

The Pleasure of Derrida's Poetry

by

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Abstract

Violence and pleasure always move together, but they do not always move the same way. Sometimes they march side-by-side to the beat of the imperial drum. This movement is easy to recognize; it is accompanied by dogmatic chants calling for totality, unity, and presence. Although this movement is despicable and furthers the repression of *the other*, it continues because it grants reassuring comfort. At other times, violence and pleasure dance together and tap out a sweet rhythm. This libidinal movement tears open presence and strives for the liberation of the other. This dance is rare, but it is gaining popularity thanks to the writings of Jacques Derrida.

This thesis traces the steps of violence and pleasure as they dance throughout Derrida's work. Because Freud's thought and psychoanalysis are strong influences on Derrida, I begin with a note about the pleasure principle. Following this note is a long section that discusses Derrida's theories of violence and pleasure. During the course of this discussion, connections are drawn between his thought and Freud's. I argue that even though Freud's work makes possible Derrida's theories, it is necessary for him to critique Freud because Freud's texts participate in a violence with which the entirety of Western knowledge is complicit. This violence is related to the death drive, the repression of the other, and a phenomenon I term "comfortable pleasure." By demonstrating how deconstruction combats this violence with a type of pleasure related to the life instincts, liberation of the other, and sweet *jouissance*, I call attention to the humanitarian motives of Derrida's work. However, I also point out the violence of deconstruction and explain why it is necessary for Derrida to struggle against it at the same time as he wages war against Western knowledge. This discussion is aided by Nietzsche's thoughts about resentment and affirmation. I argue that Derrida combats his own violence by performing Nietzsche's ideas via playful jokes and elegant, poetic turns of phrase. In the final section of this thesis, I provide examples of Derrida's poetry through a reading of "That Dangerous Supplement." This reading also develops intricacies in his theory of pleasure. These small details gesture towards a radical *jouissance* related to Derrida's persistent attempts to liberate the other, which continue even in the face of inevitable failure.

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What, ha's this thing appear'd againe tonight?

—*Hamlet*

Motivations: The Author in the Text

Although Jacques Derrida's voice has undoubtedly disseminated throughout the modern university and today speaks everywhere in the humanities, this voice speaks silently, like a ghost.¹ The proper name, "Derrida," as well as deconstruction, the movement often associated with it, has lost some of its luster in the academy. Perhaps this is because it has been worn out, discussed into oblivion. The war against cultural empiricism is well underway, and many now realize the potential danger of thinking in terms of concepts, ideas, ideals, and other terms that denote empiricism and closed structures of thought rather than the more open structure of language. This war should never be forgotten, nor should Derrida, whose writing contributed so greatly to it. The muttering of empiricist terror still reverberates in the shadows of forgotten corridors; therefore, from time to time Derrida's ghostly voice must take form. It appears like the hand at the feast of Balthazar and leaves this terrifying message on the wall, "Remember me!" Do we who have been influenced by him so much have a responsibility to acknowledge the presence of this ghost? Is not the very idea of responsibility the acknowledgement of all those ghosts, all those voices for whom we speak or, more properly put, who speak in us? Looking back on the importance of Derrida's writing in my own life, I believe it is.

Last year during a course on literary theory I was exposed to deconstruction through Jonathan Culler's book, *On Deconstruction*. The form of this text mirrored its usage in the classroom, which was to transfer the "philosophical" ideas represented most forcefully in Derrida's early texts to the realms of literary criticism and cultural studies. The nature of these ideas, as anyone who has studied Derrida well knows, is to blur the distinction between literature

1. The allusions to *Hamlet* throughout this section are borrowed from Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). Hereafter cited in the text as *SM*.

and philosophy altogether. Philosophical, theological, or scientific texts have long been the representatives of truth, while literary texts have maintained the less esteemed title of fiction. But what is the mark or textual code that distinguishes truth from fiction? When we look for a transcendental signified or a maternal language and realize that it isn't there, the difference between truth and fiction is blurred, and innumerable ghostly others begin to complicate the world of binary oppositions. All this became more and more apparent to our class as we moved through feminism, multiculturalism, and the various other discourses that deal with identity politics. By the end of the semester my own identity, personal beliefs, and world in general had become extraordinarily confusing.

During the summer that followed I found myself without a professor, friends, or family with whom to talk about my confusion. Therefore an investigation of deconstruction seemed necessary in order to clarify issues presented in the class as well as my own ideas about truth and identity, which were "out of joint" to say the least. This investigation led to Derrida, whose texts are still the most disturbing and yet most pleasurable I have ever read. At first, they were almost impossible to read through, as Derrida's lexicon draws from so many intellectual discourses and the subject matter consists of close readings of other challenging texts. Nevertheless, Derrida seemed to be the only source of answers to my growing volume of questions. At times during this investigation it seemed as if I were standing at the edge of a cliff and peering into a bottomless and overwhelming aporia. I was like the Dionysian reveler, whom Nietzsche compares with Hamlet: "Both have once looked into the essence of things, they have gained knowledge, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal

nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint.”²

Like Hamlet, I too cursed; I cursed Derrida for having thrown out of joint the rather complicated but O so tenuous worldview I had constructed over 21 years. But even as I cursed him, his words taught me that more was wrong with the world than I had ever imagined, and that much of that wrong began with prejudices and tendencies to reduce and control rooted in everyday language or language in general. Everywhere from cable news programs to daily conversations I was forced to swallow dogmatic and empiricist assertions that showed how even in casual speech people use force and violence to manipulate one another. The suffocation caused by overwhelmingly self-assured axioms and other totalizing statements led me to wonder whether the ideas of final solutions and self-contained structures of belief were not unjust and repressive forms of violence.

After much reading and careful observation of my immediate world, I realized that I did not have to curse Derrida; I realized that he was not launching a radically new system of thought, but was instead gesturing towards a rhythm that repeats itself again and again. This rhythm offers liberation from the repression of language and protection from the violence of totalitarian thought, even as it brings repression and violence into being. Upon recognizing this rhythm in myself and in the surrounding world, it occurred to me that Derrida was writing something beautiful—he was writing the movement of beauty, which can never be pinned down and given absolute definition. But this pleasurable discovery was soon interrupted by the appearance of several ghosts, in particular, the ghosts of Christianity and my conservative upbringing. As I still respected these ghosts, their message, “Taint not thy mind with such heresy,” seemed horrifying.

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 60. Hereafter cited in the text as *BT*.

The pleasure of Derrida was unacceptable to a past that demanded truth in the form of absolutes and empirical realities.

This double bind only intensified my interest in Derrida. I suggested the possibility of using his work as a focus in graduate school to several professors only to be met by responses suggesting that he had gone out of style. At the time these responses seemed ridiculous; how could Derrida, whose writing was creating such a tumultuous upheaval in my own thought, be passé? Today I better understand the need for progressive, post-positivistic academic work and why my professors steered me away from deconstruction. Nevertheless, I believe it is important for students to read Derrida in order that they have the opportunity to witness the beauty of his art and to understand the empiricist terror that he fights against.

Another ghost visited me last night: it was the ghost of Jacques Derrida. His message: “Remember me.” I did not curse this ghost; I did not want to be like Hamlet, who, according to Derrida, curses the “effect of the disorder, namely, the fate that would have destined him, Hamlet, to put a dislocated time back on its hinges. Hamlet is ‘out of joint’ because he curses his own mission” (*SM*, 20). As difficult as a response to Derrida may be, I cannot deny my responsibility or, if you will, my mission. This paper marks my response, my acceptance of responsibility, my countersignature to Derrida, and my rejection of the notion that his work is “out of style.” It is our responsibility in the humanities to acknowledge beauty wherever we find it, and Derrida is beautiful to me. Now I work with a ghost on each side: one whispers, “Taint not thy mind,” and the other, “Remember me.” The ambivalence these messages inscribed in Hamlet is not unlike the ambivalence inscribed in the subject of this paper—pleasure. Heresy,

original sin, a plummet into the abyss, hell if you will, always accompany a pleasurable experience of the beautiful, which we will come to find is not an experience at all.

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Hedonism is considered “bad.” Not nice. Poorly understood. It’s unbelievable how pejorative this word can get. No one, no one at all, no philosophy, no doctrine dares to take up hedonism. It’s an obscene word.

—*Roland Barthes*

Envois

“Pleasure is linked to the game which is played at the limit, to what is suspended at this limit. No deconstruction without pleasure and no pleasure without deconstruction.”³ These are the words of Jacques Derrida, one of the most influential and controversial figures in the humanities over the last half-century and a key player in unveiling the movement known as deconstruction. “Unveiling” and “movement”—these words cannot be stressed enough; deconstruction is no thing, nor is it a method to be employed. Deconstruction is what transpires; it is an event that takes place. As Derrida remarks, deconstruction is “the game of the world” and its possibility “must first be thought before attempting to understand all the forms of play in the world” (*IJD*, 57). Like so many of Derrida’s terms, “play” is complicated. The term has roots in Nietzsche, but Derrida contributes significantly to its meaning. For the moment, play may be thought of as the opening of pain and pleasure and all that takes place between and within these two limits.

Unfortunately, deconstruction is more commonly thought of as painful than as playful or pleasurable. Perhaps this stigma has something to do with the word “deconstruction,” the very sound of which seems to resonate with all that is heartless and cold in the world. Even Derrida dislikes the term: “the word, at least on its own has never appeared satisfactory to me,” he writes, “it is certainly not elegant.”⁴ It would be unfortunate if the unpleasant sound of this word were associated too closely with what Derrida writes about or with the style of his writing, which is

3. Jacques Derrida, “An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” interview by Derek Attridge, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (New York: Routledge, 1992), 56. Hereafter cited in the text as *IJD*.

4. Jacques Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” in *Derrida and Difference*, ed. and trans. Warwick Bemasconi (Parousia Press, 1985), 1. Hereafter cited in the text as *LJF*.

marvelously elegant and filled with so many emotions, including anger, torment, joy, and playfulness.

Reading Derrida's work can be an amazingly pleasurable event and learning about deconstruction can give us greater pleasure in life and help us to be more humane to others. This is a sweeping thesis, but rarely is the pleasure in Derrida's texts discussed. Too often these texts have been read as manuals from which to extract methodologies about how to deconstruct or "empty out" a text. To deconstruct "properly," if such a thing is possible, requires the ability to play, and that is the gift of an artist. Readings of Derrida imprisoned within methodological horizons remain blind to his play. He is one of the great authors of our time and if he is to be read responsibly, his elegant, playful, and almost poetic abilities with language must be taken into consideration. According to the American philosopher Richard Rorty, when "we enfold Derrida in this nimbus by seeing his purpose as the same autonomy at which Proust and Yeats aimed, we can avoid dissecting his writing along lines laid down by somebody else, and we can instead sit back and enjoy it."⁵

Taking pleasure in Derrida does not mean reading his texts only for entertainment. An investigation of the structure of pleasure and the roles that pleasure plays in his discourse also emphasizes his intellectual achievement. In the grand scheme, his discourse belongs along side Nietzsche's. It is an internal critique of Western culture and its history of empiricism; it is an assault on violence from within "the text." This critique cannot be understood without taking into consideration Derrida's playfulness and the pleasure it provides. Unfortunately, it is this playful style that causes more "serious" scholars to underestimate Derrida; I can think of at least

5. Richard Rorty, "Derrida," in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 133. Hereafter cited in the text as *D*.

one occasion where he has been accused of being too “frivolous.” Rorty blasts the

“metaphysicians” who make such claims about works that do not surrender to canonical form:

These people—the metaphysicians—assume that books which do not supply means to the ends typically formulated in that vocabulary must be, if not immoral or useless, suitable for only private projects. Yet the only private project they can envisage is the pursuit of pleasure. They assume that a book which does supply such pleasure cannot be a serious work of philosophy and cannot carry a “moral” message.⁶

Rorty draws our attention to a means-to-an-end vocabulary that “metaphysicians” require in order to assign high value to a work. The very fact that such a serious metalanguage exists should be cause for concern. A single, dominant discourse or structure of knowledge is possible only through the violation and repression of others. When this consideration is taken on board, the significance of Derrida’s playful style comes to the forefront. In order to make us aware of the violence inherent in philosophical metalanguage and knowledge in general, without perpetrating that violence himself, Derrida uses a language that seems playful. According to Rorty, Derrida’s texts “help us avoid cruelty, not by warning us against social injustice but by warning us against tendencies to cruelty in searches for autonomy” (*NC*, 144). This paper explores how Derrida’s play and the pleasure of that play contribute to a war against the violence of structures of knowledge that seek autonomy.

The vast scope of Derrida’s war against empiricism, which has spread across so many disciplines in the humanities, combined with his playfully unique style, makes his texts difficult to classify. Whether book publishers label his work as literary criticism, literary theory, philosophy, or cultural studies, it should be read with the same detachment that one reads a poem; it should be read with an eye that watches for tone, flavor, play of language, and the

6. Richard Rorty, “Nabokov on Cruelty,” in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 145. Hereafter cited in the text as *NC*.

pleasure that the author seems to derive from that play; it should not be read with an eye that seeks to reduce beautifully sophisticated writing to tasteless concepts. On the subject of reading philosophy, T. S. Eliot once wrote:

Those who have read philosophy with complete detachment from any schools have trained themselves to look for just those aspect of an author which are most personal; have followed with keenest interest his doubts, his prejudices, his hesitations, his confessions here and there, of failure; have sought for the peculiar flavor of the man's thought in the man's own words.⁷

Whenever deconstruction is read in the fashion that Eliot suggests, Derrida emerges from the text as a figure similar to Nietzsche's Zarathustra. Like Zarathustra, Derrida is a wanderer; he wanders through the great texts of Western culture and affirms them with a playful laugh and dance, even as he forces us to reconsider them completely. This Zarathustra also gives confessions of failure. Through carefully studying Derrida's thought and reading his work for pleasure, we will come to discover these confessions and the radical type of pleasure they entail.

In order to represent the Zarathustrian Derrida in this paper, much of the analysis is centered on *La Carte Postale (The Post Card)*, a book that began as a series of playful letters to intellectuals across the world and reveals a great deal about the pleasure and intimacy of intellectual conversation. In an oblique fashion, Derrida actually discusses his love life and marital relations in these letters; this is an unheard of move for a philosopher, which suggests something about the unique spirit from which he composes his work. Through a discussion of the pleasure of his "poetic" writing I hope to open up something new that has always existed in his work, which has been discussed extensively over the past thirty years and is on the verge of being worn out. To find something fresh in the worn and quotidian, to find the other in the same, has everything to do with pleasure.

7. Ron Bush, *T.S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 9.

The above paragraphs might sound rather enigmatic right now, but all is not to be had at one go. *Pulchrum est paucorum hominum*. If beauty is to be found in Derrida's poetry, it must be surrounded by some discussion of the thought and history that preceded it. My strategy is therefore similar to the method that Derrida speaks of in *The Post Card*: "I must ceaselessly call upon the grounds of the 'well known' in order to attempt to march to another beat."⁸ Our discussion begins with a brief note on Freud, a figure whose discourse orbits "pleasure." Following this short note is the primary section of the paper, "Sweet Violence." This section traverses the complex matrix linking violence with pleasure and is intended to outline and explore in depth how these phenomena play within the limited topography of Derrida's work. The final section of this thesis, "Radical Jouissance," explores one of Derrida's earlier texts, "That Dangerous Supplement." Here Derrida develops his own theory of pleasure and simultaneously unveils the violence of a text by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Analyzing Derrida's essay provides examples of issues discussed throughout this thesis and gives insight into radical jouissance, a type of pleasure linked to Derrida's confessions of failure.

Freud's voice will echo throughout our discussion, as will the voices of Nietzsche, Barthes, Heidegger, Levinas, Lyotard, and Rousseau among others. While this is a paper about Derrida's pleasure, we must remember that many people have discussed pleasure, violence, and their play in language over the last century and a half, and they have paved the way for his poetry. Derrida would be the first to acknowledge the trace of other voices scattered throughout his texts.

Before proceeding, I would like to pause to state that even though this thesis makes certain arguments, they are neither stable nor conclusive. There will be no final unveiling of

8. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 282. Hereafter cited in the text as *PC*.

truth, no grand ta da! The type of thought that posits pleasure as climax, like Freud's as we will see, takes little pleasure in a text. "The most consistent nihilism is perhaps masked, in some way interior to institutions, to conformist discourse, to apparent finalities," claims Roland Barthes.⁹ Pleasure moves according to a certain rhythm; when the rhythm stops, the pleasure is over. This paper does not attempt to halt Derrida's rhythm; it does not seek to have the last word on his pleasure. Our goal is to reach the point where we can begin to take pleasure in Derrida. This pleasure will be enhanced if the reader is fluent in the French language, Derrida's native tongue and the only language in which he has written. The translated passages in this piece are problematic because much of the playfulness and elegance of his writing are lost. Derrida writes on the problem of translating something beautiful in "A Letter to a Japanese Friend": "When I speak of this writing of the other which will be more beautiful, I clearly see translation as involving the same risk and chance as the poem. How to translate 'poem'? a 'poem'?" (*LJF*, 5).

9. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 44. Hereafter cited in the text as *PT*.

Because I still like him, I can foresee the impatience of the bad reader: this is the way I name or accuse the fearful reader, the reader in a hurry to be determined, decided upon deciding (in order to annul, in other words to bring back to oneself, one has to wish to know in advance what to expect, one wishes to expect what happened, one wishes to expect (oneself)). Now, it is bad, and I know no other definition of the bad, it is bad to predestine one's reading, it is always bad to foretell.

—*Jacques Derrida*

A Note on Nirvana

In the spring of 1911 Freud published “Formulations On the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” a paper that would become one of the classics of psychoanalysis. For the first time since the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* ten years earlier, he attempts to explicate the main theoretical issues of psychoanalysis. The foci of the paper, as the title suggests, are the pleasure principle and the reality principle. In “Formulations,” Freud claims that the purpose obeyed by the psyche during early phases of development is easy to recognize: “it is described as the pleasure-unpleasure [Lust-Unlust] principle, or more shortly the pleasure principle. These processes strive towards gaining pleasure; psychical activity draws back from any event which might arouse unpleasure.”¹⁰

The psyche obtains ultimate pleasure by remaining completely undisturbed in a state without any mental tension or excitation, what Freud sometimes called Nirvana. The call of somatic needs, related to hunger and sexual instincts, disturb this state. When these needs are satisfied, the tension is reduced and pleasure restored. In the early phases of mental formation, when the pleasure principle still completely dominates the psyche, satisfaction of somatic needs is pursued by means of hallucination. The pleasure principle eventually loses its absolute mastery over the psyche and the hallucinations are repressed; Freud writes: “it was the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, the disappointment experienced, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination. A new principle of

10. Sigmund Freud, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958), 219. Hereafter cited in the text as *TP*.

mental functioning was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable” (*TP*, 219).

This new principle, the reality principle, forces the psyche to look outside itself either to achieve or delay satisfaction. According to Freud, during the development of the reality principle, “the increased significance of external reality heightened the importance, too, of the sense-organs that are directed towards that external world, and of the consciousness attached to them. Consciousness now learned to comprehend sensory qualities in addition to the qualities of pleasure and unpleasure” (*TP*, 220). With the increased attention to sensory qualities, a process of fragmentation begins whereby the mental apparatus distinguishes itself from the outside world.

The development of the reality principle marks the theoretical split of the mental apparatus into the conscious and the unconscious. Conscious mental activity governed by the reality principle regulates unconscious mental activity, which is still governed by the pleasure principle. Only in dreams does the unconscious have freedom to seek wish fulfillment through hallucinations. Nevertheless, “the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle,” Freud explains, “implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time” (*TP*, 223). Little did Freud know that his principles would, at a later time, open completely untested paths, spark a psychoanalysis of Western culture and its knowledge, and liberate a great deal of forbidden pleasure.

Everything breaketh, everything is joined anew. Forever the same house of existence buildeth itself. All things separate, all things greet each other again. Forever faithful unto itself the ring of existence remaineth. Thus spake Zarathustra.

—*Friedrich Nietzsche*

Sweet Violence

The history of psychoanalysis, which is largely the history of the pleasure principle, represents a strong influence on Derrida, whose early work was often viewed as a psychoanalysis of philosophy.¹¹ He has taken occasion, however, to critique Freud and psychoanalysis in general. Derrida's concern, and what should be ours as well, is that nobody yet knows what pleasure is, despite the pleasure principle's influence on 20th century thought. "The definition of the pleasure principle," he writes, "is mute about pleasure, about its essence and quality" (*PC*, 276).

Freud tells us nothing about pleasure itself, pleasure in its proper moment. All we know is that pleasure involves the movement of "energy" between two posts, stricture and release, high and low tension. What these posts are and where they come from, like the "essence" of "pleasure" itself, is never defined by him. "Pure pleasure and pure reality," writes Derrida, "are ideal limits, which is as much as to say fictions" (*PC*, 284). Nevertheless, Freud assumes a common "experience" of pleasure. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he asserts, "We have all experienced how the greatest pleasure attainable by us, that of the sexual act, is associated with a momentary extinction of highly intensified excitation."¹² We might agree with Freud if we were having a casual conversation with him, but is not a more dynamic assertion expected at the heart of a scientific discourse than the recourse to "experience"? Are we to forget that we still do not

11. In his essay "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida offers this remark: "Despite appearances the deconstruction of logocentrism is not a psychoanalysis of philosophy." When this essay was written in the late 60s, Derrida was most likely defending himself against the claims that deconstruction was indeed a psychoanalysis of philosophy made against him by Lacanians. Derrida does acknowledge that he is writing in a period heavily influenced by psychoanalytic thought and undoubtedly there is a trace of that thought in his work. Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 196. Hereafter cited in the text as *FS*.

12. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 76. Hereafter cited in the text as *BP*.

know what “pleasure,” “experience,” and “excitation” are? One can always act as if these issues do not matter, but perhaps more than just a little is on the line here.

Freud’s assumptions mark the early development of a science. What might seem unbelievable is that all sciences, even the “objective” ones, open with speculation that is not legitimate in any way, shape, or form. While the scientific method provides a model for experimentation that gives scientific “truths” or “objective” knowledge, it cannot verify itself as “objective” or “true.” “Science as objective knowledge,” writes Derrida, “cannot formulate the question of the quantitative evaluation of a qualitative—or to go quickly let us say ‘subjective’—affect, one in which a subject is irreducibly engaged” (*PC*, 287-288). What Derrida says here and throughout *The Post Card* is that scientists cannot explain the effects that the form of their hypothesis and the involvement of a “subjective being” have on the outcome of an experiment; neither can they validate their proof at the same time as they use it to validate their hypothesis, nor can they explain the effects that their totalizing superstructures of knowledge and their objectifying language have on the surrounding culture.

Without such explanations, a science has not legitimated itself, and it must turn to another discourse for support. According to Jean-François Lyotard, “A science that has not legitimated itself is not a true science; if the discourse that was meant to legitimate it seems to belong to a pre-scientific form of knowledge, like a ‘vulgar’ narrative, it is demoted to the lowest rank.”¹³ A “vulgar narrative” does not necessarily legitimate Freud’s discourse, but he does appropriate “concepts” like “experience” and “pleasure” from philosophy and assigns them foundational positions in his psychoanalytic texts. Derrida claims these “concepts” are impossible and cannot exist without violence, but my point will be that Freud’s appropriation of philosophical

13. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 38. Hereafter cited with the prefix *PMC*.

“concepts” without acknowledging his debt to philosophy involves the same violence that brought these “concepts” into “being.” Exploring these structures of violence reveals the “true” “essence” of pleasure and paves the way for a discussion about how Derrida writes a type of pleasure linked to play.

As a philosopher, Derrida recognizes the trace of philosophy in Freud’s discourse. He takes special notice of Freud’s inability to explain metaphysical “concepts” like “pleasure,” that enigma supporting psychoanalytic thought. Derrida, who realizes the difficulty of explicating such “concepts,” does not blame Freud for his ineptitude. Nor does he blame any science for its inability to explain and justify the truth of the scientific method, the tool with which it carves up and orders the world. Psychoanalytic progress and scientific progress are necessary for the betterment of humanity, so long as their limitations are not forgotten and their objectifying methods are not rigorously employed in the humanities. As we will come to find, when scientific “objectivity” does spill over into the humanities, intellectual rigor mortis sets in.

Although Derrida is not opposed to science in general, he does take exception to the dogmatic manner with which Freud assumes that pleasure is easily recognized and understood—that nothing more must be said about it, especially within the “serious” and “rigorous” confines of a scientific text. This type of finality is, as Barthes says, a kind of nihilism; it allows no questions, no movement, and no life. According to Derrida, Freud’s isolation of the term “pleasure” through his assumption that its meaning is a given is linked to an original type of violence.

Freud’s original violence is a violence that Western metaphysics, the discourse from which he borrows the term “pleasure,” has perpetrated for a long time. Derrida defines this violence in *Of Grammatology*, a work that may well have put metaphysics to death:

There was in fact a first violence to be named. The originary violence of language which consists of inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute. To think the unique within the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of arche-violence.¹⁴

The first violence, inscribing or isolating an absolute, is equivalent to founding the law. In philosophic or scientific work, founding the law is positing the first “concept” or proper name. The history of Western metaphysics is the history of attempts to find and justify grounds for such “concepts.” Once philosophers and scientists are certain that they are on stable ground, and sometimes even when they are not, they are able to build superstructures of knowledge capable of mapping out the entire realm of phenomena. Derrida claims that the oldest “concept” in this history of violence is the “concept” of “presence.” He also claims that the belief that this “concept” can serve as a stable ground is only possible because of pleasure.

“Presence,” from ancient philosophy until Derrida, is the relationship between oneself and oneself through the spoken word. By way of the voice, the self is presented to the self without entering into the outside world or borrowing from it. Therefore, “presence” is a type of absolute closure; it is pure interiority. “Concept” is a metonymy for “presence”; it represents a closed structure of thought.

Derrida ruptures metaphysical closure and destroys all metaphysical “concepts” by demonstrating that “presence” is the result of representation; the self is a representation of an *other* that does not exist. According to Derrida, through hearing the voice, the illusion of a difference between self and other appears. In the same way that differences between terms open the possibility for meaning in a text, this original difference between two terms, one of which is a

14. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 112. Hereafter cited in the text as *OG*.

chimera, maintains the possibility of a self, consciousness, or “presence.”¹⁵ An autonomous self is only possible through the repression of this other. This repression, which is unavoidable and a necessary condition for life, takes place within the act of speaking. The act of repression is undoubtedly enigmatic; we should not delude ourselves by thinking that we can diagram its process or explain why it happens. To explain how or why one thing strives to elevate itself above another necessarily involves violently isolating a term.¹⁶ By asking the question, “what is repression?,” we have already isolated the term “is,” or “being,” which is a metonymy for “presence.” Now we are back where we started, with an illusion of “presence” and no explanation of repression. This phenomenon, repression, and its countermovement, liberation, which is never wholly separate from repression, are mysteries that must remain mysteries to the dismay of so many philosophers and scientists.

Derrida calls the mysterious repression that is internal to speech “auto-affection,” or “giving oneself a pleasure”: “Within the general structure of auto-affection, within the giving-oneself-a-presence or a pleasure, the operation of touching-touched receives the other within the narrow gulf that separates doing from suffering” (*OG*, 165). Another pleasure is given through the act of liberating the other; this liberation takes place only upon madness or death.¹⁷

15. This quick reference to texts and differences skips over an enormous part of Derrida’s work. Because these themes are very complicated and because they have been written about extensively, I have decided not to emphasize them in this paper. The bare minimum that needs to be known is that a text is anything governed by differences and that Derrida is famous for collapsing everything into text. Of course, a difference is nothing “in itself.” Therefore, meaning is produced by difference and deferral, what Derrida calls *différance*. Consider a written document; it is meaningful in the “present” both because there are differences between terms on a page and because there is a whole system of language already established, or *différé*, which is governed by differences between letters, terms, conventions, etc.

16. Nietzsche provides an explanation for this mysterious phenomenon that is behind the construction of all hierarchies. Perhaps the self rises above the other, only to appropriate the other, for this reason: “This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintatge Books, 1968), 550. Hereafter cited in the text as *WP*.

17. Freud’s influence speaks heavily in this theory. In a very narrow and limited psychoanalytic context, the

Therefore, pleasure is no stable thing; it is either the formation of the self through the repression of the other or the loss of the self through the liberation of the other.¹⁸ If this theory is applied to Freud's system, then the reality principle and the pleasure principle echo the two terms, self and other. Pleasure is then the movement between these two terms. Like the difference between self and other, the difference between these two terms is an illusion, although it is necessary for psychoanalytic structure.

Auto-affection through the voice, the first pleasure, is also the first violence. Derrida calls it arche-violence. It opens the possibility of isolating the first philosophical concept, "presence," without a stable or legitimate ground on which to do so. This concept is the basis for all other concepts and the foundation for hierarchical and totalizing superstructures of knowledge. "Auto-affection is the condition of an experience in general," Derrida claims: "This possibility—another name for 'life'—is a general structure articulated by the history of life, and leading to complex and hierarchical operations."¹⁹

Without the stable ground of "presence," no discursive foundation can be empirically justified; therefore, structural closure is impossible. The act of positing a law, concept, origin, or center and claiming that it is a self-evident truth is therefore a coup de force. This coup, establishing "pleasure" as the conceptual law or central foundation of psychoanalysis in Freud's case, is not one act among others; it is tantamount to assuming a foundation in the midst of a black hole. Freud chooses an especially ironic foundational "concept"; pleasure is precisely

other might be translated as unconscious mental hallucinations repressed by the reality principle.

18. In this aspect of Derrida's theory, there are more echoes of Nietzsche, who claimed that there is only becoming. Our idea of "being" is an illusion that arises from our inability to see the slow movement of becoming.

19. Once again, Derrida's writing uses a psychoanalytic tone. The organization of complex and hierarchical structures that he refers to is similar to the process of fragmentation whereby the psyche, under the control of the reality principle, determines what is real and what is unreal in the outside world (*OG*, 165).

what cannot be contained within a “concept” at all; it is either the act of repressing or the act of liberating.

Despite the ironic contradiction and fundamental instability inhabiting his most basic term, Freud must isolate the term “pleasure,” and therefore commit foundational violence if there is to be any growth in the corpus of psychoanalytic knowledge.²⁰ As Nietzsche writes, “the smallest things bear the greatest; upon your little wrongful act stands the entire structure of the future” (*WP*, 180). For Freud to develop further concepts, he needs to have a foundation; to have a legitimate foundation he must either ignore or forget, in other words “repress,” the simple fact that he does not know what pleasure means. This repression, or auto-affection, is not a one-time event; it is repeated with the development of every new “concept.” Therefore, violence accompanies every growth in Freud’s psychoanalytic corpus.

Although the violence continues, the instability of the foundation is forgotten after the structure of psychoanalytic knowledge reaches a certain size. At this point psychoanalysis becomes a closed structure; it is present to itself. Derrida summarizes this process as follows: “auto-affection, the as-for-itself or for-itself—subjectivity—gains in power and in its mastery of the ‘other’ to the extent that the power of repetition idealizes itself” (*OG*, 166).

The self-idealization of any structure of knowledge is dangerous for this reason: during the process of giving itself pleasure or auto-affecting, it discriminates against and represses other discourses. When one body of knowledge grows too large, those who align themselves with the

20. Original contradiction or difference is a theme that occurs in Freud as well as in Nietzsche. The split between the consciousness and unconsciousness makes possible the simultaneous occurrence of pleasure and pain. When the consciousness is “experiencing” pain, the unconsciousness is “experiencing” pleasure. Freud’s theory of simultaneous and contradictory “experience” is not unlike the one sketched by Nietzsche in *The Will to Power*: “What is a pleasure but: an excitation of the feeling of power by an obstacle (even more strongly by rhythmic obstacles and resistances)—so it swells up. Thus all pleasure includes pain” (*WP*, 347).

discourse that created it have a tendency to classify other discourses as frivolous and unimportant.

The other repressed by Freud is philosophy, the source from which he borrows the “concept” of “pleasure.” Derrida gives several examples of Freud’s repressive speech acts in *The Post Card*. One example comes from the first page of the first chapter of *Beyond*: there Freud writes that “it is of no concern to us in this connection to enquire how far, with this hypothesis of the pleasure principle, we have approached or adopted any particular, historically established, philosophical system” (BP, 3). A few lines later, after inferring that “pleasure” is enigmatic, Freud continues: “We would readily express our gratitude to any philosophical or psychological theory which was able to inform us of the feelings of pleasure and unpleasure which act so imperatively upon us. But on this point we are, alas, offered nothing to our purpose” (BP, 4). We have already seen that philosophy offers a great deal to the purpose of psychoanalysis; in fact, we could say that it offers much “pleasure.” Regardless, it is still not so obvious that Freud is repressing philosophy in order to establish the autonomy of psychoanalysis. We must give him some credit; patients that need help, perhaps urgently, motivate his work.

However, throughout *The Post Card*, Derrida suggests that Freud appropriates Nietzsche without giving him due credit simply because he is philosopher. Freud makes clear his low estimation of philosophy in a passage to which Derrida refers us: “Nietzsche, another philosopher whose *guesses and intuitions* often agree in the most astonishing way with the *painfully laborious* findings of psychoanalysis” (PC, 263; my italics). The repression here is subtle, but anyone who has ever felt discriminated against knows that off-the-cuff rhetoric combined with a certain tone of authority is capable of violently lowering one’s value or the value of his or her work with a single brush of the hand. The basic thrust of Freud’s off-the-cuff

slander is this: psychoanalysis is more valuable than philosophy because it can legitimate the claims it makes with “objective” proof. This claim to legitimacy is specious at best both because the foundation of Freud’s discourse is unstable and because he cannot explain the effects that his “subjective being” have on the outcome of his “objective” experiments. His violent and unfounded speech act is one that has been repeated throughout the history of Western knowledge. Lyotard elegantly summarizes this violent history, although he makes the distinction between scientific knowledge and narrative knowledge. This distinction is analogous to the one that Freud makes between science and philosophy:

The scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children. At best, attempts made to throw some rays of light into this observation, to civilize, educate, develop. This unequal relationship is an intrinsic effect of the values specific to each game. We all know its symptoms. It is the entire history of cultural imperialism from the dawn of Western Civilization. It is important to recognize its special tenor, which sets it apart from all other forms of imperialism. (*PMC*, 27)

Lyotard’s impassioned words should not lead us to assume immediately that Freud is a “bad” or mean-spirited person; he is writing during an age of imperialism, and his rhetoric is a product of that age. Furthermore, we must not forget that up to a certain point, repression of the other is a necessary condition for life. Few people can survive without the violence that establishes foundations and engenders totalizing structures of knowledge, even though these structures are maintained through the repression of and discrimination against others.

There is a comforting pleasure derived from structural foundation and closure; it is the pleasure or comfort that comes from normality, predictability, and safety. “The concept of centered structure,” Derrida states, “is in fact the concept of play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself

is beyond the reach of play. And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered" (*SPH*, 279). The "concept" of play, opposed to play itself, may be thought of as movement within the confines of a grounded, closed structure. This "play," or comfortable pleasure, which is related to the repression of the other and is opposed to another type of pleasure that I will discuss momentarily, is the pleasure that comes from knowing that the ground I'm walking on is really ground and not a bottomless chasm. The passage above bares strong overtones of Heidegger, who writes in *Being and Time* that all non-existential or pre-phenomenological discourse protects against the anxiety or "angst" arising from the idea that one's own death could come at any moment.²¹ The repression of the other is therefore, in a Heideggerian context, protection against death. One discourse must repress others if it is to survive, overcome its own anxiety or "angst," and give assurance of "objectivity."

In his brilliant little essay *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes suggests that certain texts give different types pleasure, one of which is closely related to comfortable pleasure. Freud's repressive assertion that "we have all experienced pleasure" and his assumption that we all know what "experience" is belong to what Barthes calls the text of pleasure, or pleasure. The text of pleasure, Barthes writes, is "the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; that text that comes from culture and does not break with it, [and] is linked to a comfortable practice of reading" (*PT*, 14). Freud's dogmatic assertion is comfortably pleasurable because it fulfills normal expectations, gives assurance, and helps to overcome "angst" in a world full of unknowns: not many people spend hours pondering the nature of pleasure; they assume a common experience as well, and therefore his assertion reaffirms or auto-affects there pre-existing beliefs.

21. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 172.

Freud's insights lend to our understanding of comfortable pleasure. Although he never relates psychoanalysis to language and texts, his thought contributes greatly to Barthes' theory and those of other French thinkers like Derrida. In fact, it seems that Barthes' distinction between the text of pleasure and the text of *jouissance*—a type of pleasure I will explain shortly—comes directly from the distinction between the death drive and the life instincts sketched by Freud in *Beyond*. The death drive is a conservative “instinct” that seeks stillness, the end of life with stasis—what Freud calls Nirvana. As we might recall, the psyche obtains the greatest pleasure by remaining in an immobile state without “excitation.” In *Beyond*, Freud traces this tendency back to a primordial urge to die:

For a long time perhaps, living substance was thus being constantly created afresh and easily dying, till decisive external influences altered in such a way as to oblige the still surviving substance to diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated detours before reaching its aim of death. These circuitous paths to death faithfully kept by the conservative instincts would thus present us today with the picture of the phenomena of life. (*BP*, 46)

Death, “the aim of life,” is the desire for permanent stability—absolute loss of movement or “excitation.” The comfort and permanent stability of death are similar to the comfort offered by scientific discourses and all other discourses that assume tenuous foundations to be completely stable and then build enormous and intricately complex structures of knowledge on them. The expansion of these structures does not exactly constitute a regression to an earlier state the way that the death drive does, but it does mark a progression toward intellectual stasis. When discussing Freud's adoption of the death drive, Derrida calls the new principle “the history of the analytic movement” (*PC*, 272). He then goes on to discuss the theme of holding together, which is the stasis and closure that intellectual superstructures impose on the world. “That which *holds together* does not maintain in the form of a system,” writes Derrida: “no (logical, scientific,

philosophical) concept of system, perhaps, could be authorized to do so, or could in fact be capable of such an assemblage. A concept itself is but an effect thereof" (*PC*, 272).

The superstructures attacked by Derrida prevent intellectual movement and keep other voices from being heard. To give credence to this point we need look no farther than the limited role that cultural discourses like religion, literature, and the arts play in America where scientific discourse, technological "progress," and beloved consumerism govern its "free" citizens. Although other discourses are sacrificed to the most dominant ones, the dominant discourses provide comfortable pleasure in return, through protection from overwhelming aporia. Scientific knowledge is, according to Nietzsche, "determined by the instincts of self-preservation even as regards the limits knowledge: we would regard as true, good, valuable that which serves the preservation of the species" (*WP*, 313). The scientific superstructure has undoubtedly helped humanity overcome the hardships of the "natural" world. While scientific discourse is necessary, it is absolutely crucial that humanity considers the sacrifices it makes by putting absolute faith in this discourse and the dangers it faces by pursuing it or any other discourse with too much zeal. Without the pleasure provided by cultural discourses such as the arts, there is little left to redeem the long comfortable life that science makes possible.

We have already seen that repression of the other is a necessary condition for the formation of the self and we are coming to find that the development of a structure of knowledge is accompanied by this violent tendency as well. Freud suggests in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that cultural identities also develop by violating others. Reviewing the following passage from that great work will help us understand the enormous importance of Derrida's project and its close relationship to Freud's:

If the development of civilization has such a far-reaching similarity to the development of the individual and if it employs the same methods, may we not be justified in reaching

the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilizations, or some epochs of civilization—possibly the whole of mankind—have become ‘neurotic’?²²

Leaving this proposition open for debate, Freud concludes with this speculation: “one day someone will venture to embark upon a pathology of cultural communities” (*CD*, 110).

Derrida embarks upon the journey proposed by Freud; therefore, it is necessary for him to critique Freud in *The Post Card*. Derrida’s work suggests that the history of Western culture and knowledge are indeed “neurotic” and that the obsession with unity and totality has led to aggression against many alternative discourses and the minorities that have participated in them. Despite the influence that Freud’s work had on loosening the strangle hold that Western knowledge had on these discourses, his dogmatic language and the structure of his texts belong to the imperialist tradition. Derrida unveils the violence of Freud’s texts in *The Post Card*. By critiquing Freud, Derrida attacks his own unstable foundations as well. As we will see momentarily, this act is representative of the deconstructive project.

Before going too far too fast, a danger Derrida continuously warns us about, it is necessary to remember the traditional research that builds large structures of knowledge is necessary in some fields, like medicine for example. The medical field needs a structure or a lens through which to interpret the body and treat patients. Freud himself needed an interpretive structure to treat patients; this is a fact many critical scholars forget. But when scientific objectivity spills over into other areas of culture, especially the humanities and private life, and begins to dictate the stories people tell themselves about each other and the world they live in, then these discourses have gained too much influence and become too rigid.

22. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 110. Hereafter cited in the text as *CD*.

Derrida will not allow us to think of people as “concepts.” They are not to be considered statistics within the confines of any discourse. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche warns against the violent rifts formed by “objectivity,” universal themes, and “concepts”:

All human concepts from earlier times were, to an extent which we can scarcely conceive, initially understood in a crude, clumsy, external, narrow, and frankly, particularly unsymbolic way. In fact, these oppositions have finally torn open chasms between man and man, chasms which would make an Achilles of spiritual freedom shudder before he leapt.²³

There must always be room for alternative interpretations of human life in the humanities, lest the work done within these fields continues to widen and solidify the rifts between different groups of people. This means that objectivity and conceptualization in the humanities must be kept to a minimum in order to keep the structures they engender from growing too large. Emmanuel Levinas treats this issue with remarkable acumen in his great ethical work, *Totality and Infinity*. “Thematization and conceptualization are not peace with the Other,” writes Levinas, “but suppression or repression of the Other. Universality presents itself as imperialism; and this is another inhumanity.”²⁴ In an essay devoted to Levinas, “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida discusses the violence of thematization and conceptualization that inhabits our culture and its knowledge. He calls this violence “oppression itself—an oppression certainly comparable to none other in the world, an ontological or transcendental oppression, but also the origin or alibi of all oppression in the world.”²⁵

23. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17. Hereafter cited in the text as *GM*.

24. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 46.

25. Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 83.

Derrida has shown us that violence towards the other is repeated throughout the construction of a body of knowledge; although this repetition yields comfortable pleasure for a while, after a certain point it becomes painful. According to Freud, one characteristic of the death drive is the compulsion to repeat the same thing over and over; he gives the example of children who “never tire of asking an adult to repeat a game that has been shown them or played with them” (*BP*, 42). How painful is this for the adult? According to philologist and Nietzsche scholar James Porter, “a strict equivalence of measure is psychologically painful, Nietzsche claims, and so it is a constant of human nature to vary rhythms and to yearn for dissonances.”²⁶

Derrida’s deconstruction is a war, “founded” on our urges for dissonance, against intellectual superstructures. It is a war that seeks to liberate other discourses from the repression of Western monoliths. Derrida states the mission of deconstruction in this beautifully elegant passage taken from *Of Grammatology*:

Within the closure, by an oblique and always perilous movement, constantly risking falling back within what is being deconstructed, it is necessary to surround the critical concepts with a careful and thorough discourse—to mark the conditions, the medium, and the limits of their effectiveness and to designate rigorously their intimate relationship to the machine whose deconstruction they permit; and, in the same process, designate the crevice through which the yet unnamable glimmer beyond the glimmer can be glimpsed. (*OG*, 14)

Derrida’s war within the horizon of structural closure is necessarily a war against comfortable pleasure. In an open letter to Derrida, Edmund Jabès writes, “to hope to be soothed means turning away from you. You burn what stood just outside the flame. Rare, very rare, to live writing with such intensity.”²⁷

26. James I. Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 153.

27. Edmund Jabès, “The Moment After,” in *Deconstruction: a Reader*, ed. Martin McQuillan (New York: Routledge, 2000), 86. Hereafter cited in the text as *MA*.

The fires that Derrida lights under foundations and texts that seek closure, that seek to give themselves a “presence” through the repression of the other, are not necessarily painful.

They belong to a special type of play that evokes a special type of pleasure or *jouissance*.

Derrida relates this play to Nietzschean affirmation, which he calls

the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. This adventure then determines the noncenter otherwise than as the loss of center. And it plays without security. For there is a sure play: that which is limited to the substitution of given, and existing, present, pieces. In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to genetic indetermination, to the seminal trace of adventure. (*SPH*, 292)

Derrida’s play is the play that moves without security, not the play that substitutes one center for another. Derrida is able to play this way, to deconstruct, by performing close readings of texts important to the history of Western knowledge, like *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. These active interpretations are neither simple commentary nor simple critique. Rather, Derrida works within the texts he reads; he finds the foci, the structural moments or foundations on which the entire work depends—“pleasure” in Freud’s case—and then shows how these moments are either inhabited by a contradiction or borrow from another discourse not contained by the text in question.

Derrida’s adventures with other texts are not diabolical and irresponsible manipulations that seek to reduce another’s writing to absurdity. They are scholarly works, written in a joyous tone void of vindictiveness. Although it can easily be overlooked, his lighthearted and playful style is an extremely important aspect of his work. Through his play Derrida avoids resentment, a theme introduced by Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, resentment develops much like Freud’s super ego; it is the result of repressing a natural aggressive or violent drive. This aggression, having nowhere to go, is channeled back inward, where it is left to fester, turn green, and become a

thousand times more inimical. When the aggression of the repressed finally finds release, it appears as a general hatred toward life, manifested in a tendency to deny everything, to say NO to everything that it is.

In his "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" released in later additions of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche warns future skeptics and critics of modernity like Derrida to avoid the resentment that the present condition of humanity so easily engenders because if they do not, they are destined to fall victim to the same violent tendencies characteristic of the age that they are critiquing:

You ought to learn the art of this-worldly comfort first; you ought to learn to laugh, my young friends, if you are hell-bent on remaining pessimists. Then perhaps, as laughers, you may some day dispatch all metaphysical comforts to the devil—metaphysics in front. Or, to say it in the language of that Dionysian monster who bears the name of Zarathustra: 'Raise up your hearts, my brothers, high, higher! And don't forget your legs! Raise up your legs, too, good dancers; and still better: stand on your heads! (BT, 26)

This passage is beautiful, and the general doctrine represented, which calls for the affirmation of everything that exists in this often painful world, is perhaps more so. Nevertheless, it seems to me that Nietzsche frequently fails to practice his own doctrine. His militant attacks on Christians, Jews, former friends, and anyone else who bothers him often resemble the type of nay-saying he opposes.

Derrida borrows Nietzsche's ideas about playful affirmation, performs them in his writing through the use of sophisticated humor, and thereby avoids resentment of his opponents. Instead of completely distancing himself from the site of critique and then launching militant aphorisms at his opponents like Nietzsche does, Derrida remains in the midst of the battle. He plays Zarathustra, not by standing on his own head, but by standing the texts he reads on theirs. After locating a contradiction or hole inside the text he is working on, Derrida begins his adventures. He turns the text upside down and against itself by using playful jokes that borrow

terms from the text to gesture toward a play in the text that furtively substitutes one center for another in an effort to secure closure, to give “presence.” These jokes rarely seem like unjust treatment of the original text. Derrida’s intellectually sophisticated sense of humor, which allows him to play at a level as nuanced as the text he reads, affirms the text’s complexity even as it unveils the violence of repressive closure.

It should be noted that the texts Derrida reads are usually very egalitarian from the start, and he has often expressed fondness for them. *Beyond* is a text written out of the need to help patients experiencing war trauma, and *Civilization and Its Discontents* is concerned with stopping the violence of cultural communities. By showing how the structure and language of texts generally opposed to violence are not necessarily exempt from it, Derrida contributes to the original author’s argument in one way or another. However, it would be wrong to assume that Derrida’s deconstruction, at least in the early years, contributes too greatly to any specific political movement other than unveiling the violence of knowledge in the West. Because his work opposes intellectual structures, it is virtually impossible for him to make any positive statements. Therefore, after Derrida ruptures a closed text, he leaves it in a heap of broken pieces.

Derrida’s absolute refusal to reconstruct a text, the dissidence that causes traditional kettle logicians to call his writing useless, is the source of much aesthetic pleasure. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud suggests that beauty is often found in what is useless to civilization. According to him, people derive so much pleasure from a “useless” phenomenon like art because it allows them a release from the civilizing machine.²⁸ Under the Freudian lens,

28. Although Freud is contemptuous towards priests and philosophers, he shows a great deal of respect to artists. The following passage attests to this fact: “We may go on from here to consider the interesting case in which happiness in life is sought in the enjoyment of beauty, wherever beauty presents itself to our senses and our judgement—the beauty of human forms and gestures, of natural objects and landscapes and of artistic and even

Derrida's work is beautiful and pleasurable to read because it liberates us from the knowledge-producing machines. Furthermore, who is to say that acts of destruction are not beautiful "in themselves?" Perhaps acts of destruction have such a negative connotation because they are almost always followed by violent institutionalization. Are not some of the most beautiful works in the Western Canon acts of destruction that absolutely resist any institutional reading that would put the fragments they leave back together? Consider *The Waste Land*, *The Cantos*, or *Finnegans Wake*.

Derrida is an artist. Instead of maniacally searching for and trying to maintain a single structure of knowledge or language like so many philosophers and scientists, or nostalgically mourning the loss of the one name, language, or structure of knowledge, he delights in toppling such structures and playing with their ruins. When discussing the fractured state of knowledge, Derrida states:

It must be conceived without nostalgia: that is, it must be conceived outside the myth of the purely maternal language belonging to the lost fatherland of thought, on the contrary we must affirm it—in the sense that Nietzsche brings affirmation into play—with a certain laughter and a certain dance.²⁹

Derrida's affirming play is a type of poetry wholly different from traditional academic writings. This poetry renders impossible any institutional reading of any text. In his essay "Jacques Derrida: Wholly Otherwise," Levinas comments on the aesthetic aspect of Derrida's work: "At the outset everything is in place; after a few pages of formidable calling into question, nothing is left inhabitable for thought. This is, all philosophical significance aside, a purely literary effect,

scientific creations. This aesthetic attitude to the goal of life offers little protection against the threat of suffering, but it can compensate for a great deal. The enjoyment of beauty has no obvious use; nor is there any clear cultural necessity for it. Yet civilization could not do without it" (CD, 33).

29. Jacques Derrida, "Differance," in *Speech and Phenomena: and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, ed. John Wild, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 159.

a new frission, Derrida's poetry."³⁰ Levinas adds: "in emphasizing the primordial importance of the questions raised by Derrida, I have desired to express the pleasure of a contact at the heart of a chiasmus" (430).

Derrida not only liberates his readers from stuffy academic conventions, he liberates many repressed others; Derrida is, Geoffrey Bennington explains, a "liberatory reading machine."³¹ Until now I have used the term "other" in a vague manner, and I will continue to do so after a bit of clarification. Thus far the other refers to whatever is repressed by the founding violence that ensures the possibility of the closed structure. The other continues to inhabit the text, but it is repressed and must remain so at all costs because it possesses the power to rupture the closing seal. Deconstruction is important to minority and cultural studies where the other has been used to represent women, gay men, lesbians, and post-colonial subjects among others. As we move forward, in order not to reduce and close off the possibilities of its meaning, it is important to think of the other in a broad theoretical manner, or perhaps as forbidden jouissance.

In an interview with Derek Attridge, Derrida discusses the other in terms of this forbidden jouissance; he also speaks about more traditional scholars, who opposed the liberation of jouissance during the early movements of deconstruction:

Deconstruction perhaps has the effect, if not the mission, of liberating forbidden jouissance. That's what has to be taken on board. It is perhaps this jouissance which most irritates the all-out adversaries of "deconstruction." Who, moreover, blame those they call the "deconstructionists" for depriving them of their habitual delectation in the reading of the great works or the rich treasures of tradition, and simultaneously for being too playful, for taking too much pleasure, for saying what they like for their own pleasure, etc. An interesting and symptomatic contradiction. These masters of "kettle logic" understand in some obscure way that the "deconstructionists," to use that

30. Emmanuel Levinas, "Jacques Derrida: Wholly Otherwise," in *Deconstruction: a Reader*, ed. Martin McQuillan (New York: Routledge, 2000), 426. Hereafter cited in the text as *WO*.

31. Geoffrey Bennington, "Genuine Gasche (Perhaps)," in *Deconstruction: a Reader*, ed. Martin McQuillan (New York: Routledge, 2000), 139.

ridiculous vocabulary, are not those who most deprive themselves of pleasure. Which is sometimes hard to put up with. (*IJD*, 56)

This passage begs several questions. What is *jouissance*? How does it differ from comfortable pleasure? What does “kettle logic” mean in this context, and why does Derrida deride those who practice it?

To begin to understand “*jouissance*,” it is necessary to return to Barthes’ *The Pleasure of the Text*. Barthes calls the text of *jouissance* “the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts, unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relationship with language” (*PT*, 14). *Jouissance* would then be a type of pleasure in opposition to but not completely separate from *plaisure* or comfortable pleasure; it is the pleasure that comes from playing without a foundation. Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is an example of the text of *jouissance*. Although he makes dogmatic and repressive assertions that are comfortably pleasurable, his general thought about the unconscious, the pleasure principle, and the death drive unsettle classical psychology and bring to crisis traditional assurance in the conscious self.

The term “*jouissance*,” as used by Derrida and Barthes, has an intimate relationship with Freud’s text. *Jouissance* is to *plaisure* what the reality principle is to the pleasure principle. While under the complete domination of the pleasure principle, the psyche is content staying within itself, and it takes pleasures in hallucinations and dreams; the psyche enjoys comfortable pleasure within a closed structure. The reality principle, however, ruptures closure and brings *jouissance*; it unsettles the psyche and forces it to look outside of itself, even if that means encountering pain.

The relationship between comfortable pleasure and *jouissance* is also comparable to the relationship between the death drive and the life instincts. In a disconcertingly equivocal tone,

Freud provides this note in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: “the attributes of life were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force whose nature can be of no conception” (BP, 46). The product of this mysterious force is organic matter, which, while traveling along one of the circuitous paths to death, discovers the life instincts or the sex instincts. Although this discovery grants pleasure, it does not grant enough pleasure to satisfy organic matter. The final destination, death, is therefore postponed along greater and greater intervals as organic matter continues to seek satisfaction through the life instincts. The rupture and delay of the determined path to death is *jouissance* in action. “It is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm,” writes Freud: “One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey” (BP, 49).

Derrida’s texts are, without question, texts of *jouissance*. These texts jerk back other texts that move toward stability, closure, and a morbidly totalizing structure of knowledge. His texts of *jouissance* are remarkably liberating, but like the reality principle, they leave readers vulnerable to pain. Few want to think about their beliefs and personal thoughts as structures based on tenuous foundations rather than fundamental truths. Those who are not prepared to go beyond the pleasure of closure and to question the comfortable pleasure they derive from their delectable yet habitual beliefs and practices seem to be the ones that Derrida calls kettle logicians.

Perhaps these kettle logicians have a right to be upset; after all, Derrida’s rigorous questioning constitutes another form of violence. He acknowledges this violence in *Of Grammatology*: “the opening of the question, the departure from the closure of self-evidence, the

putting into doubt of a system of oppositions, all these moves necessarily have the form of empiricism and errancy" (*OG*, 162). The rupturing of closure and the liberation from repression by casting doubt upon basic concepts, foundations, themes, and all the laws of a text are in fact the types of violence that are most familiar to us. Contrary to the vulgar opinion, this violence is not violent "in itself"; it is violent because it makes visible the earlier violence of isolating an absolute. In the essay "Force of Law" Derrida discusses the structure of this violence:

The admiring fascination exerted on the people by "the figure of the 'great' criminal," can be explained as follows: it is not someone who has committed this or that crime for which one feels a secret admiration; it is someone who, in defying the law, lays bare the violence of the judicial order itself.³²

Derrida is a maverick, a great criminal of sorts. He is a twentieth-century Zarathustra, who, having come down from the mountain, playfully violates violence by leveling our repressive towers of knowledge. Although this bewildering deconstruction leaves us on the brink of an aporiatic abyss, it sparks admiring fascination as well.

The pleasure readers take by posing as voyeurs to Derrida's playful Zarathustrian violence, as wonderful as it may be, constitutes what Nietzsche calls a human-all-too-human tendency: we take pleasure in deconstruction in part because we enjoy witnessing violation. Nietzsche discusses the pleasure of violating the other in *The Genealogy of Morals*. "Inflicting pain occasions the greatest pleasure," he writes, "the opportunity to inflict suffering—an actual festivity" (*GM*, 47). Nietzsche is discussing the pleasure derived from sadomasochism in ancient Greek and Roman festivals, so the passage may not seem immediately relevant. But when discussing a phenomenon like pleasure, it seems all arenas should be open for analysis; the playing fields have changed from coliseum floors to the pages of intellectual discourse, but perhaps the structure of pleasure and its relation to violence have remained the same. "To

32. Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 267.

witness suffering does one good, to inflict it even more so,” writes Nietzsche, “that is a harsh proposition, but a fundamental one, an old, powerful, human all-too-human proposition” (*GM*, 48).

Derrida echoes Nietzsche during a recent interview with *LA Weekly* when discussing the pleasure of violation and cruelty, and the manifestation of that pleasure in his writing:

The human animal has a capacity for cruelty, and to make the other suffer can be a source of pleasure. That isn't eradicable, but it doesn't mean we have the right to kill—and this is one of the crucial functions of philosophy and thinking, to handle this irreducible drive. Cruelty and aggression are always there, but they can be transformed into things that are beautiful and sublime. When I write there's an element of aggression in that activity, but I attempt to transform that aggression into something useful. Aggression can be transformed into something more interesting than killing—and of course, you can kill without killing. I can kill the other without putting an end to his or her life, and can be aggressive in a way that's not despicable.³³

As we prepare to watch Derrida make violence suffer in the next section, it is important to remember that his aggressive writing in *The Post Card* and throughout his career is not the banal mudslinging and backstabbing far too common in all venues of our culture; he refuses to fall victim to all repressive minimizing strategies. He does not reduce his opponents to caricatures to brush their work aside with a waft of his hand; in fact, he complicates the texts he reads to such a degree that we absolutely have to read them again to make sure they have not changed since our last encounter with them. As Richard Rorty writes, “Derrida is interested not in the ‘splendor of the simple’ but, rather in the lubriciousness of the tangled” (*D*, 126).

Derrida does turn some figures into caricatures, like Rousseau, as we will see in the next section; but it is not done out of resentment for any one individual. Derrida treats the figures whose texts he reads too lightheartedly and, at times, too absurdly for anyone to believe that he is

33. Jacques Derrida, “The Three Ages of Jacques Derrida,” interview by Kristina Mckenna, in *LA Weekly* (Nov. 8-14, 2002), 15.

squabbling over local arguments and petty grudges. He is engaged in a much bigger war against the violence of intellectual superstructures, and he uses his favorite thinkers to help him fight it. In the open letter to Derrida mentioned earlier, Jabès states: “your deconstruction would then be starting countless fires, which your philosophers, your thinkers, your favorite writers help spread in their writing” (*MA*, 85). On a similar note, Rorty adds: “He simply drops theory—the attempt to see his predecessors steadily and whole—playing with them, giving free reign to the trains of association they produce. Derrida rings every possible change on influencing philosophers to serves as dummies, standing philosophers on their heads, penetrating them from the rear, fertilizing them so that they give birth to new ideas an so on” (*D*, 128).

Derrida’s playfulness actually seems to mark an acknowledgement of his own violence and a refusal to take himself too seriously, as those who are too serious and take their science and philosophy too seriously are often the ones who are the cruelest and tend to repress others to elevate themselves. His war is therefore a war fought on two fronts. On one front he fights a serious opponent, a history of violence in Western knowledge that is terrorizing and must be defeated; but it cannot be fought with totalitarian language that only exacerbates the problem. Therefore, Derrida also fights a war with his own philosophical metalanguage, which is loaded with violent “concepts.” Lyotard best describes this fight and the pleasure it can bring in these lines from *The Post Modern Condition*:

To speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall within the domain of a general antagonistics. This does not necessarily mean that one plays in order to win. A move can be made for the sheer pleasure of its invention: what else is involved in that labor of language harassment undertaken by popular speech and by literature. Great joy is had in the endless invention of turns of phrase, of words and meanings, the process behind the evolution of language on the level of parole. But undoubtedly even this pleasure depends on a feeling of success won at the expense of an adversary, at least one adversary, and a formidable one: the accepted language, or connotation. (*PMC*, 10)

Derrida's pleasure and the pleasure we can take from reading his work come from witnessing a victory over his own language as well as the violation of totalitarian knowledge and the liberation of repressed others. Freud notes that the pleasures least susceptible to the taming of repression are those given by intellectual victories.³⁴ By showing how the greatest intellectual endeavors of the past, like Freud's, have constituted a type of intellectual repression, Derrida's work gives perhaps the greatest pleasure of all. He liberates a new type of writing, Derridean poetry, which cannot be contained by the prisons of Western knowledge. This poetic writing channels violence into the sublime. Derrida writes sweet violence, radical jouissance.

34. Freud claims in *Civilization and its Discontents* that "the feeling of happiness derived from the satisfaction of a wild instinctual impulse untamed by the ego is incomparably more intense than that derived from sating an instinct that has been tamed. The irresistibility of perverse instincts, and perhaps *the attraction in general of forbidden things finds an economic explanation here.*" Freud goes on to state that "one gains the most if one can sufficiently heighten the yield of pleasure from the sources of psychical and intellectual work. When that is so, fate can do little against one. A satisfaction of this kind, such as an artist's joy in creating, in giving his phantasies body, or a scientist's in solving problems or discovering truths, has a special quality *which we shall certainly one day be able to characterize in metapsychological terms*" (CD, 29-30; my italics).

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for the return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name.

—*Jean-François Lyotard*

Radical Jouissance

A special debt is owed to Freud for contributing to our discussion about violence, pleasure, and Derrida's poetry. We would not be where we are now without his brilliant thought, and one especially erroneous assertion: "We have all experienced how the greatest pleasure attainable by us, that of the sexual act, is associated with a momentary extinction of highly intensified excitation" (*BP*, 76). Although Freud misunderstands and violently misuses his most basic term, he correctly assumes a relationship between the sexual act and pleasure. While the following pages are not necessarily sexual in content, they do promise to climax with a few thoughts about the naughty fetish of one philosopher and with a conclusion of this thesis that involves some "highly intensified excitation" of its own. This section is written on behalf of Derrida, who states in the recent documentary film bearing his name that if he could hear his favorite philosophers talk about anything, it would be their sexual lives. When asked why, he responds: "Because it's the thing they don't talk about." Derrida seems to forget that Jean-Jacques Rousseau provides a few intimate passages in *The Confessions*. It is surprising that Derrida loses track of these passages, which he cites in one of his own essays, "That Dangerous Supplement." In this famous text, Derrida develops his theory of pleasure and simultaneously ruptures Rousseau's philosophic structure. To develop our understanding of this theory further and to see how Derrida playfully combats violence, perhaps it is now time to take a closer look at this essay.

Derrida's text is structured according to a maddening logic also involved in his theory of pleasure. "That Dangerous Supplement" involves a close reading of a text by Rousseau, *The Essay on the Origin of Languages*. According to traditional kettle logic, because Derrida's text is inhabited by another piece of writing, it is not a "primary text"; rather, it is a piece of criticism.

However, *The Essay* is no “primary text” either. Surely it did not just spring out of Rousseau’s head; he read other texts that influenced his thought, and there is a trace of those texts in his writing. This is not to say that Rousseau was a plagiarist; his text is different from the ones he read just as “That Dangerous Supplement” is different from *The Essay*. Every text is caught up in a strange relationship in which it is neither exactly the same as, nor completely different from, the texts that influenced its composition. Even the most ingenious, refreshingly original texts borrow old terms and conventions from a pre-existing structure of language. This odd logic is simplified with the supplementation paradigm. Every new text supplements the texts that come before it; this text supplements “That Dangerous Supplement,” which supplements *The Essay*, and so on and so forth. The supplement maintains certain threads from previous texts and unwinds new threads from the structure of language in which it is written. The supplement is neither an absolutely original text nor a replica of an old text.

Derrida plays with the logic of the supplement when introducing his theory of pleasure in “That Dangerous Supplement.” We are approaching a sample from this essay; but before reading it, in order not to get lost in Derrida’s textual labyrinth, it is important to establish the relationship between pleasure and supplementation. In the previous section, pleasure was linked to auto-affection, what Derrida calls auto-eroticism in “That Dangerous Supplement.” Through the sound of the voice an illusory space is opened between self and other. This space is maintained until death in such a way that the self necessarily maintains a superior position. This is due to the mysterious act of repression, which is the source of comfortable pleasure. Repression is repeated throughout life. However, the other is never absolutely repressed; a full “experience” of comfortable pleasure is impossible. This situation is best understood with the logic of the supplement. If the supplement is written such that it copies a previous text word for

word, even though it replaces or represses the previous text, it is not distinguishable from the previous text. In order for the supplement to have an identity, it must stand in opposition to the previous text. Similarly, a slim margin of difference between self and other is needed for the self to exist.

Just as the other is never fully repressed, it is never fully liberated; absolute *jouissance* is impossible during life. Once again, it is necessary to resort to the maddening logic of the supplement to explain this condition. Try to imagine a text that is wholly original and does not supplement another text. It is not worth mentioning that the “content” of the original text is completely new, because every word, character, and grammatical convention is new as well. The original text, if such a thing were possible, would be complete babble; it would represent nothing other than itself. The madness of the original text is not unlike the complete liberation of the other, which constitutes an event that is radically original and absolutely unrepresentable. This one time event is death. “Pleasure itself,” writes Derrida, “without symbol or suppletory, that which would accord us (to) pure presence itself, if such a thing were possible, would be only another name for death” (*OG*, 155).

This definition of *jouissance*, which must be thought of in contexts that exceed the phenomenological scope, bears witness to an important aspect of Derrida’s work: if the other is only liberated once, and yet Derrida’s intention is to liberate the other with every text he writes, then he never fully accomplishes his task. There is an element of failure permeating his entire corpus. But this element is foreseen; Derrida knows that he will fall short before the first drop of ink is spilled. Yet he continues to write. Derrida has written over 60 books, and he is still going strong. This admirable persistence keeps everyone in the unsettled state I term “radical *jouissance*.” This type of pleasure vanquishes all comfort. It reminds us that there is always an

imbalance between self and other. If any discourse is inspected closely—whether it is political, legal, economical, cultural, or even academic—there is violence and repression. The state of things is always out of joint. Derrida's radical *jouissance* shows us that every act of liberation is lacking insofar as it requires a supplementary act of liberation.

Derrida's message—that imbalance is a necessary condition of life and yet we must always struggle to correct it—is untenable for most philosophic structures. The philosophers who build and maintain these structures posit teleological goals and ideals; they assume that when the goals are met and the ideals obtained, that all imbalance will be eradicated and comfortable pleasure will be available for all. Although these philosophers often have wonderful intentions, they have a tendency in efforts to obtain their lofty ideals to exclude and repress the other. Jean-Jacques Rousseau is one such philosopher.

Rousseau's ideal is nature, a philosophical structure that is well thought out, complex, and worthy of a more thorough analysis than this paper provides. According to Rousseau, humanity is caught in a state of culture that is fallen from nature; however, with proper supplementary measures, nature is more or less restorable. This philosophy bears marks of the idealist dream, which is to unify all peoples in one structure and therefore put an end to history and human struggle. Derrida suggests that philosophies like Rousseau's built on the ideal of unity, which smells suspiciously of the death drive, only perpetuate violence toward and repression of the other:

Rousseau shows that social distance, the dispersion of the neighborhood, is the condition of oppression, arbitrariness, and vice. The governments of oppression all make the same gesture: to break presence, the copresence of citizens, the unanimity of "assembled peoples," to create the situation of dispersion holding subjects so far apart as to be incapable of feeling themselves together in the space of one and the same speech, one and the same persuasive exchange. The now recognized ambiguity of this structure is such that one can equally well reverse its direction and show that this copresence is sometimes

also that of a crowd subjected to a demagogic harangue. We must attend to the signs of Rousseau's vigilance when confronted by the possibility of such a reversal. (*OG*, 137)

In "That Dangerous Supplement," Derrida verifies the aforementioned reversal; he shows that it is unity and co-presence, not division and difference, that are dangerous. By gesturing toward telltale moments in *The Essay*, he unveils the violence of Rousseau's idealist dream. These moments show that Rousseau can only assert his ideal of the one, the whole, the full presence of nature by tearing it away and holding it at a distance from his counter ideal—culture, or the other. But in strange, maddening counter-movements, Rousseau borrows from culture in order to supplement nature, which according to his definition should be complete in itself. Just as the self maintains its vitality through the other, nature survives via culture. "Dangerous Supplement," a play on Rousseau's use of the phrase, is the title Derrida gives the double movement of holding the other at a distance and yet borrowing from it. This ambivalence parallels the double movement of radical Derridean *jouissance*, which acknowledges the impossibility of liberating the other but demands it with unparalleled tenacity, nonetheless.

The dangerous supplement—a double gesture, a divided and yet coherent movement—is perhaps untenable for all reason. But we now have a faint understanding of it, which gives us enough preparation to delve into Derrida's text. We begin in *medias res*; Derrida has already highlighted a few examples of Rousseau's violence and the play of the supplement. The climax of the essay, from which radical Derridean *jouissance* erupts, is still to come. The gravity of Derrida's project is clear enough, but we should remain attentive to his lighthearted Zarathustrian play when relating the logic of the supplement to Rousseau's "dirty" habit:

Dangerous supplement. These are the words that Rousseau uses in *The Confessions*. He uses them in a context which is only apparently different, and in order to explain, precisely a "condition almost unintelligible and inconceivable [to reason]": "In a word, between myself and the most passionate lover there was only one, but that an essential,

point of distinction, which makes my condition almost unintelligible and inconceivable.”
(*OG*, 149)

What is inconceivable to Rousseau is that he cannot overcome his masturbation addiction.

While continually making references to his theory of auto-affection, Derrida plays with this confession in order to rupture Rousseau's philosophical structure. Masturbation is an agent of culture, and is therefore evil to Rousseau. It threatens the perpetrator with castration and prevents hetero-affection. But as Derrida points out, masturbation seems like the most natural thing in the world:

The experience of auto-affection is lived in anguish. Masturbation reassures only through that culpability traditionally attached to the practice, obliging children to assume the fault and to interiorize the threat of castration that always accompanies it. Pleasure is thus lived as the irremediable loss of the vital substance, as exposure to death and madness. The dangerous supplement, which Rousseau also calls a “fatal advantage,” is properly seductive; it leads desire away from the good path, makes it err far from natural ways, guides it towards its loss or fall and therefore it is a sort of lapse or scandal. It thus destroys Nature. But the scandal of reason is that nothing seems more Natural than this destruction of Nature. It is myself who exerts myself to separate myself from the force that Nature has entrusted me. (*OG*, 151)

The mad logic of the supplement presents itself: what is most offensive to Rousseau and threatens to destroy nature is also what is most attractive to him and seems most fundamental to nature.

Derrida takes the opportunity opened by this breach in reason to reassert his theory of pleasure in the context of Rousseau's confession:

Rousseau will never stop having recourse to, and accusing himself of, this onanism that permits one to be himself affected by providing himself with presences, by summoning absent beauties. In his eyes it will remain the model of vice and perversion. Affecting oneself by another presence, one *corrupts* oneself [makes oneself other] by oneself. Rousseau neither wishes to think nor can think that this alteration does not simply happen to the self, that it is the self's very origin. He must consider it a contingent evil coming from without to affect the integrity of the subject. But he cannot give up what immediately restores to him the other desired presence; no more than he can give up language. (*OG*, 153)

This passage, along with the previous one, illustrates Derrida's poetic talents. By supplementing Rousseau's confession with his own theory of auto-affection, Derrida writes beautifully rhythmical sentences. This poetry appears like absolute babble at first, but when analyzed more carefully, layers of meaning are unearthed and multiple messages are revealed. We have waded far enough into Derrida's thought to know that these layers are always infused with a desire to liberate the other. Even though he plays with Rousseau's embarrassing confession in clever fashion, Derrida's overarching message travels far beyond this contextual layer and arrives at a solemn point: the other whom we despise, repress, and violate is part of us; the other makes us who we are.

Adieu

When Derrida's poetry is read for pleasure, it evokes more divergent feelings than there are layers of meaning in his texts. His play makes us feel joyous and lighthearted, while his violation of violence sates our appetites for aggression. The beautiful rhythm of his writing supplements these feelings with a remarkable calm. Nonetheless, this soothing tranquility is soon pierced by a dangerous supplement, and radical Derridean *jouissance* makes us feel disheveled by reminding us of the other's perpetual suffering. This volatile collection of heterogeneous emotions contributes to the pleasure of Derrida's poetry, but the collection does not form a totality. There is much more to write about this subject, and yet it will not be written here, now. A space to write is left for other Zarathustrian spirits brave enough to play with Derrida and take pleasure in his poetry.

This paper comes to a close without bringing closure. As I prepare to put down my pen, I breath no sigh of relief, feel no comfortable pleasure. Derrida says that this world, having been sundered by a primordial tremor, is off its hinges. Indeed, things are out of joint. They have been out of joint since time immemorial, and they must go on being out of joint for life to continue. Although the violence that imbalance engenders will continue interminably, we refuse to accept it passively. We will continue the war against violence, and we will do so with a playful Derridean laugh and dance.

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