



On Derrida's Method

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I have examined Derrida's method as exemplified by several of his texts. Derrida demonstrates that discourse is always simultaneously determined by its shadow or ghost, because each moment of exclusion and distinction of its constituent terms requires the opposing term as a relational Other and defining axis to be upheld. Derrida thus demonstrates that transcendental and empirical are empty terms on their own as philosophy requires its relation to non-philosophy to define itself, transcendental and empirical only exist in relation to each other through iterability and differance. One cannot define the transcendental in isolation from the empirical and vice versa. Truth is thus neither transcendental nor empirical, but located in the space between that is quasi-transcendental. I also examined Derrida's ideas of politics and history, and how these are informed by an opening of philosophy to its Other or shadow.

Keywords: Derrida; Method; Transcendental; Empirical; Quasi-transcendental

In this paper I will be examining Derrida's methodology through reading various Derrida texts that describe his method. I will describe differance, the quasi-transcendental and iterability as essential to coming to an understanding of Derrida's method. Derrida discovers that the transcendental and empirical are dynamically related through differance and iterability, or repetition with a difference. The transcendental is thus not conceivable outside of its relation to the empirical, and vice versa. Each moment of exclusion of the transcendental from the empirical is necessary for maintaining the transcendental subject in Husserl, just as Heidegger's empirical Being requires the exclusion of Christian ideology, accounting for the transcendental on empirical grounds, for his radical

worldliness to be defined. Transcendental is thus not conceivable without the empirical and vice versa.

Derrida overcomes logocentrism by exceeding the text in locating the point of exteriority and transcending its totality. This he does through an acknowledgement of differance, the point of interaction between philosophy and empiricism, or philosophy and non-philosophy. Differance is the acknowledgement of the economy of conceptual oppositions of the structure within totality. These conceptual oppositions are the condition of possibility for philosophy. This forges a doubling of philosophy because empiricism had been traditionally relegated to the place of supplement or absence. In place of totality, Derrida acknowledges the play between presence and absence which makes philosophy possible. By acknowledging that there is "nothing outside the text"¹, Derrida is democratizing philosophy by demolishing the hierarchy of representation that claims that signified, or ideal, is superior to image, or sign. This is because in Derrida's reading the supplement, or the sign, is interchangeable with the signified and is in fact the very condition of its possibility. The hierarchy between speech and writing also collapses as Derrida argues that "there never has been anything but writing".² There is no external referent or transcendental signified that divides representation into signifier and signified,

¹ Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. 158.

² Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. 158.



but a chain of supplements that infinitely refer to each other. Derrida thus overcomes totality and logocentrism by acknowledging the quasi-transcendental, which is the repetition of the transcendental in the empirical. Derrida's method is to locate the limit of the text, or the limit of philosophy, and transgress it towards what it had negated or what had been suppressed within the economy of its conceptual oppositions. Deconstruction acknowledges this as a double writing through iterability and the concept of signature. The absolute is only perpetuated by the trace. The transcendental is only activated through its repetition as the empirical in iterability. The transcendental does not exist outside the empirical, just as the empirical does not exist outside the transcendental through repetition.

In this section I will be discussing Derrida's deconstruction of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, which also elaborates his question of method. This question of method can then be extrapolated to his readings of other philosophers. Derrida's reading performs a singularity which simultaneously exemplifies a general method. Derrida's reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, according to Paul De Man in *Critical Writings*³ shows a close affinity with Jean Starobinski's "intellectual biography." It is this account that allows Derrida to give a reading of Rousseau's philosophy such that the philosophy follows the same pattern as the autobiographical details. According to De Man, Derrida begins his essay with the discussion of a philologically oriented remark of Starobinski, a matter of determining the date of *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, thus demonstrating the affinity between both texts.⁴ This enables Derrida to discuss Rousseau's philosophical issues (the noble savage, speech and writing and the origin of languages, the social contract) alongside and closely related to the autobiographical elements (the young Jean-Jacques and his wet-nurse, mother, his masturbation

fantasies). In both philosophy and autobiography, the supplement is relegated to a secondary sphere but Derrida demonstrates that this supplement is part of the very structurality that enables us to read and think the dominant aspects of discourse such as speech and the noble savage. Derrida thus demonstrates that the supplementarity of philosophy and auto-biography functions through the iterability of Rousseau's idea that there is such a thing as a foundational and originary presence such as speech in his philosophy and sex in his autobiography. Derrida then demonstrates the irreducibility of the supplement to thinking the origin: writing is necessary to thinking speech because speech is already a form of writing, just as masturbation and auto-affection is a condition of possibility for relating to others. Hence the inclusion of the autobiography with a reading of Rousseau's philosophy is a demonstration of the supplementarity that exemplifies itself in both texts. It thus displays a fundamental iterability to Rousseau's text. Hence these demonstrate a fundamental exchangeability between origin and supplement because everything is already supplementary: the origin is already a supplement.

Reading Starobinski, it is clear that Derrida has based his deconstruction upon Starobinski's account which attributes to Rousseau a certain desire for immediacy, presence and the originary and a distrust of mediation, the supplementary and the substitute such as signs and wet nurses. Rousseau desires the immediacy of God, the original mother, nature and the voice, and denigrates as inferior signs, writing, masturbation and wet nurses in Starobinski's account. Hence there is an iterability to Rousseau's account of presence in both his valorisation of nature and the more autobiographical details in Starobinski's account such as Rousseau's distrust of wet mothers and masturbation. In both accounts Starobinski notes a desire for presence and the originary over the substitute, which Derrida then deconstructs by noting that the sign and mediation or the dangerous supplement is the very condition of possibility for thinking the primary term such as sex, Nature and

³ Paul De Man. *Critical Writings*. University of Minnesota Press, USA. 1989.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.



voice. The notion of supplementarity is thus another iterable form that occurs in both Rousseau's philosophy and Starobinski's autobiographical account. Derrida demonstrates that autobiography and philosophy are supplementary and that the notion of presence in both discourses occurs as an iterable form. Derrida thus demonstrates the iterability of Rousseau's account of the supplement in both his philosophy and Starobinski's autobiography of Rousseau. For instance, in the passage below we have Starobinski's account of Rousseau's disdain for writing:

Marvellous writer that he is, Rousseau is constantly protesting against the art of writing. For even though he recognizes that 'human power acts through means', he is unhappy in the world of means, in which he feels lost. If he perseveres with writing, it is to hasten the moment when the pen will fall from his hands and the essential things will be said in the silent embrace of reconciliation and return. In the absence of a reconciliation with his perfidious friends, writing makes sense only as a way of denouncing any attempt at communication as nonsensical.⁵

Above we see that Derrida's account of Rousseau's denigration of writing can be attributed to Starobinski's account of Rousseau, who according to Starobinski, distrusts the mediated nature of writing. Derrida locates Rousseau's disdain for absence and the mediated form of writing in Starobinski's account and hence encounters the iterability of the Rousseau text. Elsewhere in the autobiography, Starobinski performs a similar characterization of Rousseau's disdain for the mediation of signs, culture, wet-mothers and masturbation. Derrida's account thus bases itself on Starobinski's account of Rousseau's distrust for mediation, the substitute and the supplement, which Derrida notes that Rousseau personally names dangerous and inferior. Hence there is a fundamental iterability to the Rousseau

text in both his philosophy and Starobinski's autobiographical account. The supplement is labelled secondary, subversive, and inferior to presence in both accounts. Autobiography and philosophy thus supplement each other, and presence is an iterable form that occurs in both accounts. It is Starobinski's mediation of Rousseau, hence the iteration of Rousseau, that allows us to witness Rousseau's privileging of presence. Hence Rousseau is iterable both in his own philosophy and in Starobinski's autobiography, which Derrida brings to attention by supplementing the Rousseau philosophy with Starobinski's more autobiographical account of him. These accounts, philosophy and autobiography, supplement each other and are iterations of the Rousseau text, thus demonstrating at a performative level their very content in terms of form.

What Derrida demonstrates in both Rousseau's autobiography and philosophy is that each term is as vital to illuminating the other and thus cannot function without the opposing term because it needs to exclude the opposing term to be defined by it. There can be no nature without culture, voice without writing as these perform an essential function, and these so called original terms such as mothers are already supplements of an origin that does not exist. The difference between these terms, the supplement, is excluded from Rousseau's philosophy but demonstrated to be absolutely necessary by Derrida. The supplement which had been designated as an absence is in fact not a void but a replacement that is as much plenitude as the presence to which it is supposed to be secondary. In this sense it is dangerous because it is a doubling of the originary. The sign, as well as writing, which Rousseau had marked as something subversive and secondary, is fully capable of functioning in the place of the signified. The space between the supplement and the originary that is the difference between the two is the a priori condition of both to function. What nature had relegated as secondary to presence, such as masturbation is in fact the condition of relating to otherness in the first place

⁵ Jean Starobinski. *Jean Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1988.



to occur. Auto-affection that takes place in activities such as masturbation and self-contemplation marks the division, the temporal delay and difference that is the condition of communication and provides the entrance of absence. Absence is the supplementary condition that co-exists with presence in order for communication to occur. Presence and absence are not hierarchies in this sense but doublings of each other, each replacing the other in what Derrida calls the chain of supplements. The supplement exists in the plane between presence and absence because it is the difference that enables the functioning of metaphysics. Culture is another such supplement relegated to nature which is its own a priori condition of possibility. Culture is not subservient or secondary to nature but an essential condition of possibility to the forming of the human, hence while Rousseau would valorise a sort of naturalist primitivism in the noble savage Derrida demonstrates that culture is no less a factor in determining the vagaries of human behaviour.

A “supplement” is an appendage, an addition which is extraneous and not necessary, an artificial aid or technology that is parasitical on the original. Perhaps it is also an inferior copy of the original called upon to perform the tasks of the original where the original is lacking. It makes up for a lack, as Derrida calls it, it is a substitute. However where Rousseau would denigrate it as something dangerous and evil because it lacks the qualities or the “presence” of the original Derrida would argue that it is a replacement that is necessary. Analogically, the empirical has been named an inferior copy of the transcendental by Plato. Derrida's intervention implies that it is not a parasitical copy but a necessary replacement or a section of an entire infrastructure, economy or system. To this it is entirely essential and a necessary condition for that which it replaces. Derrida shows that the origin is already a supplement and the supplement is necessary to conceiving the primary term. For instance, masturbation and auto-affection are the conditions of possibility for relating to others, these are not secondary to nature. Wet-nurses are a necessary

substitute for mothers when mothers are unable to perform that function. Culture is not secondary to but equal to nature (and its condition of possibility).

On Derrida's account, Rousseau claims that there has never been an intermediary between everything and nothing. The supplement is an absence, writing and representation are absences, in reality there is only presence and plenitude. Speech and nature are examples of this. Derrida argues instead that the supplement is not an absence but an intermediary, or the mediation between presence and absence. The supplement is the difference that enables both the existence of presence and absence. Rousseau argues that that writing is only a supplement to speech, masturbation is a subservient evil to Nature, and for Rousseau only speech or nature in its full plenitude or presence is metaphysically concrete. Rousseau has formulated such arguments because he believed in the value of presence and origin, or the absolute proximity of the signifier to the signified, and in seeking to preserve the value of the origin and voice, or a certain phonocentrism and logocentrism, Rousseau prioritizes the ordinary element in philosophy as its superior element and very foundation. Rousseau then denigrates as secondary all that is supplementary in philosophy. Derrida demonstrates that such a move occludes and excludes the very condition of possibility of his philosophy- the supplement as the a priori difference that is necessary to thinking both. Derrida wants to point out the difference between everything and nothing, presence and absence that makes metaphysics possible. This difference is the supplement or writing. This spacing between transcendental and empirical, namely the quasi-transcendental, conditions metaphysics through the distinguishing movement of the trace. Derrida thus performs meta-phenomenology in naming difference and the quasi-transcendental as the conditionality that produces metaphysics. Rousseau protects not merely metaphysics, but logocentrism and phonocentrism, the absolute proximity of the signifier to the signified, and the priority of the



signified over the signifier. What Derrida shows is that difference is necessary to producing and thinking this very logocentrism and presence that would otherwise not hold as that which is supplementary is an a priori condition of possibility for thinking the structure of Rousseau's philosophy. Logocentrism and phonocentrism would be impossible to conceive without the supplement which Rousseau labels as dangerous and inferior.

Derrida justifies his use of the word "supplement" by using it as a tool to explore the status of all that has been designated as the negative or subsidiary pole of philosophy or systems of thought. The negative, Other, ghost or shadow, and absence have always been relegated to a "supplementary" status in philosophy. In his essay, Derrida argues that what is supplementary is essential and necessary, an a priori condition of possibility. The quasi-transcendental acknowledges the "between" of the supplement as intermediary which makes philosophy possible, philosophy is neither transcendental nor empirical, but enabled by the "between" or "nothing", or "difference" which separates the two.⁶ The advantage of Derrida's method over other methods of reading is that it accounts for the conditions that make reading possible.

It makes for an inclusive reading rather than a partial or politically biased reading, and there is politics that is being addressed. This politics is an ethics of open-ness to the other and a hospitality to what had been traditionally been relegated to a secondary and subservient status. In this way, the transcendental or the Absolute is not reduced but expanded to include Otherness, making for a reading that is democratic and just. Reading is thus informed by an ethics of performing justice and hospitality rather than blindness and exclusion to the Other and unthought of language. Deconstruction is performative as well as a form of testament to forms of injustice

which it then addresses by performing a reading that addresses excluded differences and elements. Derrida demonstrates that the condition of possibility for a text's reception is its repeatability, or iterability. Without this trace or representation, nothing would be communicated to consciousness. Deconstruction thus is a doubling commentary in the sense that it takes the condition of possibility for the very act of reading to occur into account, its necessity for mediation, or iterability. Derrida's question, in place of "What is Philosophy", is "What makes Philosophy possible?" This entails an examination of the conditions of possibility for reading. What Philosophy has failed to acknowledge, is that it is precisely that, that it is a reading, or a certain method of reading. A text, by its very nature, is open to just that, readings that exceed the manifest intent that an author inscribes (what the author means [voudrait dire]). Reading, as has been traditionally conceived, is the uncovering of the latent meaning of a text. This is the transcendental signified or external referent of meaning that the reader only discovers or sees. Derrida's intervention shows that reading is inevitably an act of production of signifying structures. The reader invents and always exceeds what is latent in the text, and as Derrida would have it, is entirely capable of identifying its blindspot and reading or seeing beyond the circumscribed meaning of a text. This act of exceeding the blindspot of the text is the opening of the text towards what had been latent within its manifest structure, or as Derrida would put it, a "doubling commentary". Philosophy has to acknowledge that as a text, not indubitable Truth or the Absolute, it is inescapably open to reading, which opens the text beyond its circumscribed meaning. As Narcissus only acknowledges Echo⁷ by identifying the Other within himself, reading must be reflexive of its own (theatrical) conditions of production in order for justice and love to be part of it. Derrida's intervention shows that reading is not an act of discovery but an act of invention, in

⁶ Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. 157.

⁷ Jacques Derrida. *Politics of Friendship*. Verso. New York. 1997. 24.



which one exceeds the circumscribed limits of the text to see beyond its blindspots, inventing meaning where meaning is not latent or fixed but radically uncertain and undecidable, open to the reader's act of active invention, seeing, decoding, interpretation and deciphering meaning where this had not been determined prior to the reader's intervention. Reading is thus an act of production rather than a passive act of decoding latent meaning, and the reader on Derrida's account is no passive witness but an active reader who invents and produces meaning, empowered to render a subjective perspective rather than discover an objective reality or transcendental signified.

In this section I describe Derrida's methodology as exemplified by several of his texts. In "Outwork", Derrida discusses deconstruction as the structure of the double mark which seizes and entangles the binary opposition, one of the term retains its old name so as to destroy the opposition to which it no longer quite belongs, and to which in an event it has never quite yielded. The history of this opposition is of the incessant struggles generative of hierarchical configurations, working the entire field within which these texts move. Thus deconstruction renames the old structure through displacing the dislodging through the signature and trace in order to displace and reverse the hierarchy to which it belonged. The structure itself is worked in turn: the rule according to which every concept necessarily received two similar marks: a repetition without identity: one mark inside and the other outside the deconstructed system, which gives rise to a double reading and a double writing. Deconstruction is a double science. Deconstruction thus challenges the hierarchy of the binary opposition through the discovery of aporia which fixates it through its traditional consolidation. Through examining the fact that signified and signifier, interior and exterior are not opposites but the same and undergo a process of erasure, deconstruction democratizes philosophy by demonstrating that there never has been anything but writing. Writing is not inferior to speech but its possibility as a system of differences

which relays signifier to signifier in an infinite play of supplements rather than a referential origin or transcendental signified. Deconstruction is the celebration of endless play in meaning through the movement of the infinite trace, which opens up signification to infinite possibilities as there is nothing outside the text. There is no mythical origin or transcendental signified. There is just the play between supplement and signifiers which relate to each other in a system of differences and difference. Deconstruction thus reverses the hierarchy of transcendental and empirical, signifier and signified to celebrate infinite play and textuality to show that philosophy is a form of literature. Because reading is invention and not discovery with the movement of the infinite trace, as reading is determined within a context of radical uncertainty and undecidability, reading is thus a productive act rather than an inheritance of latent and decided meaning. Reading is taking chances with a text rather than subscribing to an ossified and unshakeable ground of inherited meaning. This act of invention thus pluralizes meaning and opens the text towards an abyss and an infinite amount of possibilities. Meaning is abyssal and infinite rather than circumscribed and predetermined.

Beginning with Nietzsche's aestheticization of philosophy, Derrida's philosophy takes on a similar turn towards aphorism and metaphor by showing that philosophy proceeds by metaphor and signature to collapse the divide between literature and philosophy. Derrida's collapse of the oppositions between speech and writing, transcendental and empirical, signified and signifier demonstrates that there is a paradoxical difference which is not a difference but a difference which translates into a sameness between the two because concepts are irrevocably mediated. Philosophy proceeds by signature and metaphor through having to go through a process of repetition or iterability. Metaphoricity, or the quasi-transcendental, is thus a condition of possibility for philosophy. Philosophy proceeds by metaphor and thus does not exist outside its signification through metaphoricity, or iterability and signature.



In “Tympan”, Derrida writes that philosophy has always insisted on thinking its other. This is the supplement of philosophy, or the negative of the binary. A tympan marks the limit of a discourse (it is the outer membrane of the ear). To tympanize philosophy means to reconsider the meaning of the limit and to blur the boundaries between outer and inner, presence and absence. Deconstruction exceeds this limit and examines the difference between outer and inner, presence and absence that makes philosophy possible, so there is no longer a margin, or a within and without of philosophy, but a text whose supplements are infinitely open to reading. The two forms of philosophy that Derrida identifies- hierarchy and envelopment- lead to forms of phallogentrism and logocentrism as patriarchy and the ideal or center are privileged at the expense of what is supplementary to it. In place of this, Derrida writes that philosophy has always thought its other. It has always proceeded through iterability or the repetition of the ideal in the sensible. This sensible Other is that which Idealism negated while remaining blind to it. The task of philosophy now is to rethink the margin or the limit. Philosophy’s task is to exceed it and show that philosophy and its other are not a hierarchy or envelopment but essentially that inner and outer, presence and absence are the same. It is the difference between the two which enables metaphysics to function.

In “Signature, Event, Context”, Derrida argues that writing forms the basis of communication by means of its ability to perpetuate itself through citability and iterability. Writing forms a rupture and spacing with the absent origin in order to enable it to communicate. Writing functions even in the absence of the sender, and thus reveals communication to perpetuate itself even in the absence of its origin. Writing is a system of differential marks and difference, in terms of iterability and the deferral of meaning through space and time. Writing is precisely what enables communication. Writing thus forms the basis for speech which is modelled after it as a system of difference in order to communicate- the principle of communication is

iterability, citability and repeatability of the original mark. In the essay Derrida discusses the opposition between speech and writing. Derrida begins by giving a deconstruction of writing. Derrida observes that writing, as conceived traditionally, is closely linked to communication. Writing is a means of extending the field of communication. It does not add to it or alter it but simply transmits meaning in the absence of the sender of the message. Writing is thus shown to be a means of communication through conveying, across the passage of space and time, the identical message but differing and being altered slightly in its mediated form through repetition with a difference, or iterability.

Deconstruction then intervenes and transforms by dislodging and displacing a traditional hierarchy and pluralizing it to discover a double science or a double writing through iterability, metaphoricity and signature. Derrida’s discovery of repetition with a difference demonstrates the fundamental mediation of concepts that dislodge and displace hierarchy, instituting a new writing that signifies plurivocally rather referring to a univocal transcendental signified. Hence, meaning becomes polysemy and dissemination, which proceeds by metaphor, and thus collapses the distinction between philosophy and literature. Everything is writing. There never has been anything but writing.⁸ Philosophy and literature are the same in existing as texts to be interpreted rather than as the uncovering of univocal or absolute meaning belonging to a transcendental signified or absolute origin. As meaning is an act of invention, one has to gamble and take chances with a text, in a climate of radical indeterminacy and undecidability. Where there is radical indeterminacy and undecidability, the reader’s role becomes infinitely more active in producing signifying structures where there had been none, as there is nothing outside the text,

⁸ Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. 158.



meaning is invention rather than discovery of pre-determined essences and unshakeable truths. Truth is difference, occupying a space between determinacy and indeterminacy, because affirming truth as a presence denies possibility and alterity while denying truth only reproduces it as a negative and thus remains bound to its ontological structure. Truth is thus not reducible to presence or absence. Rather it occupies a space between as difference and the quasi-transcendental. Truth is neither presence nor absence, philosophy nor non-philosophy, metaphysics nor non-metaphysics but inhabits a space between, the paradoxical space of the quasi-transcendental, that determines the thinking of both. This is because it is this prior and anterior difference that determines the very possibility of thinking truth and its other, philosophy and non-philosophy, transcendental and empirical. In this paper we will be examining the quasi-transcendental nature of truth, truth that is neither transcendental nor empirical but the difference and difference between the two.

Derrida's style

In *Differance*, Derrida outlines the key non-concept in his philosophy, which delays and defers, spatially and temporally, signification and meaning. It thus puts meaning into a certain play. Difference is a non-concept rather than a concept which brings the unthought in philosophy to light. Difference also affirms the economy of difference within a dialectic rather than privileging a binary structure. In this paper we will examine different ways in which Derrida sheds light on aporias in phenomenology, showing that the limit or impossibility of a text is precisely delimited or its site of possibility. This will play out in different ways. In our examination of Husserl we will show that the distinction between transcendental and empirical fails to hold as nothing distinguishes the transcendental and empirical. Similarly, we will examine how Heidegger's non-metaphysics is indistinguishable from metaphysics, and how the radical empiricism of Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur and Blanchot translates into a repetition of metaphysics rather than a negation of it and thus

becomes indistinguishable from metaphysics. Derrida shows that each text is inescapably haunted by its double, and hence deconstruction becomes a double science and a double-writing, in which the ghost of a text returns to haunt it through aporia and the delimitation of limit.

Geoffrey Bennington has remarked on the humour of Derrida. Indeed Derrida, through irony and playfulness, invokes laughter through his demonstrations that hierarchies are based on a certain structurality, which has always simultaneously affirmed the center as a non-center. This is because thought has always simultaneously been determined by the unthought and its margin or ghost. Derrida's non-concepts such as trace, difference, iterability and quasi-transcendental are ironic displacements of traditional hierarchies to reveal a non-origin to be the origin. Derrida affirms difference, or the nothing that separates the transcendental and empirical, as the condition of possibility of all thought and structurality of structure. This is because phenomenological reduction would not be enabled if this difference were ontological or substantial. Through irony and playfulness, Derrida displaces, and yet affirms, metaphysical structures simultaneously. A central strategy of Derrida's is the revelation of aporia or paradox, demonstrating that the impossibility of a text is precisely its possibility. Or that the limit of a text is precisely what allows it to be de-limited. This joyful affirmation of play and paradox shows that Derrida brings humour to philosophy and disturbs concepts through his non-concepts of difference and trace. Derrida does this in order to show that traditional hierarchies are based on structuralities which affirm the center as a loss of center because the ghost of a text always returns to haunt it. Derrida democratizes phenomenology through demonstrating that non-philosophy and philosophy are fundamentally the same rather than related hierarchically or mutually exclusive. The inside/outside and transcendental/empirical distinction is shown to be an illusion, hence Derrida democratizes phenomenology by acknowledging the site of exclusion is precisely phenomenology's ground of possibility. Derrida



demonstrates that phenomenology cannot do without its ghost or unthought. Phenomenology's other is shown to be precisely its condition of possibility, hence the distinction philosophy and non-philosophy, being and non-being, presence and absence is shown to be an illusion. As transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion, truth is neither transcendental nor empirical, philosophy nor non-philosophy, but the space between that is quasi-transcendental. The interval between the transcendental and the empirical, difference, functions as the limit, spacing and trace that produces both transcendental and empirical and enables metaphysics to function. As the quasi-transcendental, or the difference between the transcendental and empirical, is what allows us to think both, transcendental and empirical do not exist outside the dynamic relation of difference and iterability. The quasi-transcendental is the limit or spacing that allows us to think both the transcendental and empirical, hence empirical is not conceivable without transcendental and transcendental is not conceivable without the empirical as each term requires the other for the distinction to be upheld.

Derrida has remarked on his style that:

I do have concerns that may be called aesthetic- I don't particularly like that word; I have a concern about composition, about form, whose origin is not, however, exclusively aesthetic. Faced with the singularity of the world event, I have to respond to it singularly with my signature, in my own way, not as an aesthetic fetish, but to take responsibility. It happens to me and I have to respond, me, with my language, my age, my history, my *ductus*, my way of writing, off making the letters, even if it is illegible. Naturally one has to invent, not in the sense of fiction but in that of the performative : here is my response to a given situation; if it is a signature, then it too has to be an event, in its way, modestly, but it has to have the form of something that is not simply constative- it too, like all acts of responsibility, has to pledge itself, to give a pledge. This is how I would explain my concern about writing, form, rhetoric, politics. To be sure, mine is not only a concern with responsibility in the noble

ethico-metaphysical or ethico-juridical sense, it is also a concern about testimony, about testament, about leaving something that has a certain form, that appears. The big question is the question of beauty, and I cannot tackle it so fast.⁹

Derrida thus defines his aesthetic as ethical. It provides a ground for response and is performative, formulated to take responsibility for an event and render hospitality and justice to the Other and the unthought. It is a signature and a pledge in response to forms of injustice and totalitarianism, bearing witness and giving testimony to what is traditionally suppressed within a rigidly enforced power structure. Deconstruction is thus about beauty in the sense that it is an aesthetics of complexity where other forms of philosophy enforce certain forms of blindness, essentialism, simplification and injustice. Deconstruction renders hospitality to the Other and the unthought of language and politics. As Derrida mentions elsewhere in the interview, deconstruction is a sensitization to the multiple levels of structurality within an event or philosophy, it is a performative and demonstration that the dominant force in discourse cannot function without its shadow or ghost and thus has to acknowledge it as something which is as essential to determining it. In this way it renders justice and hospitality to the unthought and Other of language and politics. Deconstruction is thus essentially ethical and testimonial, recognizing all constituents within an economy of forces rather than privileging the dominant force in traditional consolidation as negative and positive, One and Other, transcendental and empirical, are all essential to thinking and determining each other. Deconstruction is justice in the sense that it bears witness to the whole and all constituents within a structure rather than privileging and blinding itself to one element, thus enabling a seeing beyond circumscribed elements to acknowledge the fundamental beauty of an organism or structure in

⁹ Jacques Derrida. *A Taste for the Secret*. Malden, MA ,Polity 2001.



its totality and wholeness. Derrida's work is thus a signature in the sense that it bears witness to the repetition that is necessary to thinking a structure. Where phenomenology has traditionally divided itself into either transcendental and empirical, Derrida demonstrates that transcendental and empirical are empty terms on their own and exist only in relation to each other as each requires the other as its defining axis and relational Other for the distinction to be upheld.

Deconstruction is thus justice as it enables a seeing beyond traditionally consolidated blindspots to acknowledge that transcendental idealism or empirical idealism is aporetic and blind to Otherness where true philosophy acknowledges that these exist only in dynamic relation to each other. There is no such thing as a pure transcendental idealism as Husserl needs to exclude the empirical in order to define his transcendental, just as Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Blanchot and Ricoeur require the transcendental to exclude it from their radical empiricisms. As Derrida has argued, deconstruction is the thinking of futurity and the opening of reading to the future of a democracy to come that acknowledges Otherness and alterity. It is an ethics of hospitality and open-ness to the Other as well as acknowledging the possibility of the self only exists in relation to the Other because the Other is always already implicit in the positing of the self. Deconstruction thus does not perform anything other than an acknowledgement of conditions that are already implicit in reading, discovering that the ghost of a text that inhabits it has always simultaneously determined it as its relational Other and condition of possibility for its very conceptualization. It is thus a mistake to assume Derrida is merely displacing and reversing hierarchy. His concern is to point out theoretical blindness and essentialism when one chooses to privilege only one aspect of a discourse, because discourse is simultaneously determined by its shadow or ghost. Deconstruction is thus the thinking of the simultaneous one and the other because these exist only in and through each other through iterability and differance. As Derrida puts

it, the relation is not merely ethical, but messianic as the other arrives before me, is already pre-existent in me as a condition of possibility as alterity is implicit in thinking the One and the ego¹⁰, the Other precedes me as a condition of possibility for the self, hence texts are not so much deconstructible as an action or process but self-deconstructible as a very possibility implicit in the thinking of structure. Alterity and Otherness is the condition of possibility for thinking the self, hence opening the text to its Other or ghost in deconstruction is merely naming the conditions that allow us to read and encounter the text in the first place.

In this paper, I will be discussing Derrida's reworking of metaphysics as history. Derrida describes history as the history of the metaphysical concept, where ontology delineated a strict division of signified and signifier, where the signified designated full presence to the signifier, which brings about a certain logocentrism. What this paper has done in place is show through Derrida that the signified is nothing outside the signifier and has to be relayed through time, history, and differance. This is a democratic move as it opens up possibilities for reading. By suggesting that meaning is not ossified and to be located outside the text but within the text, Derrida democratizes reading by suggesting reading is an act of invention and the possibilities for different readings are endless, where representation would hold you to an objective truth. In place this paper has shown that this history of the metaphysical concept as we know it, with transcendental and empirical strictly delineated and divided, has come to an end as there never has been anything but writing, meaning is located within the text rather than without, and the reader actively invents his reading instead of simply discovering an objective transcendental signified. The history of the metaphysical concept as we know it has come to an end which Derrida designates the end of the book and the beginning of writing, by acknowledging there never has been anything but

¹⁰ Ibid., 84.



writing we celebrate the play of meaning and the infinite possibility that comes about from opening the text to its shadow or Other. The history of the metaphysical concept suggested hierarchy, where the signified precedes the signifier, but by suggesting that all signs are supplements and that there never has been anything but writing, Derrida democratizes philosophy and opens up the text to infinite possibilities for reading. Reading is no longer discovery but invention, and the implications of transcendental-empirical difference being an illusion is that everything is already a supplement and hence a rigid transcendental signified which holds as primary and originary, which the sign only represents, is brought to an end. In place is a celebration of meaning as play and infinite possibility, moving beyond circumscribed limits of a text to see beyond its blindspots. Derrida also overcomes the history of metaphysics as logocentrism by inscribing difference at the heart of phenomenology, showing a non-origin to be an origin and demonstrating that signified is nothing outside signifier. Hence a pure presence uncontaminated by delay and temporalization or mediation is impossible as the transcendental exists only in and through the empirical.

I will now discuss Derrida's political texts and how these illuminate the assumptions of his phenomenology. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida explores the notion that language is never pure and uncontaminated from without, as all language is acquisition and assimilation. Recounting his roots as a Franco-Magrabian, his experience of language was one of colonization and assimilation rather than anything innately acquired or pre-existent. As Derrida puts it, the language called maternal is never purely natural, nor proper, nor inhabitable. Derrida recounts his experience of growing up as a Jewish Algerian assimilated by the French, from which he derived his first language, a language never properly his own as it was the language of the colonizer. Derrida then questions the purity of even the colonizer's language as his method of acquiring the language would have been similar to any of the

colonizer's own breed and race – that of conversation, learning and acquisition. The difference between a first language and a second language is thus blurred by Derrida as we see that the origin does not properly exist as everything is already supplementary, all language is learned, acquired, assimilated from without rather than proceeding from any innate ability or inbred knowledge. Extending this idea of assimilation and contamination to this paper, one could properly argue that there is no proper transcendental or originary ideal without the empirical. In the same way that language is acquisition, assimilation and contamination the transcendental likewise has to be mediated by the empirical to come into being. As Derrida argues, all language bears the violence of the colonizer as it is imposed from without and learnt rather than innate or inbred. The monolingualism of the Other is thus the language of the colonizer, imposed from an external source, where Derrida recounts the contaminations of Christian and French culture into his upbringing as he grew up and was subsequently displaced from his French Nationality more than once. The idea of mediation thus comes into play. There is properly no transcendental without the empirical as the ideal requires history and the material to come into being. In the same way there is no pure, uncontaminated self existing in a vacuum without external influences such as the colonizer's language and culture, the transcendental does not exist outside its history and specificity or particularity as the empirical. In the same way one's language is fundamentally mediated from without by conversation, education, acquisition and assimilation, the ideal lives only through history, Husserl's transcendental has to be re-activated through History in the *Rückfrage* in order to come into existence, just as God properly unfolds through difference within the limits of everything and nothing, presence and absence. As Derrida argues, the ideal is nothing outside the history in which it displays itself, just as the empirical does not exist outside its supplementarity to the transcendental.



In the *Work of Mourning*, Derrida describes friendship as one that is defined by finitude, fidelity and mourning. One mourns a friend because one's self is also constituted by friendship, in mourning the Other we also mourn the self, the self is in this sense indebted to and predicated on the Other. Recalling the philosophers that he has survived such as Barthes and de Man, Derrida comments on his indebtedness to them and indeed how the Other has influenced, moulded, shaped and formed the self. As Derrida argues, the law of friendship is one of surviving and mourning. I am a friend by virtue of the fact that I can survive the Other, and thus mourn him. Friendship is thus premised upon finitude as its limit and necessity. In similar ways, this paper has argued that the infinite knows its realization through the finite. In the same way the value of an ideal or transcendental notion such as friendship is defined by its limits in finitude and mourning, the ideal does not properly exist outside its finitude and history. This is what we will describe in the Husserl papers as the *Ruckfrage* and re-activation, the ideal does not properly exist in a vacuum, but through finitude as its limit and condition. In other papers, we will discuss how a pure finitude or materialism does not exist as each definition of the purely finite or purely material requires its opposite, the infinite and ideal, to mediate, supplement and define it. In the same way the limit of friendship is finitude, the limit of phenomenology as we have seen in this paper is its contingency and history. There is no pure transcendental, or pure empirical, these exist only in relation to each other as supplements and traces.

In the *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida defines friendship as an answer for, an answer to and an answering before the Other. The condition of possibility for friendship is that the Other has to precede the self. Friendship is first a response to the Other, then a responsibility for the Other, then a respect for the Other and a basis for moral goodwill. The basis for friendship is thus that the Other provides the foundation for the self, the Other has to precede the self and exist as its responsibility and limit. While this paper has not

discussed Derrida's politics explicitly, the commentary in the *Politics of Friendship* is relevant in defining the Other as the limit and horizon for defining the self or One. As we have earlier discussed on methodology, the Other is implicit in the definition of the One or self as it is its structural necessity and defining opposite. In the same way, we have shown that phenomenology's unthought always forms the basis for thought as the ghost of a text always returns to haunt it. Defining the transcendental in isolation from the empirical or the empirical in isolation from the transcendental does not make sense. Rather, just as the Other has to precede the One in friendship, phenomenology is always informed by its shadow. The ideal requires the material to define itself against, and vice versa. Transcendental can only exist in relation to the empirical as it is its defining opposite that must exist in order for the distinction to be upheld and coherent.

Hence a consistency can be seen with this series of analogies drawn between Derrida's later works such as *Monolingualism of the Other*, *The Politics of Friendship and the Work of Mourning*. The consistent theme that runs throughout is how the Other is always the foundation upon which the One is premised and thus exists as its limit and defining opposite that it cannot do without. In a similar fashion we will see throughout this paper that attempts to divorce the transcendental from the empirical as we witness in Husserl or to divorce the empirical from the transcendental in Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Blanchot, Levinas and Ricoeur cannot be coherent as in doing so one occludes the Other as the defining moment and relational opposite upon which the One must be premised. At the foundation of Derrida's phenomenology is thus a politics and an ethics. It is an open-ness and hospitality to the Other as the necessary founding condition of possibility of the One. Derrida's democratization of phenomenology is thus an opening up of phenomenology to include and embrace this Other as its condition of possibility and defining moment.

In this paper I have examined Derrida's method as exemplified by several of his texts.



Derrida demonstrates that discourse is always simultaneously determined by its shadow or ghost, because each moment of exclusion and distinction of its constituent terms requires the opposing term as a relational Other and defining axis to be upheld. Derrida thus demonstrates that transcendental and empirical are empty terms on their own as philosophy requires its relation to non-philosophy to define itself, transcendental and

empirical only exist in relation to each other through iterability and difference. One cannot define the transcendental in isolation from the empirical and vice versa. Truth is thus neither transcendental nor empirical, but located in the space between that is quasi-transcendental. I also examined Derrida's ideas of politics and history, and how these are informed by an opening of philosophy to its Other or shadow.

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