

JACQUES DERRIDA: THE DOMINANCE OF UNITY

by

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For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.

And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book.

Revelations

Religious traditions are anchored in their sacred texts and thus demand a finality to their teachings, a closing of the book. If the book is re-opened a violation occurs, a violation that is foreseen and written within the book, for by its own appellation, the holy Book must include all possible events, even the occasion of its own violation. The self-proclaimed guardians of the Book, those who through a history of domination and suppression have come to be called "the orthodox," enforce its integrity in the name of the true and the proper. Thus the Book is endowed with its capital letter. Propriety is derived from the Book's lineage, the divine word, testified to by the authority of its divinely inspired authors. The issues of orthodoxy and authority are played out in the formation of the canon that must be both representational and proleptic, centering its basic doctrines in terms of the uniqueness of its origins and the all-encompassing nature of its termination. The

tradition is bound by the completion of the Book and all of history is inscribed within its corpus.

The Bible not only offers us the highest model of a book, the specimen that will never be superceded; the Bible also encompasses all books, no matter how alien they are to biblical revelation, knowledge, poetry, prophecy, proverbs, because it contains the spirit of the book; the books that follow it are always contemporaneous with the Bible: the Bible certainly grows, expands with itself in an infinite growth that leaves it identical, permanently sanctioned by the relationship of unity, just as the ten Laws set forth and contain the monologos, the One Law. The law of Unity that cannot be transgressed and can never be denied by negation alone.¹

Should the Book be re-opened as either addition or subtraction a transgression occurs. But given its Unity, this transgression is rendered harmless for it has always already been encompassed within its totality. Transgression can never exist as an exteriority. It is inevitably interior and it is this interiority that renders the transgression benign, uneventful, in that its negation or affirmation is overcome, incorporated in the totality that is the Book itself. The law of Unity, the One Law of which Blanchot writes, consumes the forbidden, quells the rebellious. For the Book and all books that follow there can be no pure exteriority, and all that is, is ruled by the logos, the law, the

perfection of the divine will. The hermeneutics of interpretation has as its center the Book and all interpretation attempts to derive one Meaning/meaning of all reading and writing. Thus hermeneutics seeks its own termination in the triumph of meaning, the Revelation that makes all books possible. The Book produces history with the Now at its center, origin and telos at its boundaries. All past presents and all future presents endure in the permanence of the Book. Like Augustine's God the Book is at rest in the Eternal Now but is simultaneously at work. The Book is God's Work at work. It is about the work of its own embellishment but, at the same time, its own effacement. The construction and the deconstruction of the book renders the Book impossible. It is about this impossibility that Jacques Derrida is at work, the strange work that has come to be called "deconstruction."

There is no place to begin with Derrida; oftentimes the place has been Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, a figure whose writing is crucial for Derrida, the work of the Book is about the business of "revenge." It is the exercise of the will-to-power over texts. As Nietzsche would understand it, the violent imposition of Being upon becoming. The Book, any book, seeks an economy of exchange from itself to itself, an economy of the Same, through the currency of binary thinking. Understood philosophically and theologically it is the protection of the Infinite against the finite, the Eternal against the temporal, the True against the errant. In its embellishment, the Book privileges one of these opposing terms with propriety that simultaneously devalues the other. In its destruction the Book excludes what these oppositions cannot include. In the

narcissistic oversight of the Book, the Logos, the One systematically excludes its own other, the other that makes its power possible, but it refuses to think a strange "Other" that is not its own. In the unforeseen inclusion of this uncanny Other, the Book inevitably writes its own "end".

Ontotheology, the complicity of theology and philosophy to make common cause in the name of the One, understands Meaning to be transcendent and immanent. The Book reflects God, Reality, Reason, Goodness - all substitute names for the center of metaphysical Unity. This Unity forms the Book and takes its form therein. In the manifestation of the logos in the world. This extra linguistic meaning forms all books and is imported from the divine to the human through language. The language of the book is mimetic, reflecting the meaning that transcends it, wherein signified and signifier function in the union of re-presentation. For Derrida, the history of Western metaphysics is "logocentric". But, likewise, it is "phonocentric" in that all occidental methods of analysis, explication, reading and interpretation have failed to ask the radical question of writing. Writing is not merely devalued speech as it has been deemed in the tradition. Writing, radically conceived, provokes a reversal that subverts ontotheology. This "double writing" constitutes a fold in the corpus of the book, solicits a gap between embellishment and an uninvited Otherness that never presents itself, but is never absent.

The relationship between the two texts, between presence in general (anwesenheit) and that which exceeds it before

or beyond Greece - such a relationship can never offer itself to be read in the form of presence...And yet, that which gives us to think beyond the closure cannot be simply absent. Absent, either it would give us nothing to think as it still would be a negative more of presence...In order to exceed metaphysics it is necessary that a trace be inscribed within the text of metaphysics, a trace that continues to signal not in the direction of another presence, or another form of presence, but in the direction of an entirely other text. Such a trace cannot be thought 'more metaphysics.' No philosopheme is prepared to master it. And it (is) that which must elude mastery. Only presence is mastered.²

Deconstruction, as Derrida conceives it, locates the dissymmetry between writing and "writing" (*écriture*), the fissure that forms a dislocation. The strange text of "writing" is not an alternative to the book, rather a return to the book that writes its impossibility. The book, with its beginning and end forms a narrative or system, controlled by the author who infuses his intentions into the corpus. The nexus of signs articulated in the book makes experience continuous, progressive and ultimately controllable. The Unity of the book is the object of metaphysical desire, the desire for order and security, the desire for revenge against all that does not conform.

As Derrida himself understands deconstruction, it would not be possible without the opening provided by Heidegger's ontico-ontological

difference. Heidegger's radical interrogation of presence as the metaphysical determination of the meaning and truth of Being characterizes the ontotheological tradition as having treated Being as present. In its forgetfulness of the difference between Being and beings, metaphysics has cast the difference into oblivion. It is through the dominance of this oblivion that the tradition may be understood. It demands that all interrogation of Being be exhausted in the understanding of either being or non-being. Within the binary oppositions of presence and absence, being and non-being, Being is already understood as presence. But through the opening of a radical interrogation of Being, Heidegger puts back into play the questioning of the Being of beings that cannot be reduced to "subject", "essence", "substance", "object", or any other manifestation of presence. That which has been "forgotten" for Heidegger or violently suppressed for Derrida issues its effects throughout the history of metaphysics although it cannot be spoken or understood, for that which is spoken and understood is always present. It does not offer itself as an alternative history within a history. It is the very possibility of history, of presence, a certain kind of absence "older" than presence. But Derrida locates the remnants of metaphysical thinking in Heidegger's difference. "The extraordinary trembling to which classical ontology is subjected in Sein and Zeit still remains within the grammar and lexicon of metaphysics."³

In the first place, Heidegger's task is to seek the meaning of Being. In the second, he divides the proper and the improper in terms of authenticity. Thirdly, there is in Heidegger's texts an uncritical

cooperation between presence and the phone. The question of the meaning of Being is linked to the language of ontotheology in determining Being as a manifestation of self-presence or what Heidegger himself labeled "sub-jectism". Derrida explores the inextricable connections between meaning and metaphysics. Meaning is connected with the logos, the speech prior to presence that is a primordial present. The meaning of the book is the author's thoughts, the meaning of the Book, the Author's thoughts. The spoken is the manifestation of these thoughts, closer to them and prior to the written. The spoken is pronounced by the living voice, the coupling of breath and psyche. Meaning resides in this merger that is also a contract. But once committed to writing it only imperfectly preserves the original meaning. Deprived of the living voice, writing is thus understood as "the cadaverous rigidity"⁴ that has lost its vitality. Spoken discourse, modeled upon dialectics, is living and well-born. It has a proper heritage. It is the discourse of the Father, the figure that substantiates its legitimacy. "Logos is a 'zōon'. An animal that is born, grows and belongs to the 'phusis.' Linguistics, logic dialectics and zoology are all in the same camp."⁵ Logos is well-proportioned with a head, middle and tail. The Book displays the same proportions.

Socrates: But to this you will surely agree: every discourse (logon, like a living creature (asper zoon), should be put together (sinestanai) that it has its own body and lacks neither head nor foot, middle nor extremities, all composed in such a way that they suit both each other and the whole. (264 b-c)

In this passage from the "Phaedrus", Plato makes it clear that speech is an offspring of an organism and should reflect its nature. It must form a unity infused into it by the thoughts and voice of its father, the transmitter of life. Deprived of voice and twice removed from the psyche, writing is ill-born, deformed, improper, "...freed from 'logos', this individual has no essence, no truth no patronym, no constitution of its own."⁶ Writing is the miserable son cut off from its father, at the disposal of misuse.

Socrates: And once a thing is put into writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place...it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the right people, and not address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its aid, being unable to defend itself or attend to its own needs. (275 e)

The father is the father of Western thought, Socrates. His children, the citizens of Athens are well-born or ill-born. We, his progeny, are either/or as well. The voice of Socrates resonates in Plato's dialogues, the gift of the living voice, the wisest of all men, the one who never writes. As the figure of the father, Socrates represents the Good, the Wise, the Courageous, namely all the virtues united in the psyche of he who both guides and corrupts through his voice.

From Plato forward, good writing that faithfully re-presents the living voice, is tied down in philosophy as the virtues are tied down in the psyche. But good writing is always in the dangerous situation of

"drifting" toward corruption, the dark brother is its uncanny twin. For Derrida, the history of ontotheology is played out in the space between "good" and "bad" writing. "Good" writing corresponds to its meaning, its essence. It is authentic and reliable, serving as an aid to the memory. "Bad" writing is deviant and errant. It distorts the truth of the voice and is the vehicle of prevaricators and flatterers who seduce their audiences. Philosophy and theology have continuously endeavored to situate their truths in faithful writing while denouncing the unfaithful as meaningless, erroneous or heretical. But for Derrida philosophy operates from a place that is occupied by neither form of writing, a place that makes the polar opposition of writing and all polar oppositions impossible. "Writing" or "écriture" is a space of play between "good" and "bad" writing. Thus this "writing" has no proper name, not even a common name. It is the unnamable space of "différance", undecidable and "pharmakos", that which has no stable meaning, that is both remedy and poison.

If the 'pharmakon' is 'ambivalent', it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.)...The 'pharmakon' is the movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) difference. It is the 'différance' of difference.⁷

The difference between the 'a' and the 'e' in "différance" and "difference" functions generally within a language and grammar modeled on phonetic writing. But Derrida understands pure phonetic writing to be a fiction. The difference between the 'a' and the 'e' eludes the phonetic framework of such grammar. It neither belongs to sensibility nor to intelligibility in its resistance of oppositionally directed thinking. Between the sensible and the intelligible, "différance" transports differences in the space between or beyond the meaning of speech and writing.

"Différance" (is) infinitely deferred in a movement of temporalizing and spacing never to be secured by the phone. "Writing" can never be conceptualized nor spoken without leaving something out, a something that is no "thing" in its excessiveness. Derrida calls this excess the "supplement" or "simalacrum". Even in its classical sense, writing is recalcitrant to presence and effects its rupturing. Socrates was aware of this uncanny Other but Plato ironically writes his dialogues in the desire to claim for philosophy its proper place and at the same time provides the dismantling of that propriety.

For Socrates and for Derrida writing and reading are nomadic. For Derrida this is inevitably so. Writing cannot be tied down in the psyche for, after Freud and Heidegger, the subject has come into question. No reading, no matter how tenacious can insist upon its own authority without a vengeful violence to difference. There are no "true" readings, no orthodoxies that can fix their doctrines for all times. All reading is mis-reading, a "faux-pas" that wanders through a labyrinth of texts,

thick and opaque where the intersection radiates an intertextuality. Metaphysics offers the illusion of a writing whose multiplications, variations and deviations are masterable and intelligible. Writing is polysemetic with no unbridgable rifts, no radical absences or pointless detours. But all writing is, for Derrida, ill-fated. The proper falls into the common. Thus it exceeds the impositions of the philosopher king, the father, the author. Writing is always already "writing". It shatters the divine Book, the philosophical system, the authority of the state. It is in and through its excess that Derrida seeks the tension where the rupturing force of "writing" shakes the edifice of Western thought. He permits the orphaned its place, a nonplace in the margins where malformation always murmurs. In the silences of metaphysics, the Other, with no voice to speak or words to say, writes.

The spaces, the absences in writing, cannot be subserved to form some modification of presence. The intervals which separate the visible allow for the spacing necessary to meaning, but these intervals are subversive. They allow a loosening such that a linguistic grafting can take place from one context to another. They allow detours, randomness and slippage from one site to another. Words, phrases, idioms slide from space to space in a "drift" with no conscious direction. Language has a fluidity that is structurally necessary to its functions. It can function in the absence of its referents. It has an iterability such that it preserves the possibility of recognition and citation, quoting, shifting, punning and so on. In Derrida's deconstructive strategy, terms are separated from the predication of classical metaphysics such that various linguistic

shifts are sought out, not to close the spaces, but to invoke the grafting and spacing of textuality, which Derrida often refers to as a "weaving".

Metaphysically, the written has been uncritically placed with the spoken under the general category of communication. Whether Egyptian hieroglyphics or Chinese characters, writing is presumed to re-present ideas and images which remain constant throughout human experience. Classical writing is supposed articulated in a signified/signifier relation such that any language can be faithfully translated into any other. The idea content of pictographic or phonetic writing is understood to be its meaning. Communication is the transmission of meaning that presumes the transfer of ideas from one consciousness to another. For Derrida, meaning and consciousness are metaphysical instantiations of consciousness modeled upon the book. The signified maintains an identity across space and time regardless of the variations of context. This identity is guaranteed in a system of grammar that is capable of sustaining the identical. Thus meaning is transported without undergoing any essential distortion or deviation. The possibility of communication makes possible the goal of unity in which agreement and disagreement occur. Thus compatibility amongst those of different languages, customs, cultures, religions and ideologies share in a homogeneity that mediates all their differences. But Derrida asks:

Is it certain that there corresponds to the word 'communication' a unique, univocal concept, a concept that can be rigorously grasped and transmitted?...But in order

to articulate and propose the question, I already had to anticipate the meaning of the word 'communication'. I have had to predetermine communication as the vehicle, transport, or site of passage of a 'meaning' and of a meaning that is 'one'.⁸

The semantic horizons that govern this classical notion of communication also yields the illusion of unity. Meaning is generated and conserved in the space of repetition, the repeated movement of regularity such that a return without remainder is progressively generated. For Nietzsche our psychological perspective is in part determined by this understanding of communication which should be heard in terms of communion. "[F]or there to be communion something has to be firm, simplified, capable of precision (above all in the [so-called] 'identical' case). For it to be communicable, however, it must be experienced as adapted, as 'recognizable'. The material of the senses adapted by the understanding, reduced to rough outlines, made similar, subsumed under related matters."⁹

Communication presupposes the communion of subjects. The "subject" is, for Derrida following Nietzsche, the ontological term for our belief in a unity underlying all the different and multivarious modifications that we take ourselves to be. In turn we understand our belief in unity to be the effect of a singular and unified cause or causal agency, namely an origin. The belief in the subject provides the grounding of the possibility for truth, reality, essence and all the supports that make possible the Western configuration of beliefs that the post-moderns call

"metaphysics". The pre-condition of the possibility of unity is the will to impress one's self upon the other, to bring inside what is outside, to hear one's self speak. This is how Derrida conceives ontotheology: The divine speaking through the human and man recognizing that divinity in his own voice. This is true of theism and humanism. This is "auto-affection".

God is the name and the element of that which makes possible an absolutely pure and absolutely self-present self-knowledge. From Descartes to Hegel and in spite of the differences that separate the different places and moments in the structure of that epoch, God's infinite understanding is the other name for the logos as self-presence. The logos can be infinite and self-present, it can be produced as auto-affection, only through the 'voice' an order of the signifier by which the subject takes from itself into itself, does not borrow outside of itself the signifier that it emits and that affects it at the same time. Such is the least experience - or consciousness - of the voice: of hearing (understanding - oneself - speak) [s'entendre-parler].¹⁰

Communication, if properly formed and constant, is the offspring of dialectics and dialectical methodology. The goal is completion, copulation. When it terminates in "aporia" or the union dysfunctions it is inevitable abortive. If the line of generations is interrupted or the conversation is cut, communication is ruptured by a blow or a cut (un

coup) which Derrida understands to be made by a sharp instrument, a stylus, a stiletto. This rupturing is "writing". The writing which Derrida allows be written. It is not a deciphering or a decoding which are both tools of communication. It recognizes no presence behind or beyond its inscriptions which lose their identity. But this "identity" was always already a fiction, being impressed on always already anonymous marks. Ontotheology's pretension of "good" writing presumes logic and grammar to super-intend its work, to force accurate re-presentation of the word in its truth that is, at least in principle, transparent. "I shall repeat a hundred times: we really ought to free ourselves from the seduction of words."¹¹ Grammar provides the frame, the fortress for the "eidos" and guards it from all outside intrusion. Grammar preserves truth in language by setting its boundaries. The sentries are "reason", "logic", "truth", "sense", "knowledge". They patrol the limits, guard the gates, these guardians of "le propre".

For Heidegger, philosophy generates itself through a preservation made possible only by a "forgetting". Philosophy cannot include what it has excluded and has thereby flourished. The excluded is not present, can never be rendered present. Thus, philosophy, for Heidegger is at its end. While this end is a completion it is not a perfection and not a unity. Something is always left out, not to be re-membered. The task of thinking at the end calls us to an unforgetting that is not a remembering. There is nothing forgotten, no thing to be remembered. The forgotten (is) for Derrida, unthought, unnamable, unseen. No signified can be brought into language at some eschaton. The Other (is) excessive,

not in a plenitude of presence, but in a hollow that recedes somewhere in a certain inside, the unincorporable, the indigestible, the excreted that makes possible the animation of the organism. Metaphysics has received its constitution through a repressive power of excluding this excess, mending the tears in its fabric, closing the gaps and orifices. Metaphysical repression operates within the field of meaning by wedding itself to identity and truth. Propriety installs meaning to preserve its nobility. The body proper displays its divine right by eliminating all pretenders, contenders and bastards. The legitimate heir, the body proper of noble blood, can prove his lineage by tracing his family, his father's recognition. The rightful king rules by right of his body, protected by those who revere and recognize his right against all who would challenge his authority. The most grievous crimes are judged by those who would subvert this power. The domain of the king operates according to the law, the center of its power wherein binary oppositions form the allegiance of all citizens. Propriety demands the law and the agreement of those who live in a community. Outside there is no recognition of this law, but there is an outside only by this law. But this outside is still under the domain of the inside. It can become inside through the conquering of what is present there. But what of this radical, subterranean other, the Other who is never outside? It can never be taken in, domesticated, enslaved. It's non-existence inevitably renders the kingdom pregnable. The uncanny guest is neither present nor absent and its very indecidability threatens. Neither an enemy from

without nor a traitor from within it situates itself in the tension between friend and foe.

[D]ifference instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom. And it is always in the name of a kingdom that one may reproach 'différance' with wishing to reign, believing that one sees it aggrandize itself with a capital letter.¹²

Propriety is also understood as a singular identifiable and discriminated occurrence such as a single event. Derrida characterizes this propriety by the signature. It is detachable, attachable and carries with it the weight of the royal seal. When applied to a proclamation it inscribes the force of the law. When withheld or misused it devalues the document and renders it suspicious. The signature is the written assurance of the consent of the author-ity, the presumed guarantee of authenticity, the witness to the writer's intentions. The signature reflects the uniqueness of the subject in its ownmost singularity. The signature summons the identifiable and attests to the unity of the collection of multiple thoughts and activities that form the person, the entity that we claim to be. This "we" is the collective singularity governed by the presence of self-presence. While the entity that "we" are remains the subject of inquiry within the ontotheological tradition, it is the "sub-ject" put through a radical inquiry by post-modern thinkers such as Derrida. Derrida understands this radical questioning

to have spoken through Nietzsche who "was alone in treating both philosophy and life, the science and philosophy of life 'with and in his name!"¹³ Nietzsche ran the risk of putting his name and the future of his name on the line.

In the written signature a subversion of the metaphysical subject is at hand. In its repeatability and its iterability the signature is at risk, the risk at the heart of identity. What returns detaches from the bearer. But there was never an original attachment. It is always a false name, a pseudonym, a forgery. The name stands in for what is never named, has no name, the mark that re-marks the play, marks Nietzsche's play, his texts, by virtue of "some contract drawn up with his contemporaries".¹⁴ But who are Nietzsche's contemporaries if not the "overmen", the posthumous and cryptic "we"? The proper name, the dead name is the burden of Nietzsche's contemporaries, the bearers of the name, the dead gods. In the risk of the signature one offers the sacrifice of identity and takes on the masks with a joyful wisdom in the knowledge that there have never been anything but the play of masking, the trembling of the "we".

Assuming, then, that all this is stated in the Preface signed 'Friedrich Nietzsche' to a book entitled Ecce Homo - a book whose final words are "Have I been understood? Dionysus versus the Crucified" [egegen den Gekeuzigten] Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, Christ but not Christ, nor even Dionysus, but rather the name of the versus, the adverse or the countername, the combat between the two names -

this would surface, would it not, to pluralize in a singular fashion the proper name and the homonymic mask? It would surface, that is, to lead all the affiliated threads of the name astray in a labyrinth which is of course the labyrinth of the ear. Proceed, then by seeking out the inner edges, the inner walls, the passages.¹⁵

The signature, for Derrida, does not take place when one writes. It takes place posthumously. It opens us a line of credit with the other, the reader/hearer, and is co-signed by that other in a contract wherein the parties merge, the other constitutes the I, entombing the cryptic I as a dead name, for what returns to this name can never return to the living. "A text is signed only much later by the other. And this testamentary structure doesn't befall a text as if by accident, but constructs it. This is how a text comes about."¹⁶

The "we", the unification sought by all kingdoms, be they of gods or men, is founded upon the foundations of the metaphysical subject, the controlling subject that is the 'what' the deconstruction seeks to deconstruct. It must not be conceived as a destruction for such implies the undoing of something already present, an ediface that has been. Deconstruction seeks no reverse metaphysics. It attempts to locate the very possibility of such reversals. Humanitas, the subject of ontotheology, the essence of mankind, is the propriety of intersubjectivity, its authenticity, its perfection and telos. The unity of the anthropos, the truth of Man is the structure that, like Heidegger's Greek temple at

Paestum,¹⁷ rest unrestfully on the rocky cleavage where land and sea meet. The temple, the work of art, between earth and world, in a place always already ruptured, enlivens a difference older than presence. The work of art discloses conflict, pain, the "cri" of "écriture". In this strife emerges the holy, and the strife is the very possibility of its appearance. The holy does not close the wound, bridge the gap which is the goal of the Holy of ontotheology. It is the very task of this healing that Heidegger questions, a questioning that makes tremble all shrines to the old gods.

Is it not this security of the near what is trembling today, that is the co-belonging and co-propriety of the name of man and the name of Being, such as this co-propriety inhabits, and is inhabited by the language of West...such as it is inscribed and forgotten according to the history of metaphysics, and such as it is awakened also by the destruction of ontotheology? But this trembling - which can only come from a certain outside - was already requisite within the very structure that it solicits.¹⁸

The "certain outside" (is) the "Other", that which, in Heidegger's language, always withdraws as the world shows itself. This "earth" (is) what has no place in the world of the tradition, that which (is) unincorporatable, ununifiable, and, upon whose suppression metaphysics is erected. For Heidegger this uncanny "relation" is painful. For Derrida it is violent. Through the violence to the Other our religious and

philosophical tradition has demanded a mediation of all experience under the entitlements that take on the names of "God", "Truth," "Good", "Man", "Progress" and all the various substitutes that claim to confer a proper name upon the center of all existence. The centrality of sovereignty impowers itself to protect its rightful rule. The dominance of the center invokes a tyranny and proclaims the privilege of its symbols, its desires, its needs, its myths and images. The exercise of this oneness co-ops all difference through an insidious and thorough colonization. This domestication binds itself through boundaries of association and likeness whereby oppositions are rendered dialectical.

In this heliopolitics the social ideal will be sought in an ideal of fusion...the subject...losing himself in a collective representation, in a common ideal...It is the collectivity which says "us" and which, turned toward the intelligible sun, toward truth, experiences the other at his side and not face to face with him.¹⁹

Deconstructive discourse seeks no alternative. It seeks the Other, alterity that (is) comparable to no other. The Other (is) the radical possibility of otherness already inscribed inside metaphysical oppositions such that the difference between inside and outside breaks down. The strange "presence" of the Other is a certain "absence" that cannot be ransomed to the speakable, nameable, visible. But can we properly ask what this encounter with the Other means? Yes, we may properly ask it, must ask it in the name of propriety. At the end of such inquiry we are

forced to re-examine our questions and the desires from which they derive. How do we think after Heidegger?

Occasionally we still have the feeling that violence has long been done to the thingly element of things and that thought has played a part in this violence, for which reason people disavow thought instead of taking pains to make it more thoughtful.²⁰

Thinking thoughtfully is painful, disorienting, dismembering, a cutting that is both a blow and a gift (le coup de don). The fabric of life, textuality, writes us in a play, the seriousness of a child's play, that seeks no completion. The "security" that we have found in the demands of ontotheology (is) a "pharmakon". Heidegger reminds us that it has brought us to a place where only a god can save us. The age of technology, the time of Man, the egoism of the I is the culmination of an epoch of violence.

Everything given to me within light appears given to myself by myself. Henceforward, the heliological 'metaphor' only turns away our glance, providing an alibi for the historical violence of light: a displacement of technico - political oppression in the direction of philosophical discourse.²¹

Derrida reminds us that the encounter with the "Other" is never a relation. Deconstruction is not the way of negative theology. It must be thought as separation that cannot be overcome. The "Other" is not the absent god of negative theology whose absence retains the center. The

encounter is "present" only as what Derrida calls "trace". It is a "present" that never was, a lost and impossible "origin", irretrievable in its withdrawal. "Trace" has the sense of an imprint or a track in the earth. The "Other" is traced in omission, the gaps in our speech, the rifts in our language, slips of the tongue. It is traced in an event that was never present. For Derrida, we are all citizens of Babel. In some remote past a god has declared war on the name, put his name on the line in the holiest of all wars. God declared his anger toward the tribe of Shem, the name that means "name", when they engage in the violent imposition of their language upon all beings in the name of the "Name". The universal tongue would be the force of unity, a violent hegemony over all difference. God prevents this imposition by proclaiming his name, sacrificing its propriety. By pronouncing his name, a pronouncing that has already confounded his name, "Babel" is conferred on the name by the naming. This war of names, this versus, is our history, a dark history which forbids us to interfere with his name. To speak it, translate it, is inevitably transgressive but also inevitably necessary. The wages of transgression are that we are eternally condemned to that transgression. The double bind, the tragedy of desire, is that the unnameable name must be named. It is this desire that speaks through our discourse as "trace".

Thus one sees that God declares war by forcing men, if you will, to translate his proper name with a common noun. In effect, he says to them. 'Now you will not impose a single tongue; you will be condemned to the

multiplicity of tongues: translate and, to begin with,
translate my name'.²²

"YHWH", the proper name of all proper names, is the very name of the war, the countername, the mark of impropriety.²³ In his name, we receive the name already confounded in a distant past, before being, without appeal. We are doomed to a plurality of tongues and there is no possibility of the eradication of this radical plurality in his name. The sacred text is the spoil of this war, the text that reveals the impossibility of revelation, the impossibility of the Book. The Book marks the site of the "trace", the space of the pharmakon. It is the "différance" of difference. It is "woman".

"Woman" as "Other" exceeds the dominion of masculine unity. Woman is given her name by Adam after he names the other animals, the act of exercising dominion over all the beings of the earth. Her name is derivative of his. Denied a proper name, she has no proper being. This impropriety must be taken over by man, domesticated, brought under his control. This control, in Derridian understanding, makes possible the genesis of the Book. Throughout the tradition woman is defined only by her reference to man. He is complete, fully present. She is incidental, an afterthought. "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other"²⁴ "Woman" (is) the concealed term included, by an act of man, an act of auto-affection, into all that is properly human. But in her truth, the impossibility of truth, she is monstrosity. Woman is "woman" because she does not believe in herself. She has no ability to captivate

in her name. She seeks no revenge in the name of Man, in the name of the One, for she (is) not s/he. She (is) the margin between s/he.

Supposing truth is a woman - what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman's heart? What is certain is that she has not allowed herself to be won -and today every kind of dogmatism is left standing dispirited and discouraged. If it is left standing at all! For there are scoffers who claim that it has fallen, that all dogmatism lies on the ground - even more, that all dogmatism is dying.²⁵

Within the metaphysical oppositions of true and false the patriarch can at his sceptical best believe the truth of the proposition that there is no truth. But her truth is the indecidable oscilation that cannot be stabalized by propositions. She shatters the very foundation of propositional meaning. The relation between male and female has been played out in propositions, propriety and property. This relation is irreducibly violent. Mastery demands decidability for its agreements and disagreements, inclusions and exclusions. But woman hesitates in knowing that winning at this game is inevitably losing. This hesitation makes the structure tremble. Hers is "le coup de don" the blow of the living feminine who strikes in the giving.

The disaster is the gift; it gives disaster as if it took no account of being or not - being. It is not advent (which is proper to what comes to pass): it does not happen. And thus I cannot ever happen upon this thought, except without knowing, without appropriating any knowledge. Or again, is it the advent of what does not happen, of what would come without arriving, outside being, and as though by drifting away? The posthumous disaster?²⁶

Man cannot add to nor subtract from the Holy Book for the transgressions are already figured in the Book. But "woman", the unforeseen "Other" is the possible-impossible of its very occurrence. From this monstrosity the old gods (human, all- too human) must turn their eyes away. It is forbidden to increase or decrease the written but yet errancy is the legacy of the law, the law that is always already written. Thus the kingdom is infinitely deferred. Man translates for the sake of the messianic end. But in the irony that this "end" provokes, translation is man's declaration of war against the God who both demands and forbids it. We are the children of Shem and also the children of the God who forfeits his Name in defense of his name. We are strangely split, indecidable, double bound. The 'double bind' is in the law. Through this law God signs his name.

The signature does not come after the law, it is the divided act of the law: revenge, resentment, reprisal, revendication as signature. But also as gift and gift of

languages...countersigned God, God who countersigneth
thyselves, God who signeth theyself in us, let us laugh,
amen.27

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