcomes the author not as an author-ity, but again, as the welcomed ‘Other.’

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<sup>86</sup> *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs. Translated, with an Introd., by David B. Allison. Pref. by Newton Garver* Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973, 88-104.

<sup>87</sup> Derrida, Jacques and John D. Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell : A Conversation with Jacques Derrida / Edited with a Commentary by John D. Caputo* New York : Fordham University Press, 1997, 210.

The relationship with the text is one of play between the author, text, and reader. Ricoeur defines the text as the “symbolic discourse that functions as a rupture or a reaffirmation,” however, the reaffirmation may become violent and fetishized by established powers that fix them in order to avoid liberation from established myths. The necessity remains that an engagement of critical hermeneutics must take place in order to avoid the perversion of discourse and neither reject an ideology of unity nor anarchy of fragmentation, but conditions that allow for a space where both play between the lines and provide alternatives to an established order.<sup>88</sup>

The profound space of absence is that which allows for the possibility of literary inspiration, a pure book, according to Derrida, is the “book about nothing.”<sup>89</sup> The book about nothing is that book that cannot point to any one empirical object, but the book that represents the darkness of the internal, the pure reflection of the mode of language with which we speak. Nothing is constituted by a disappearing and if we are to take the author to bring these words to work, and rely on the presence of absence in the word to bring to form the things farthest from us. As the consciousness of the distance of the unconscious makes itself present in absence, the author must submit to the pure experience of the consciousness of nothing, avoiding the oppression of its ambiguity and taking weakness to be the ‘force of signification,’<sup>90</sup> “It is the

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<sup>88</sup> Wood, David. *On Paul Ricoeur : Narrative and Interpretation* London ; New York : Routledge, 1991, 65.

<sup>89</sup> *Writing and Difference / Jacques Derrida ; Translated, with an Introd. and Additional Notes by Alan Bass* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978, 8.

<sup>90</sup> *Writing and Difference / Jacques Derrida ; Translated, with an Introd. and Additional Notes by Alan Bass* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978, 8.

consciousness of nothing, upon which all consciousness of something enriches itself, takes on meaning and shape.”<sup>91</sup>

The moment the author chooses to engrave what we hear, or rather, what we do not hear, is the moment in which we conceive of the impossible possibility. The task in writing is to lower meaning while elevating inscription.<sup>92</sup> The graceful adventure into the will to write reawakens the will, bringing forth freedom from the constraints of the conventional notion of meaning, and liberated the individual to look at the impossibility of the homogenous reality and the freedom of the alternative.

The freedom to think otherwise, to be otherwise and not as such, liberates being from the bondage of the structure, and acknowledges that what is missing is shapeless and profound.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 10.

## CONCLUSION

### Force and Signification: The 'Other'

“To see only oneself is a form of blindness. One sees nothing else.”  
Jacques Derrida, “Speech is Blind” 2002

“As soon as I speak to the other, I submit to the law of giving reason(s), I share a virtually universalizable medium, I divide my authority”  
Jacques Derrida, *Rogues* 2003.

The 'Other' is the reflection of difference, that which sets the condition from which meaning may arise. Derrida states in *The Politics of Friendship* that we are always situated in relation to the 'Other,' “before even having taken responsibility for any given affirmation, we are already caught up in a kind of asymmetrical and heteronomical curvature of the social space, more precisely, in the relation to the 'Other.’”<sup>93</sup>

The 'Other' represents the space, space is not an object but an absence, in which we derive a sense of responsibility, providing refuge where the 'Other' may infinitely differ without fear of complete appropriation. Taking the 'Other' and appropriating them into the self is the 'worst.' The violence of the worst is conditioned by attempting to assimilate the other into sameness. The violence in statically defining the 'Other' is to remove all possibility to stand outside of these appropriations and dismiss difference and alterity all together. Derrida celebrates

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<sup>93</sup> ————. *Politics of Friendship / Jacques Derrida ; Translated by George Collins* London ; New York : Verso, c1997, 1997, 633.

the asymmetry of the ‘Other,’ and in this distance the friend never allows me to possess the ‘Other’. The totalizing of the ‘Other’ is, as reflected in Derrida’s criticisms of totalizing language, a limit that destroys the fundamental difference that conditions our experience. When the ‘Other’ is forced to reach a final and ‘proper’ destination, excluding difference and imposing sameness, limiting the Other to the self, the most violent act occurs, the violence of assimilation.<sup>94</sup> Derrida, as a former victim of alterity, living in Algeria as a secular Jew, addresses the issues of the politics of the alien, ‘Other,’ in his later works. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* addresses the question of global unity, seeking to free the subaltern from the politics of oppression.

It is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law, and of knowing if this improvement is possible within an historical space which takes place between the Law of an unconditional hospitality, offered a priori to every other, to all newcomers, whoever they may be, and the conditional laws of a right to hospitality, without which the unconditional Law of hospitality would be in danger of remaining a pious and irresponsible desire, without form and without potency, and of even being perverted at any moment.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> ————. *Rogues : Two Essays on Reason / Jacques Derrida ; Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas* Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 2005, 15.

<sup>95</sup> ————. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness / Jacques Derrida* New York : Routledge, 2001, 22-23.

Derrida's later works on the topic of hospitality allow refuge for the 'Other' to find acceptance of alterity and difference as a guide to the self. In relation to language and narrative, the hospitality to the 'Other' offers up the space of welcoming alternative interpretations in text, making it the departure from objectivity into an intersubjective space of meaning. Derrida argues that "deconstruction is hospitality to the other, to the other than oneself, the other than its 'other', to an other that is beyond any 'its other.'"<sup>96</sup> The constitution of the self is never protected from the 'Other,' in fact the self is only aware of itself because of the absence presented by the Other.

In deriving meaning through the 'Other' and preserving the subjective consciousness of the self, we must retain our independence while remaining open and hospitable to difference. The conditions of meaning are set forth by the interplay between the self and 'Other,' an infinite shift that conditions our ability to say some-thing about the world of experience in interpretation. To interpret subjectively is to ineluctably fall in between self-Other interpretive schemes. As Derrida recommends, the sympathetic nature of hospitality demands that we accept and interpret amongst each other and through this, the world of meaning emerges through the integration of interpretation, without assimilation.

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<sup>96</sup> Derrida, Jacques and Gil Anidjar. *Acts of Religion / Jacques Derrida ; Edited and with an Introduction by Gil Anidjar* New York : Routledge, 2002, 364.

## Of Meaning

To leave open the possibility for future discourse, the word conclusion will not end this thesis, but experience a form of *clôture*. As reflected throughout this thesis, being in language acquires a gnoseological and epistemological dignity from the experience of the ‘Other.’ In the search for meaning, the ‘Other’ provides the space of differences that pull the self from itself, while leaving a trace for value to continuously be engaged and never at rest. Becoming unfamiliar with meaning suggests a certain symbol of permeability in which the text ‘becomes’ and subverts simultaneously. The meaning of meaning *is* infinite, it never finds a moment to rest as it is in constant motion. Meaning as a symbolic re-presentation, reflects that which is most sacred about the human condition, the weakness of the psyche to wholly translate and communicate the pre-expressive and latent phenomena that seeks to be present. To write is to know this weakness and to accept it, so as to become familiar with the idea that “meaning must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning.”<sup>97</sup> We do not uncover meaning, the meaning of becoming or the becoming of meaning would only be disturbed the force of meaning. Force without language would not be what it is, this is the relationship of presence and absence, of the strange movement that takes place in order to not reduce meaning, but to respect the boundaries and limitations of what is unrevealed. Again, the force of weakness, of the vulnerability in operating within the

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<sup>97</sup> *Writing and Difference / Jacques Derrida ; Translated, with an Introd. and Additional Notes by Alan Bass* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978, 11.

darkness, reveals a power. In this darkness, we take the hand of the other and write, as it is “the metaphor-for-others-aimed-at-others-here-and-now.”<sup>98</sup>

As the author of this thesis, I accept the weakness of its project, the engagement of its own economy, and the will to experience the debris that falls and explodes in the rupture of meaning.

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<sup>98</sup> *Writing and Difference / Jacques Derrida ; Translated, with an Introd. and Additional Notes by Alan Bass*  
Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978, 29.

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