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Derrida's Style: Formalism as an Address to the Other

by

Benjamin Leake

Under the Direction of Calvin Thomas, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Deconstruction's widely accepted death has been closely associated with the death of its primary methodology: the practice of close reading, which has fallen into disfavor over the past three decades due to its association with formalism. The New Historical and political modes offer themselves as having inherited the important, iconoclastic features of deconstruction and at the same time offering a correction to its perceived faults. Three major figures in this turn, Stephen Greenblatt, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Spivak, describe their work in accordance with this narrative of inheritance and correction. In this essay, I reconsider deconstruction's relationship to formalism and political literary criticism and argue that deconstruction plays an indispensable role in our current discussions of the history of formalism and the ethics of literary interpretation.

INDEX WORDS: Derrida, Heidegger, Freud, Nietzsche, Deconstruction, Metaphysics, New Criticism, New Historicism, Post-Colonial Theory, Queer Theory, Literary Theory, Political Turn, Existentialism

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2021

Derrida's Style: Formalism as an Address to the Other

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DEDICATION

To those who through love, friendship, and example have directed me toward a more profound sense of self that can only be discovered in life when you make the conscious decision to live it on your own terms. Your light continues to be a reminder to stay close to my own inspiration rather than emulate others and seek their affirmation. As I embark on new adventures, I carry our shared experiences and conversations alongside me.

The recluse will doubt whether a philosopher CAN have "ultimate and actual" opinions at all; whether behind every cave in him there is not, and must necessarily be, a still deeper cave: an ampler, stranger, richer world beyond the surface, an abyss behind every bottom, beneath every "foundation." Every philosophy is a foreground philosophy—this is a recluse's verdict: "There is something arbitrary in the fact that the PHILOSOPHER came to a stand here, took a retrospect, and looked around; that he HERE laid his spade aside and did not dig any deeper—there is also something suspicious in it." Every philosophy also CONCEALS a philosophy; every opinion is also a LURKING-PLACE, every word is also a MASK.

—Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

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PREFACE AS EULOGY

As Hegel reminds us in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, every preface is occasioned by a death. A particular absence that we as readers or as writers are unable to apprehend or resolve but to which we are nonetheless indebted and must, in this moment, pay our last respects. For Hegel, the preface is always written after the main body of the text has run its course, and it is responsible for interpreting that work for the reader. The preface stands in for the absent text, the text we have not yet read, and tells us what it has to say. Hegel argues our attempts to reconcile this absence compel us along two divergent but equally inept pathways: we either preface a work by offering a definitional statement on what the work itself is or by identifying absences in other works and stating how this particular work addresses those absences. Hegel sees the failure of both impulses in their uninspired superficiality. He argues that if the preface were simply to announce the conclusions of a study prior to the main body of the text itself it would merely be presenting dead conclusions, or as he writes a “corpse which has left its guiding tendency behind it” (Miller 3). The other route, which begins with describing how the work by this author is different from the works of other authors, or as he writes, “with differentiating and passing judgement on various thinkers,” would lack immersion (Miller 3). Hegel sees this endless, generalizing activity of classifying works by authors, types, and *isms* as distinct from other authors, types, and *isms* as both superficial and novelty seeking. He writes, “this kind of knowing is forever grasping at something new; it remains essentially preoccupied with itself instead of being preoccupied with the real issue and surrendering to it” (Miller 3). Hegel, with the observation of these failures, not only points out the errors of these approaches to preface writing that could be corrected with another approach but rather points out the more radical error, the foundational insufficiency that is the condition of possibility of the preface itself. The preface can only superficially stand in and attempt to speak for the text, but it can never roll up its sleeves and get down to doing the actual living breathing, immanent work of knowledge production of the text itself. The essential feature that necessitates the preface, makes it possible, also renders it impossible. When we eulogize, attempt to give a just interpretation of the absent other, we always find ourselves at a loss for words.

In literary studies, deconstruction has many times been declared dead, and its commemorative place is often heralded for its role in displacing the hegemonic position of New Criticism in the 1960s and 70s. The dead space this dead mode of analysis temporarily occupied during its bracketed, but nonetheless fruitful, life was a period of time between the erosion of the old system, New Criticism, and the birth of the new systems, New Historicism and political literary analysis. The New Historical and political modes offer themselves as having inherited the important, iconoclastic features of deconstruction and at the same time offered a correction to its faults. Three major figures in this turn, Stephen Greenblatt, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Spivak, offer their work in accordance to this narrative of inheritance and correction. Spivak best summarizes this general view guiding the political turn when she explains in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” that Derrida’s work falls short by making “Nietzschean philosophical and psychoanalytic, rather than specifically political, choices to suggest a critique of European ethnocentrism” (89). According to these thinkers, this failure to go beyond philosophy and psychoanalysis can be corrected. When deconstruction is used selectively as a tool, it can function in the service of a political analysis that challenges dominant modes of oppression. Greenblatt, following Foucault, demonstrates the ways that modes of power emerge from the margins and become dominant modes of production that shape our subjective lives, Spivak uses deconstruction in the service of a post-colonial Marxist analysis that involves targeted interventions within the enclosure of Eurocentric discourse, and Butler explores performance as a mode of deconstruction of hegemonic modes of power that govern the gender and sexual norms that shape our subjectivity.

Despite this suggested resolution we see in this narrative presiding over and authorizing the transition from old to new, this preface, both predicate and antecedent, that lays to rest the old system and guarantees a passage to the new systems, I argue there remains an unresolved, haunting tension. In the construction of their new systems of analysis, political theorists don’t simply move beyond the formalism of the New Critics and resolve tensions around Derrida’s deconstruction of that formalism but rather construct a new formalism. They construct new systems that reenact traditional references to centers and unity. In doing so, Greenblatt, Spivak, and Butler overlook deconstruction’s main task: to recognize and

deconstruct all systems, to reveal that our focus on unity, completeness, and totality are a set of culturally fetishized values to which we attach the value tag *truth*. Derrida calls this classical systematic approach to knowledge *metaphysics*, and his deconstructive interventions in Western metaphysics from Plato to 21st century philosophers, theorists, and authors attempt to open this mode of thinking up to its own foundational lack of presence, the ontological absence that both precedes the system or text and operates within, frustrating its attempts at enclosure.

Derrida uses the term *phallogocentrism* to describe this focus on unity, center, and completeness. *Phallo-centrism* has to do with our cultural focus on truth as a male centered mode of reproduction: the father producing the son, with the mother perceived as a transparent vehicle for this process. The son follows the footsteps of the father, the student follows the master, in order to arrive at truth, much as Hegel describes the preface as rehearsing the conclusions of the text to guide us into the text's formal, mature body (Miller 11). *Logo-centrism* has to do with the focus on speech, the living breathing voice of the speaker, rather than writing, as the appropriate vehicle for truth. Where speech is the only vehicle for the true *seed* of knowledge, and writing represents a reckless dissemination or scattering of these seeds.

This tension, between speech and writing, between reproductive and wasteful disseminations of knowledge, is not simply ambivalent, competing forces compelled in two opposing directions within the same libidinal economy as described in psychoanalysis, but rather it is an irreducible remainder, which unreconciled stands both outside and within the current systems, much as Derrida describes with his term *hauntology*—the haunting way the irreducible feature exists without and within but never becomes present. This lukewarm mixture, neither hot nor cold, nauseates us and we must therefore spit it out, reject it, and this is the very position as literary critics drawn into the tensions around deconstruction find ourselves in. And this is also very much the position of Hamlet or Antigone.

We find ourselves in an irreconcilable tension. Our current foundational figures instituted in the political turn have long been declared the new founders and many perceive that justice has been served to both deconstruction as well as inequity in textual reading. And with this turn, we have discovered inextricable linkages that entail obligations and prohibitions around our understanding of the corpus of

deconstruction. Any other burial that one may desire to pursue privately, to settle matters within their own home system without external reference to the political, are prohibited because the essence of the personal is both necessarily connected to and frustrated by the political. The personal finds itself under a demand to answer to established, universal sets of norms, which prevents it from being able to isolate and close itself off entirely. We then find ourselves suspended between multiple idioms. If we provide a socio-political analysis of the text, we are accused by formalists of importing our preconceived modes of analysis and not accounting for the text on its own terms. If we focus on the text itself of the formalists, we are accused of sidestepping our political obligations and of consciously or unconsciously replicating dominant modes of power. If we pursue abstract philosophical questions, or ontological questions about being and our attempts to apprehend meaning, we can be equally accused by both formalists and political theorists of not doing justice to literary texts. Each idiom remains certain of its position and digs its bootheels firmly into its own ideological soil.

Additionally, as systems become, or already have become, institutionalized, whether they be New Critical, existentialist, psychoanalytic, feminist, postcolonial, queer, or even *deconstructive* modes of analysis, their original insights have a tendency to lose their spirit and are often reduced to a residual, mechanical form of self-repetition. Standardized buzz words become an academic shorthand through which we signify our ideological commitments and thereby win respect and approval from others within a particular audience. As Derrida describes however, there is never just one deconstruction, and deconstruction, at its best, has served as a critique of the metaphysics of institutions rather than an institution itself. As he writes, “if a judge [becomes] a calculating machine—which happens—we will not say that he is just, free, and responsible” (Force of Law 961). Equally, if literary critics become calculating machines, endlessly processing texts under established modes of accounting, then we cannot say they are offering just interpretations, despite the quantity of texts they may turn out.

Using Heidegger’s concept of *aporia* and Derrida’s notion of the *aporia* of interpretation and connecting it with Derrida’s ontological claim of the haunting constitutive absence of the other, I argue there is always something radically arbitrary about interpretive choices and they are always open to

revision. The justice that is owed to the other, which the political modes declare themselves to have provided, is found not in interpretive standardizations but in the irreducible distance between the universal quality of interpretative systems and the singularity of the other. This irreducible element frustrates enclosure and entails that interpretation is never final or complete. In a Freudian mode, we might argue that at our foundations we have all been violently separated from the oceanic, undifferentiated state of early infancy, and reading is one way we express the drive to resolve that rift and find resolution and unity. In a productive attempt at resolution, we might, on an unconscious level that finds expression in religion, hope to follow the footsteps of the authors we read to the land of milk and honey, to a new promised land that brings us back to the nourishment, connection, and feelings of completeness we received in the arms of our earliest caretaker. On the destructive side of the same impulse, we may unconsciously intend to strangle our forefathers, to suffocate them with our modes of preservation, much like an entomologist mounting butterflies both idealizes and kills. Tracing Derrida back through Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, however, we follow Heidegger's footsteps in *Holzwege*, not to unity or total destruction but to the passing moments of clearing. In the undecidable aporias we find in the interruption of passages, the moments where our throats tighten as we turn toward the other and struggle to find the last words or our first words, literary interpretation presents itself not as closed or complete but as always on the verge of new meanings, as interpretation to come.

1 NEW CRITICISM: A *FORMALIZED* APPROACH TO LITERARY STUDIES

1.1 Intro

The story of the institutionalization of literary studies in English departments in the US begins with the New Critics and the birth of a new foundation of authority, the *text itself*. The term *New Criticism* was coined by Ransom and applied to authors of the scholarly works he assembled in the anthology *The New Criticism* published in 1941 by New Directions. The common goal of scholars subsumed under the moniker *New Critics* was to establish a methodological, or in other words formal, basis through which claims about texts could be justified and subjected to critique by established common touchstones of interpretation in the field of literary studies. Although interpretive practices of New Critics vary, they share the expressed common objective to focus on the text itself as a unified, self-contained organic whole. Rather than simply discovering *form* in literature, which I define as a unified, self-same true essence to be found in literary works, the New Critics' work *formalizes* literature; that is, their object of study and systematic approach to analysis founded upon and guided by the light of unified truth is a socially mediated process that plays an active role in shaping the very thing they claim to discover in literary texts. In this section, with reference to Derrida's essay "Force of Law," I provide a de/constructivist account of the particular mode of knowledge production instituted by the New Critics. As we will see, this conception of unified truth and the need for language to conform itself to a unified structure, in order to serve as the vehicle for truth, is directly drawing from Platonic metaphysics.

In this chapter, I will first introduce the New Critics, identify New Criticism's relationship to Platonic metaphysical philosophy, and then use Derrida's analysis of justice and law to analyze the structure of the revolution of New Criticism. Derrida's essay "Force of Law" explores three themes that are essential to our discussion of literary interpretation. The first is an interrogation of the metaphysical foundations of law or norm guided systems. Derrida argues that despite references to greater authorities institutions are neither legal nor illegal, legitimate nor illegitimate, in their founding, revolutionary moment. It is only through a retroactive movement that an established institution can self-authorize its

foundations. The second is the question of the line between inside and outside of a text and internal vs external critique. The third, and most important, is the question of justice: what distinguishes a just interpretation from a violent misinterpretation of a text?

1.2 Ransom, Plato, and the Metaphysics of Poetic Interpretation

John Crow Ransom's seminal essay "Criticism, Inc." published in the Autumn 1937 issue of the *Virginia Quarterly Review* sets out with this call to create and institutionalize a uniformed standard for interpretive practices. He states that literature needs to "become more scientific, or [in other words] precise and systematic" (I). As he describes, the field of literary studies in English departments in the US lacked a general formal approach to its proper object of analysis, literature. The issue, as he describes it, is that students "must be permitted to study literature, and not merely about literature" (II). By "about literature," Ransom refers to two previously dominant streams in English departments. The first stream is composed of historical approaches, which includes biographical study, and the second, impressionistic readings that focus on the reader's appreciation of the work. He argued that these approaches to literary analysis were a diversion that avoided a responsible study of literary works. The arguments advanced by Ransom, and others who are associated with New Criticism as a general movement, such as I.A. Richards, R.P Blackmore, Cleanth Brooks, and Robert Penn Warren, position the New Critics as both rebels and founders. The new Critics overturned previously established modes of criticism and replaced them with a systematic approach focused on the unity of the literary text. Their emphasis on form and formalism means they had an emphasis on applying a systematic analysis to what they identified as the structural features that contribute to the wholistic unity of literary texts.

We typically think of the New Critics' formalism as offering an *epistemology*, a comprehensive theory of how to interpret literature, but New Criticism also offers a *metaphysics*, a philosophy about the nature of truth and the role of poetry and criticism in relationship to interpreting that truth. The New Critic's metaphysical claim is that truth is a unified essence, and their epistemological work, rather than simply discovering unified truth, does the roll-up-your-sleeves, hard labor of reifying that *a priori*

metaphysical assumption. We might think of Hume's comment in the *Treatise* that reason is a slave and "can never pretend to any office than to serve and obey" (636). This presumed metaphysical unity to be found embodied in texts serves two functions: it provides the ideological foundation for New Criticism and the justification that authorizes and presides over the ongoing production of its critique. The New Critical approach is founded and authorized under the metaphysical reference point to literary texts themselves, which they argued contain a wholistic, unified structure.

In "Criticism, Inc.," Ransom defines the metaphysics of New Criticism and poetic work. He writes, "The critic should regard the poem as nothing short of a desperate ontological or metaphysical maneuver. The poet himself, in the agony of composition, has something like this sense of his labors. The poet perpetuates in his poem an order of existence which in actual life is constantly crumbling beneath his touch" (Criticism V). In this quote, Ransom defines for us the basic metaphysics of New Criticism: the nature of truth, poetic labor as revealing truth, what role the poet has in relationship to both truth and poetic labor, and the role of the critic in interpreting that truth. Although he doesn't state it directly, the structure of Ransom's metaphysics has the same basic structure of Plato's metaphysics but with a substitution, the New Critic, rather than the philosopher, has access to universal truth.

Plato argues that the forms, which are beyond this world, are eternal, universal, and true, and the physical world, which is transitory, full of differences, and as Ransom writes "crumbling beneath [our] touch," offers only a derivative mode of that truth (Criticism V). The philosopher, in Plato's view, is able to access truth, to come in contact with it, through the method of the dialectic. When the philosopher engages in philosophical dialogue, he follows the dialectical process of collection and articulation. Collecting what initially appear to be unique and particular things according to their similarities, and then once understood as being a part of a greater whole, articulating that greater unity in terms of its parts.

According to Plato, when deep in philosophical contemplation, the philosopher participates in the form of truth like the individual cup participates in the universal *cupness*, he dwells in the form as universal truth. Plato considers this initial insight into truth to be a direct, prelinguistic relationship, which then is later represented by language. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche describes this concept of the

immediacy between the philosopher and truth in Plato with the phrase “I Plato, am the truth” (20). But there lies a certain danger for the philosopher in relationship to the truth. The philosopher has a prelinguistic understanding of truth, is directly able to contemplate the forms, but he must rely on language to articulate that truth, and language itself is transitory and subject to various meanings and misinterpretations. Therefore, we are always in danger of distorting the truth or having the truth be misunderstood by our audience.

To contain this problem, Plato argues that the philosopher is of a higher order than the poet and emphasizes the role of spoken arguments. Poets labor over language to create pretty sounding arrangements of words, but these works can only be truly serious and valuable “if their compositions are based on knowledge of the truth, and they can defend or prove them, when they are put to the test, by spoken arguments...then they are to be called, not only poets, orators, legislators, but are worthy of a higher name, befitting the serious pursuit of their life...lovers of wisdom or philosophers” (Phaedrus 278c-d). In terms of communicating this truth, which is already whole, selfsame, and complete as a disembodied form, spoken argumentation or speech is the best vehicle. Speech, the philosopher’s speech to his audience, in order to be housed in truth, must have a structure, a form, that resembles truth. The speech must have an organic unity. He states, “every discourse ought to be a living creature, having a body of its own and a head and feet; there should be a middle, beginning, and end, adapted to one another and to the whole?” (Phaedrus 264c). This organic unity allows the speech of the philosopher to participate in the forms. Writing, on the other hand, is a lesser vehicle to speech because the living breathing philosopher, when he is there to speak in person, can rephrase his statements, answer questions, and provide further explanation. Writing cannot answer back and can be widely disseminated and subjected to endless misinterpretations from audiences that have no familiarity with its author and his spoken discourse. Where the philosophical dialectic unifies, finds the truth in the whole, writing fragments and scatters it seeds on rocky soil. Speech is the good origin and writing the wasteful, bad simulacra.

The work of the philosopher has two parts: the first is to understand the underlying unity beneath seemingly disjointed particular things, to comprehend “scattered particulars in one idea,” and the second

is the work, which he compares to the butcher, of carving up the organic whole at its joints in a way that breaks the whole down “according to the natural formation” rather than a badly imposed cut that splinters pieces of bone and ruins the meat (Phaedrus 265e). Ransom, like Plato, sees the interpretation of truth as dividing up the organic body under the sacrosanctity of the divine, eternal whole. Ransom describes the work of literary criticism as violence. He says the critic always has two goals in mind: “the prose core to which he can violently reduce the total object, and the differentia, residue, or tissue, which keeps the object poetical or entire” (Criticism V). Ransom argues that there is a “distinguishable logical object” or “universal” core to every poem and that the poet in their composition struggles to apprehend this truth which seems to crumble at their fingertips, always just out of reach for those in finite space and time. As the poet works at his verse, he attempts to wrangle in this extra-worldly, metaphysical (beyond the physical) truth. Ransom defines the poet’s style as the individual features he exhibits in his articulation of this universal truth, the particular, idiomatic features of his or her embodiment.

Ransom defines the work of the critic using Plato’s metaphor of the butcher dividing up a carcass. The term *formalism* for the New Critics offers a number of associations and meanings. Parker provides us a definition stating that formalism is an increased focus on “literary structure and language” and a decreased emphasis on “history, cultural context, biography, and politics” (Interpret Literature 25). In addition to this focus on literary structure, I argue that the term *form* has a platonic resonance. Like Plato, Ransom sees truth as a universal essence that is beyond the derivative physical incarnation of the poem, and his call for a formalist criticism is a call to reveal how that essence is reflected in material form by the poem. Ransom describes criticism as separating the “distinguishable logical object” or “universal” from the “irrelevant tissue from which it does not really emerge” (Criticism V). The truth has been embodied in organic form by the tissue of the poem, but truth does not arise from the body. The truth is real and eternal and the body is fleeting and contingent. Like a copy cannot produce an original, the body cannot give rise to the truth. The fleshy tissue holds the poem together in a derivative, organic reproduction of the divine, eternal form. The body of the poem must be understood as comprising a whole and then be separated and divided following the principles of unity in order to reveal the universal truth it simulates in

its organic unity. Ransom uses the terms *technical effects* and *critical approach* to define these technical, or in other words, basic physical components of a literary work, and the mode of interpretive argumentation that reveals their unity. As he writes, “The critic has to take the poem apart, or analyze it, for the sake of uncovering these [universal] features. With all the finesse possible, it is rude and patchy business by comparison with the living integrity of the poem. But without it there could hardly be much understanding of the value of poetry” (Criticism V). He sees the work as destroying an element of integrity of the poem, as destroying its beautiful artifice, but also as necessary in order to reveal the truth concealed in the poem.

The critic, much like the philosopher, probes beyond the beautiful surface of the poem in order to discover truth and interrogate the specific methods behind the poem’s attempt to capture this truth. Unlike, Plato, Ransom sees the poet as deeply engaged in universal truth but requiring the work of criticism to get at the abstract universal. Ransom defines the poet’s style as the particular organic aspects encompassing the universal core the poet attempts to capture. Style, he writes, “is a comprehensive word, and probably means: the general character of his irrelevances, or tissues. All his technical devices contribute to it, elaborating or individualizing the universal, the core-object; likewise all his material detail” (V). Style is the particular, contingent way the poet embodies the universal in his work.

1.3 Revolution: From Fugitives to Justice

The turn toward formalism was a revolution in literary studies. It was a radical upturning and rearranging of the basic principles and practices in the field, and it has had a lasting impact long after the halcyon days of New Criticism in the period from the 1930s to the 1950s. Derrida, following Walter Benjamin as well as Nietzsche and Marx, sees violence as the essential feature of both revolution and the function of maintaining organized systems. He uses the terms *law-founding* and *law-preserving violence*, adapted from Benjamin’s essay “A Critique of Violence,” to describe the double action of revolution. There is always a violence involved in upturning the established law—in this case I broaden the term to describe the norm guided practices that structure reading—and the violence necessary to institute and

continuously enforce the new order. In this section, I first argue that rather than simply discovering form in literature, or the unified, self-same text itself, the New Critics' work *formalizes* literature. I then move on to show how Derrida's understanding of the violence of foundations necessitates the inexhaustible demand of justice. Because institutions are always ungrounded, we can never definitively close the door on justice. Justice steals after us in our loneliest loneliness—addresses us in our irreducible singularity—and demands that we once more and innumerable times retrace the interpretive pathways that organize and guide our passages through texts.

Like any metaphysics, New Criticism entails violence, a violence at the very establishment of its understanding of what foundationally and definitively is, its primordial stance on the nature of truth and reality. This violence is essential to the creation and the preservation of the law. But there is always a tension to be found in the law, in the violence of enforcing laws: the question whether or not the particular application of violence that constitutes and enforces any particular universal law in any singular situation is just or unjust. Following Montaigne and Pascal, Derrida explores the paradoxical relationship between law and justice, whether laws can be just or whether justice is simply the law of the strongest, simply a mystified excuse for power (Force of Law 939). Through the tensions between law and justice, Derrida remains committed to an ideal of justice, but an ideal to be found both within and beyond the messy contingent aspects of the world. By working with the paradoxical tensions between law and justice, he argues that justice is neither some abstract yard-stick found in a magic omniscient space beyond the physical world nor is it simply reducible to a function of systems and power. Justice exists in the space of interpretation, in the “absence of rules and definitive criteria that would allow one to distinguish univocally between *droit* (law and right) and justice” (Force of Law 923). Derrida sees justice as a metaphysical question that must be taken up by interpretation. A Levinasian question of how we address ourselves to the singularity of the being of the other. By *address* Derrida means our ability to direct ourselves to others on the basis of mutual recognition rather than in terms of a one sided drive for recognition expressed in mastery and servitude. Where the New Critics appeal to unity and the self-same as justice—in finding the unity of the text, they take themselves to have accurately addressed the

singularity of its meaning—Derrida shows justice to be found in irreducibility, in the lack of a singular essence of meaning. There is always some irreducible aspect of the other, and in our attempts to address the other, there is always something idiomatic and singular about them and their existence, some quality unmasterable by any system of interpretation. It is in this irreducible space, within the impossibility of a definitive justice, that justice operates.

As a force of law, New Criticism requires justification by an appeal to justice. It must present itself as the legitimate application of law. As we will see, the text itself provides the metaphysical foundation and justification of New Critical practices. By violence, I don't mean anyone being dragged to the guillotine or shot in a firing line. But decisions about what is the object of criticism and what qualifies as criticism have both theoretical and material consequences: decisions about what articles and books get published, who is considered for faculty positions, who gets promoted and who gets quietly ushered out the door, what qualifies as *good* student work and merits *good* grades, whose classes are popular and have large enrollment numbers, what departments get funding, etc. As Derrida describes, law requires force, it isn't a law if it isn't enforced.

Not all of the New Critics were personal friends or colleagues, but a concentrated core of the movement, including Ransom, were a part of the Fugitives, the initial group of poets in Nashville. Drawing from the name and spirit of this group, *The Fugitive* is also the title of Ransom's literary journal. The name is taken from a poem by Hirsch. Allen Tate gives a definition of the ideal writing, "a Fugitive was quite simply a Poet: the Wanderer, or even the Wandering Jew, the Outcast, the man who carries the secret wisdom around the world" (Cowan 44). This initial stance of operating outside the given law is always necessary for the creation of a new institution. Rebellion, the violence of rebellion, whether in the form of a general labor strike or famous criminals like Bonnie and Clyde or Al Capone, who openly flaunt the law and even garner public support, are bound to become a special focus of state suppression. The state must put down this kind of violence because "the secret wisdom" we might say it carries is the capacity to overturn the state and create new laws (Force of Law 985). Ransom embraced the idea that what they were doing was rebellious, the work of an outlaw, a fugitive. "Criticism, Inc." has a polemic

spirit. In the essay, we get broad iconoclastic shots fired at the established modes of literary criticism, knocking them down as fundamentally insufficient. Beyond this rebellion against established norms of criticism, the New Critics are responsible for constructing a formal epistemology of literary interpretation. And this is the double movement of revolution. It both flaunts established law but also necessarily institutes a new law. In this way, the New Critics and Ransom in particular are, as Leitch writes, “harbingers of the professionalization of literary analysis that characterized mid- and late-twentieth-century U.S. literary culture” (Norton 1107). They set out with the expressed goal of establishing a universal methodological basis, i.e. the norm guided practices, through which claims about texts can be justified and subjected to both verification and critique from professional peers in the field of literary studies (Criticism I).

Two main features of their analysis, the call to examine the *text itself* as well as *close reading*, place the text at the center as the foundation and justification for their approach. Close reading is the primary method the New Critics apply in analyzing literary texts. The practice seeks to start primarily with the text and to support claims about the text by relying exclusively on supporting evidence from the text itself rather than an appeal to things outside the text. As Kenneth Burke described, the New Critics sought a methodology for an *intrinsic* rather than *extrinsic* textual critique. The text itself, rather than the external historical context or the internal, subjective reactions of the reader, become the primary object of study. In a broad sense, these methods can generally be understood as starting with technical features of the literary work, such as image, metaphor, tone, paradox, ambiguity, tension, and irony, and working to demonstrate how these features contribute to an over-arching meaning of the work as whole. In “Criticism, Inc.” Ransom defines criticism not by asking “What is criticism?” but instead asking “What is criticism not?” (IV). Interesting enough, this point is very similar to Saussure’s insight that the meaning of what is said also importantly involves what is not said (Course 120). So rather than a simple revelation of the text itself in shining truth, Ransom offers a two-fold distancing: not what the text itself is, but what an interpretation of the text itself is not. He defines the text itself through its relation to those dirty rotten *other* ways of reading texts. The methods that New Criticism excludes include, *personal*

registrations that deal with the “effect of the art-work upon the critic as reader,” *synopsis and paraphrase*, which Ransom describes as the delight of “high school classes and the women’s clubs,” *historical studies*, which include biographical studies, *linguistic studies*, *moral studies*, which include Aristotelian ethics, Christianity, and Marxist political-economic interpretations—Ransom refers to Marxism as the “proletarian gospel”—and *any other special studies that deal with some abstract or prose content taken out of the work*—by this he describes areas that deviate from textual analysis and investigate aspects of the author’s life and personal hobbies. He also includes philosophy as being a mode of analysis external to the text, and outside of the work of literary criticism, in that philosophy deals in generalizations rather than the particulars of a given text. His concern is that a philosopher would simply be drawing from “their prior philosophical stock” rather than approaching the text on its own terms (Criticism I). Ransom’s digs and outright dismissals of what were major approaches to studying literature up to that point make it clear he is out for mutiny not compromise.

To provide some context to Ransom’s polemical opposition, it helps to understand what literary studies looked like before New Criticism. Parker provides some illuminating descriptions of this period in literary studies (Interpret Literature 13-16). Prior to New Criticism, Literature departments had a wide variety of approaches without any overarching, uniform methodology. Courses would view literary texts in a variety of ways, some approached literary works as moral guides to be read didactically, others would focus on impressionistic readings, others would engage in philological analysis of the language in the work, more history centered courses would focus on the writer’s biography and the people and works his or her work draws on, and some would focus on appreciation of the work by reading the work out loud in a spirited way in class. Ransom saw all these approaches in-themselves as foundationally insufficient. He states, “We feel certain that the critical act is not one of those which the professors of literature habitually perform, and cause their students to perform” (Criticism IV). Perhaps aspects of these approaches could be applied in a critical reading, but they all needed to be subsumed under the guiding logos of formal literary criticism. They needed to be organized and directed by an argument that offers a unified interpretation of the text.

This work of the literary critic dedicated to *intrinsic* textual critique also involved a great deal of *extrinsic* reorganization. It was a call for the redefinition of literary studies. The various disciplines practiced within literary studies underwent a uniform standardization of the material labor and norms guiding the discipline. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren were extremely interested in the pedagogical application and wrote books, including *An Approach to Literature*, *Understanding Poetry*, and *Understanding Fiction*, as a response to what they considered to be a disturbing inability of students to analyze a literary work when presented without the author's name or historical context. Additionally, New Criticism was especially oriented to the study of poetry and its interest in poetry not only depended on the fact that many of the New Critics, like Ransom, were poets themselves, but also involved the practical pedagogical restraints of the classroom setting—professors can make productive use of class time and maintain student interest and active participation by leading critical readings of multiple poems in a single class session. The act of defining literary criticism also re-constituted what we study as literature. New Criticism favored particular groups of texts such as the metaphysical poets at the expense of others, such as the Romantic and Victorian poets. And it was especially suited to difficult modernist works, such as the poetry of Yeats and Eliot. In his 1952 essay, "An Age of Criticism," Ransom describes this as a retrospective process where some works "prove sturdier than we knew while others lose substance" (New Republic 1952). Among these he mentions that modern movements in criticism "confer new life upon Dickinson, Hawthorne, Melville, and James" and explains that critics also "find desiccation in other writers once fully as reputable" (New Republic 1952). Rather than saying that works under the light of New Criticism were revealed to be lacking in substance, it would be more accurate to say that particular works previously highly regarded by traditionalists, such as poems by Keats, which have a certain delicate beauty to them, didn't conform well to or benefit from the probing New Critical approaches, whereas modernist poetry, with lines that "follow like a tedious argument," and literary works that require detailed analysis to tease out their meaning did.

So to get to my point about New Criticism, despite the New Critics view that their foundation was the *text itself*, it turns out this foundation was neither self-evident nor present in-itself at all but was rather

a retroactive product of their own institutionalization of a theoretical framework. Drawing on the insights of phenomenology, we could say that what New Critics call the *inside* or the *text itself* was always already constituted by its *outside*, through a highly mediated relationship to literary *others*. It's precisely within the impossibility of drawing definitive borders between these terms *internal* and *external*, *speech-writing*, *origin-copy*, and the whole hierarchy of the metaphysical *great chain of being* of truth-philosopher-audience or truth-poet-literary critic, that Derrida finds justice.

In tracing the distinction between law-founding and law-preserving violence in Benjamin's essay, Derrida finds the impossibility of *metaphysical* singularity, singularity as a unified, self-same essence, and affirms an irreducible singularity, various currents of thought and action that cannot be subsumed under the concept of the same. Each founding moment is without ground and each preserving moment is unfounded. But rather than this resulting in nihilism, this groundlessness, this lack of a center, entails an absolute freedom and responsibility to justice: "Deconstruction is justice" (Force of Law 945). This is a strange, even self-indulgent, phrase from Derrida. It also appears to offer a kind of one-upmanship, answering the question of whether or not deconstruction can provide us a guide to justice with the pronouncement "my philosophy is justice." But this phrase is not to affirm deconstruction as some final system, as an ultimate and superior set of principles authorized by the name Derrida. Rather, it affirms what Derrida cannot control. It is in deconstruction's failure to provide a unified interpretive framework and find a singular and definitive essence in any text that it can be understood as justice. Because interpretation is free, always operating in the gap between each individual blade-like flattened item on the end of a stem and what we call a *leaf*, then the act of naming, the leap of naming, of addressing others in their singularity through social-linguistic conceptual structures always entails a responsibility. This responsibility is the unmasterable, and therefore the deconstructive, movement of justice itself.

2 “WHAT IS METAPHYSICS?” AND HOW IS IT RELEVANT TO ENGLISH LITERATURE DEPARTMENTS?

In his essay “What is Metaphysics?”, Heidegger argues that the “only meaningful source of unity” of the multiple disciplines in the modern university is provided by “the practical establishment of goals by each discipline” (I). The way each department, or even each of the disciplines under the house of each department, approaches its object of inquiry differs fundamentally, but the taking of an object is essential to all. The disciplines, or using the more classical term, the sciences, in the broad sense, all approach knowledge by studying beings themselves, i.e. specific things, specific objects of study. This object of study becomes the primary source of understanding as well as the source of new breakthroughs in understanding. As Heidegger describes, the investigation of *things* necessarily involves an exclusion, the exclusion of *non-things*. He writes, “precisely in the way scientific man secures to himself what is most properly his, he speaks of something different. What should be examined are beings only, and besides that—nothing” (What is Metaphysics I). The scientific modes of knowledge refer themselves to things and to nothing outside or beyond that. Heidegger asks however, what is this *nothing* that a science, in referring to its object, does not refer to. This takes us into his foundational question of metaphysics. When I talk about beings, what remains unsaid? Heidegger is interested in the non-thing that is not studied by the very taking of an object of study, how our epistemology always already assumes a metaphysics. In this chapter, I show how Heidegger’s critique of the disciplines relates to his foundational understanding of truth as *Alethia*.

The disciplines present themselves as engaged in freely chosen modes of investigation and as involved in the foundational search of human inquiry into what is essential in their particular objects of study. Heidegger rightly identifies this acceptance of the diversity of approaches as foundational to the scientific worldview, both in the broad and narrow sense of the term. As biology can keep on studying organisms, and physicists physical motion, and quantum physics can study the radically different phenomena that occur on the quantum level without any real disturbance to their respective fields,

historians can study concrete history, linguists language, and anthropologists human culture, and literary critics literature, so long as their methods reveal the truth of their objects. This liberty is essential to the free spirit of investigation and has been the foundational challenge to and uprooting of traditional worldviews and inherited beliefs.

Part of the source of this liberty that both founds and sustains a diversity of approaches to understanding is that despite the common need to select an object of study, there remains meaningful divisions between interpretive practices. Imposing the methods from one discipline directed to its object onto another discipline with its own object can, at times, result in a violent distortion. To support his argument, Heidegger offers an example of the difference between mathematical knowledge and philological-historical knowledge. Where math demands a mode of “exactness,” it does not undermine the value and standard of rigor of philological-historical studies. As he says, “to demand exactness in the study of history is to violate the idea of the specific rigor of the humanities” (I). So, where a mathematical proof follows deductive reasoning to arrive at logical certainty, the rigor of philological investigation recognizes polysemy and the possibility of the meanings of words changing with usage over time. Or as Nietzsche writes, words are “pockets, into which this or that or several things have been stuffed at once!” (Human 212). If one were to attempt to import the kind of axiomatic deductive problem solving we see in math onto philological history, it wouldn’t make for a better philological history. It would instead distort that particular object of inquiry.

Despite this perceived freedom, Heidegger sees a foundational lack of freedom. In electing an object of study, we foundationally assume a particular interpretation of the nature of reality. The issue that Heidegger sees is that being is not a thing. Rather than something that is understood as present, being reveals itself in absence, being is a *non-thing*. The disciplines mistake being as something which can be understood as an object of study. To correct this error, Heidegger argues that we must go beyond the traditional understanding of truth in philosophy that is applied across the disciplines known as the *correspondence theory of truth* and instead view truth as *Alethia*. Heidegger takes special concern with the correspondence theory of truth as a product of both Plato and the modern influence of Cartesianism

and seeks to recover a presocratic Greek notion of truth as *Alethia*, as unconcealment. This discussion of the structure of academic disciplines connects with Heidegger's understanding of truth as *Alethia* as playing a pragmatic role in how we engage with being. He draws a distinction between *ontic*, or our socially acquired modes of understanding that structure the way we view *things*, i.e. objects, and *ontological* understanding, as our more primary, practical relationship to being.

Following the correspondence theory, we describe statements as true because they confer with the way the world actually is in this moment, how facts in the world confirm our claims about the world. As John Searle explains the "cat is on the mat" is a true statement if it corresponds to there being an actual cat on the actual mat, or as he writes, "there will be a condition in the world that meets the requirement" to make the statement "the cat is on the mat" true, and the term we have for that condition in the world is the word *fact* (212). As in right now it's 3 PM, Wednesday afternoon, and it's 78 degrees Fahrenheit outside, and I, as a perceiving, thinking subject, am present to make these observations. These facts however, although they appear to be simple, everyday, and immediately comprehensible, depend upon a complex network of social arrangements that makes them possible. They are all things that can be measured, weighed out, and standardized. These activities of measuring and weighing all involve a social history of development, from the development of uniform weights, the clock and the standardization of time, and the development of other tools and technology necessary for performing these tasks. These facts then are founded in a practical activity within the world that precedes supposedly transparent and neutral observation. They also, without acknowledging it, take a position on the nature of both being and time. When we accept the correspondence theory of truth, and thereby overlook these background practices, we enter into what Heidegger calls the metaphysics of presence.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes the way that in our common mode of everyday existence we are presented with metaphysical truth in terms of what he calls *present-at-hand* beings, as objectified, consumable *facts* about the world, and contrasts that with *ready-to-hand* doing. He argues that peasant artisans have a more foundational connection with being. When the artisan is engaged directly with his craft, he's not aware of himself in a way that Descartes describes the subject, and his hammer, rather than

being some *thing* he knows a bunch of facts about, is a transparent action, hammering. He is also not concerned with the clock or the uniformly measured out socially necessary labor time guiding the production of the factory worker. His activity, rather than being understood in the present, as something here and now, is guided by a tradition of activity, and his work is a mode of interpreting that tradition in a future directed way. If we think of Alice Walker's story "Everyday use," Maggie would represent this more essential form of authenticity. She has learned the process of quilting by hand and therefore can inherit and use the family quilts and repair them as needed without having to guard and preserve them as present-at-hand museum piece as Dee would like to do. This active know-how knowledge of the craft person for Heidegger is the basis of the most authentic relationship one can have to truth. Only in the moment that the craft-person's hammer breaks would he become aware of it as an object present and available to be measured, weighted, or categorized.

In his view, the disciplines in the university are metaphysical because they exchange an authentic relationship with being for a relationship with an object of study. For Heidegger, this relationship with building is a kind of poetics because the artisan can bring out what is genuine and beautiful about the materials he works with. This stands in contradiction to the objectifying way that technology views the world: the way technology reduces all things into material to be optimized, as material to be made more efficient, easily repeatable, and standardized. As Heidegger scholar Iain Thomson describes, "If I think nature around me is nothing but meaningless stuff waiting to be optimized, then why shouldn't I just put a nice, big hotel here, make a lot of money, all the people can see the ocean. The idea that there's something there independently of me is something you have to cultivate and develop a sensitivity to. I think that's what a poet does, the poet is sort of the paradigmatic instance of the person who's learned a receptivity to things independent of us" (Ruspoli 1:04:00). Heidegger's idea is that the artisan or master of a skill, is able to connect with a foundational poesis of being, is able to bring out this vibrant unfolding of being.

We can see in Heidegger's basic ontic-ontological distinction between things and being the tension that New Criticism is stuck between. On one side, New Criticism hopes to have a more craft-based approach to studying literature, and at the same time, it remains committed to truth as

correspondence. New Criticism's desire to divorce itself from history would also be challenged since Heidegger argues that the form itself, the discipline's taking an object of study, is both temporal and spatial, it has a space and time. The object is present, it is here and now. History is also a primary concern for Ransom, despite his desire to exclude it. He is concerned with the history of the discipline, he turns toward the past, literary works written in the past and past ways of studying literature, with a view directed toward our future reproduction of the discipline, and thereby present a new understanding of our present activities. In terms of spatially, we have physical spaces where the study of literature occurs, libraries, classrooms, etc., but we also have a spatiality in our relationship to the text when we talk about *close reading*. Of course close reading doesn't mean that we literally place the text against our face as we read it, but it does have a spatiality in terms of the way our investigation seeks to be *in-depth* or *inside* rather than remaining simply *on the surface* or *outside*. This spatiality seeks to be more intimately entwined with the nuance and detail of the text.

Heidegger uses the term *Ent-fernung* to describe the more primary way we are spatial and temporal; i.e. how it is that objects appear to us as ready-to-hand within a meaningful context at all. The literal translation of *entfernung* means *distance*, but Heidegger inserts a hyphen into the word, which emphasizes a separation between the negative prefix *ent*, which means to abolish or take away, from the stem *fern*, which means remote or distant. This separation conveys a double sense of both establishing and abolishing distance (Dreyfus 130). Macquarrie and Robinson derive the English translation by modifying the English word *dissever*, to separate, to *de-sever*, which would mean to negate separation or abolish distance (138n2). Heidegger uses de-severance to describe the act and essential tendency we have to bring objects close to serve a particular purpose. This tendency to bring things close however, is not simply a matter of us bringing an object close to ourselves in terms of physical, measurable distance, or close to our physical body. He says, “[b]ringing close is not oriented towards the I-Thing encumbered with a body, but concerned Being-in-the-world” (Being and Time 107). By bringing close (de-severance), Heidegger is describing the way that we bring objects in space into a relationship in which the objects are available to be used for a particular end or set of ends. He provides an example of someone building a

sunroom to bring the sun close to emphasize this point (Being and Time 137). When I build a sunroom, I do not physically bring the sun closer, but rather establish a kind of relationship with the room and windows and the sun that transforms the space into a place to-enjoy-the-sun. When I encounter the space where I want to build the sun room, I might first see it as a possible sunny space without even thinking of myself, but rather thinking purely in terms of aspects of the space. As I work to create the space, I become engaged in the work and see the objects around and my body in their ready-to-hand relevance to the task. It's not until later, when I'm sitting in a chair for too long and feel hot and sunburned that I might find myself as an *I* in reference to the arranged space around me. I might then identify, following the correspondence theory of truth, that the sun, an object, caused, me, a subject, to become sunburnt. In this way, the sense of *I* and the physical proximity of objects to my body are secondary, and often occur as a result of an interruption, to our more primary, ready-to-hand spatiality.

We can similarly provide a phenomenological account of practices of reading. Interpretation of texts isn't first and primarily founded on formalism; rather, literary interpretation springs from the poesis of our being in the world in a meaningful way. The way in which truth as Alethia is revealed through meaningful action. As Heidegger writes, Dasein is the being "that, in its very being, being is an issue for it" (Being and Time 32). He uses the term *Dasein*, which means being-there, for the *self* to avoid the Cartesian metaphysical connotations of the *self*. What Heidegger means is that in our being, the essence of who we are, we are concerned with the question of meaning: why is there something "and not just nothing?" (What is Metaphysics? 12). This essence, however, isn't a soul or something self-same and present, it is an absence, a lack of being. It's because we lack an objective essence, a stable sense of self-same *iness*, that we have a question of meaning. For Heidegger, this meaning is not something we can avoid. As Dasein, we are inherently concerned with meaning. The world is meaningful to us and there's no escaping that. Formalist literary analysis arises, then, out of this greater context of collective meaning but attempts to objectify the text, to master it according to a system. For Heidegger not just literature but language itself is something that cannot be mastered in this way, because it is the existential foundation of our being in the world. We are the kind of beings for whom the meaning of being is a question.

As Heidegger sees truth as *Alethia* as an *authentic* mode of being that stands in contradiction to a *derivative* correspondence theory of truth, we can start to see what Derrida considers to be metaphysical about Heidegger's work. Where Plato imagines some pre-linguistic connection between the philosopher and the truth and the living, breathing logos, the spoken word of the present philosopher being the only true appropriate medium for communicating this truth, Heidegger also imagines some pure relationship with being communicated not through philosophical reflection about an object but through the authentic master in active practice of his craft. In a certain way, this involves a lack of presence, but it also assumes a more direct organic unity with truth. For Heidegger, the Cartesian subject is not present in these moments of action because subject and object become transparent. Instead of the predicative sentence "I am hammering," there exists just a pure state of transparent action with no present subject standing separate from the activity, hammering. For Heidegger, it is only when we are interrupted, when the hammer is broken in some way, that we enter into the state of division between a self-present I and a present thing like a hammer. Heidegger sees the *I* as showing up as a burden and as an interruption to our activities. As we will see, Derrida challenges this notion of pure being vs interruption and, in other words, asserts that the hammer is always already broken.

3 HEIDEGGER, NIETZSCHE, DERRIDA

If we take a step back and look at the Heideggerian elements in Derrida's work and Derrida's critique of Heidegger, we can gain closer insight into Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysical tradition. In Derrida's book *Spurs*, Derrida examines the metaphysical aspects of Heidegger's thought. Derrida's concern is that in parts Heidegger presents being as a foundational signified. Heidegger's ontic-ontological distinction has a tendency to present ontological being as a kind of arche-foundation that precedes the ontic categories of beings (Grammatology 20). This metaphysical view in Heidegger becomes most direct in his two-volume work entitled *Nietzsche*. In the work, Heidegger argues that Nietzsche is the last philosopher of the metaphysical tradition of philosophy and that he, Heidegger, is the first to genuinely liberate being from metaphysical determinations. This view depends upon reading Nietzsche's work as a totalizing whole with a foundational metaphysics that unifies his work with the concept of the *will to power*. Derrida responds to this reading by undermining the unified view of Nietzsche and showing how Nietzsche is in fact more disruptive to the metaphysical tradition than Heidegger. This critique importantly turns on what Heidegger does not explore or attempt to account for in Nietzsche's work, the representation of women and a focus on style in Nietzsche's writing. Derrida argues that in Nietzsche's writing, style is not subsumed to logos. Nietzsche's stylistic multiplicity and heterogeneity resist systematization and cannot be reduced under one logos or made present and available to one, singular truth. Derrida reads Nietzsche against Heidegger and reveals Nietzsche to be a thinker of difference.

Spurs draws heavily from the passage "How the True World became a Fiction: The History of an Error" in Nietzsche's *Twilight of Idols*. Focusing on Nietzsche's statement about the femininity of truth in this passage, Derrida turns to a discussion of women in Nietzsche's work and Nietzsche's margin note "I have forgotten my umbrella" in the *Nachlass*, his unpublished notebooks. Nietzsche writes that when philosophy moves from the Platonic to the Christian conception of truth that truth "becomes woman" (23). This feminine turn in truth is the historical transition in philosophy from truth being

immediately present to “the sage, the pious, the virtuous man,” summarized by the statement “I Plato am the Truth,” to truth becoming “unattainable for now” but promised to arrive later for “the sage, the pious, the virtuous man” (23). This introduction of the feminine into the male centered origins of Platonic philosophy means the introduction of delay and deferral as well as subtleness and incomprehensibility. It is also importantly the linguistic, spatial, and historical instantiation of truth. In Nietzsche’s view, this introduction of delay creates an internal conflict for philosophy. Although the philosopher tries, he cannot return to an immediate, prelinguistic dwelling in the truth described by Plato, so he moves in a further direction and abolishes the metaphysical true world, but in so doing he also abolishes the *apparent world*, the world of appearances and masks. In our dichotomy between truth and appearance, truth and falsity, we find that the concepts are understood in their relation and that one cannot be eradicated without undermining the other. Nietzsche suggests that we can move beyond this dichotomy when we understand truth as the appearance of truth. This would mean an end to the phallogocentric economy of philosophical truth. Because it follows that appearance, style, performance, associated with women, could not be mastered or subsumed under a definitive understanding of unveiled truth.

Picking up on Nietzsche’s theme, Derrida’s text focuses on two tripartite configurations that of style-spurs-women and the proper names Heidegger-Nietzsche-Derrida. These two configurations exchange truth as a fetishized exchange value between themselves, much as the philosopher hopes to arrive at truth unveiled in its ideal, material, ontological, or other terms describing a foundational, fixed, and definitive form. In Heidegger’s discussion of truth as *Alethia*, he describes ontic, present-at-hand, determinations of beings as a derivative and impoverished mode of understanding being which he hopes to unveil and arrive at truth itself. In *Nietzsche*, Heidegger argues that Nietzsche presents the will to power as a foundational metaphysics and the eternal recurrence as the mode through which that foundational essence is expressed (Vol I: 4). This allows Heidegger to present his own destruction of metaphysics as the first philosophy to subvert the metaphysical tradition and arrive at truth. Not only is this framing of Nietzsche incorrect it also relies heavily on a falsification of Nietzsche’s work.

Philosophers have always had an ambivalent relationship to Nietzsche, with their main source of

frustration being the multiple and dynamic ways in which he writes, using a multiplicity of voices, styles, and characters. In order to be conceived as a *genuine philosopher*, many philosophers hoped that a work would be produced that proves that Nietzsche had a unified system (Behler 13). This pressure motivated the publication of the *Will to Power*, which was a work created by selecting and extracting passages from various parts of Nietzsche's unpublished notebooks and assembled them into a unified whole. But as the editorsazzino Montinari and Giorgio Colli themselves stated, the manuscript is a fraud (Behler 13). The writings have not been altered, but the process of omission and piecing together to create a coherent unity involves a falsification. Heidegger, although aware of this issue, and even recognizing the falsification himself, repeats the view of a unified Nietzsche in his own work (Behler 14).

Derrida sees Nietzsche as important for disrupting self-same identity, truth, and the autonomous subject, and instead revealing an economy of differing and deferring drives. He brings our attention to what is divergent and multiple in Nietzsche's work as well as efforts at understanding Nietzsche as unified. Derrida introduces the word *spur* into the discussion as a metaphor to describe two branching aspects of Nietzsche's text that ultimately lead to moments of undecidability. He also discusses the margin note "I have forgotten my umbrella" in Nietzsche's notebook to explore the boundary between inside and outside the text. The style-spur and the irreducible quality of this supplemental margin note frustrate both the unified view of Nietzsche as well as Heidegger's concept of truth. One bifurcating spur Derrida locates in Nietzsche's text is the paradoxical notion that woman does not believe in truth even though she has come to represent truth in the eyes of the male philosopher. A second Spur is the philosophical drive toward systemization in order to pin down truth and truth's irreducibility. Nietzsche's text resists the idea that there is an essence to truth or women. He sees the spur and style as related in that both are an object that divide and distance, as well as point. Derrida writes, "style-spur, the spurring style, is a long object, an oblong object, a word, which perforates even as it parries. It is the oblong—foliated point (a spur or a spar) which derives its apotropaic power from the taut, resistant tissues, webs, sails and vails which are erected, furled and unfurled around it" (Spurs 41). Derrida defines his discussion of style around the stylus, the phallic pointed object wielded by the male philosopher as the traditional master of

truth and authority: “In the question of style there is always the weight of *examen* of some pointed object. At times this object might be only a quill or a stylus. But it could just as easily be a stiletto, or even a rapier. Such objects might be used in a vicious attack against what philosophy appeals to in the name of matter or matrix, an attack whose thrust could not but leave its mark” (Spurs 37). Derrida identifies the stylus as the tool and mechanism through which the male philosopher inscribes his thought and reproduces his name as an author of philosophy. Derrida begins a play of substitutions of the signifier, noting the various signifieds it can point out (Spurs 41). He mentions that a stiletto could be a stylus, blood red perhaps to suggest the fear of a female reversal of penetration, or as Freud describes the fetish whose prototype is the penis of the mother, the penis the child believes the mother has until he finds it absent and must substitute it with the fetish, or even a rapier, a weapon designed to thrust and penetrate. In Nietzsche’s work, Derrida finds a subversion of style, a style which undermines philosophy’s quest to arrive at truth through a process of systematization that pins down and captures truth. Derrida argues that the spur is also an umbrella. For Derrida, the umbrella is also the unifying term—the umbrella concept often refers to the generalization that presides over the particulars—for Derrida in the text of Nietzsche, as a margin note “I have forgotten my umbrella,” as the style-spur, it becomes that which supplements the text, the remainder that is irreducible and idiomatic and cannot be reduced to a unified view of Nietzsche.

At the same time, however, truth remains veiled, unattainable, inaccessible, it merely threatens to become present. It also threatens castration, to reveal itself as castrated, as absence, lack of presence, as untruth and lie. Neither presence nor absence arrive in a definitive form. Truth as female in Nietzsche’s writing plays at castration, but also realizes that to castrate would bring her back into the phallogocentric economy of the male philosopher (Spurs 61). Instead, Nietzsche argues, she uses castration’s effect. She plays at castration at the same time she plays at unveiling truth in its definitive and fixed form. Truth dances, but it is the phallogocentric narrative that fears and assumes this dance will result in either castration or revelation of truth as presence. In the biblical story of Salome we see this male-centered narrative and fear. Salome’s dance of the seven veils seduces Herod, the king, master of truth and the royal line, into making a blind promise, a commitment to do whatever she requests without knowledge of whether her

request will be just or unjust. Herod does not listen to the signs and the warnings from others, he follows too closely, does not keep the proper distance, he places too much meaning in the promise of her beauty, he blindly invests his word, the spoken word of the king, the proper line of the logos, without any guarantee from Salome about what she will ask of him in return. And the result is castration. She asks for the head of John the Baptist to be brought to her on a platter.

Nietzsche undermines the metaphysical narrative of truth in his photo with Lou Andreas-Salomé, the Russian born psychoanalyst and Nietzsche's love interest, and Paul Rée and Nietzsche. According to Salomé's memoir *Looking Back*, Nietzsche arranged the photo in a playful mood (111). Salomé wields a phallic object, a whip, and drives Rée and Nietzsche like horses. As Derrida writes, "Because woman is (her own) writing, style must return to her. In other words, it could be said that if style were a man (much as the penis, according to Freud is the 'normal prototype of fetishes'), then writing would be a woman" (Spurs 57). If the stylus is the phallic object which the male author, such as Nietzsche, uses to make his inscription, then the polysemy of meaning, the play of language, would be female, that which can never return to the philosopher and be captured as truth. In the reversal staged in the photograph, we see what it means for woman to wield the phallus and avoid the dominance, mastery, and control of the phallogocentric philosopher. She avoids it through play. The photograph is deliberately out of proportion. Nietzsche planned for the wagon to be too small. He also makes a joke of his own self-image, positioning himself staring off toward the horizon in elevated thought (Andres-Salomé 111). We see that the phallus cannot be taken, the male philosopher cannot be castrated, because the phallus was never properly or exclusively male but rather was a phallus-for, a phallus-for-the mother, or the mother's phallus. As Freud describes in his essay entitled "Fetishism," the fetish—usually involving items that resemble pubic hair such as fur, velvet, or lace—is based on the last thing the child sees before he sees that the mother does not have male genitals (199). Truth becoming female then is not about locating women within a specific economy, either in the patriarchal household or in the progressive workplace, or the male chauvinist fear of women castrating men, rather truth becoming female is truth as deferral, delay, as *différance*. The becoming female of truth is truth as delay and mediation through the other.

Like the phallus the truth is not something the woman possesses. It is the male phantasy that she first has a phallus and is later in need of a phallus. The infant imagines he can respond to this lack by being the phallus for the mother. Truth is the fetishized object of the male philosopher, but woman understands that truth is an effect, a secondary illusion, and she avoids possession and castration. She wields the phallus. The proper name of the philosopher does not belong properly to the father but to suppressed feminine. When truth becomes female, the right to inheritance of the proper name of the philosopher necessarily involves mediation through the mother. This mediation reveals that the truth is not male, selfsame, or present in the first place but rather originally self-estranged. As Derrida describes in *The Ear of the Other*, the autobiographer's father is always already dead and the proper name always already the dead author and that life is always the life of the mother. To support this point, Derrida quotes from Nietzsche's biography *Ecce Homo* where he says "I am, to express it in the form of a riddle, already dead as my father, while as my mother, I am still living and becoming old" (qtd. in Ear 15). The divergence between the father, the proper name, and the mother, whose name is subsumed by the paternal lineage, between the expressed dead and the unexpressed living, is the legacy of the name. The name is the doubled and divided name of the father who is always already dead. As Derrida says, "You will not be able to hear and understand my name unless you hear it with an ear attuned to the name of the dead man and the living feminine" (Ear 16). The ear is the organ of reception. It is passive and receives. It is a passivity that is also an action, it makes speech and the authentic transmission of the logos possible. But this passage of speech through otherness is borrowed on credit from the listening audience and at stake is the return, the surplus value, the profit from the investment in the form of the genuine inheritance of truth under the authority of the proper name of the philosopher. But the passage is not transparent. Neither truth nor castration are the essence of woman, but rather the projection of the male philosopher. This play of presence and absence, the cut of the sexes, relies not the suppression of an originary absence as Heidegger describes, but rather the absence of origins in the address to the other.

Heidegger is fundamentally concerned about the metaphysics underlying the drive toward systematization. In his view, a distinction is necessary between the ontic objects of philosophy and

ontology as the study of being. The mistake is that metaphysical philosophy assumes that it has arrived at truth when it has achieved the location of its object with an ordered arrangement. As Heidegger describes in “What Is Metaphysics?”, it isn’t simply the drive by metaphysical philosophy to mistake being for beings and determine knowledge as the organization of beings according to systematic taxonomies. As Derrida describes in an interview, this thought of the absence that precedes what is present, is the consideration that drives his work. Moving beyond Heidegger however, Derrida puts into question the form of the question itself as the true form of philosophy. Rather than revealing a foundational question, as in Heidegger’s question “what is being?”, Derrida reveals the foundational relation to the other. In an interview he explains, “In order to ask a question I must address someone” (On Being 5:05). This relationship to the other is marked by the absence of the other. It is because the other is not present that I must address myself to him or her in order to ask a question. Rather than ontic presence preceded by being, the ontic-ontological difference is made possible by difference as other. The lack of presence and the self-same that provokes the question “what is?”.

This lack of presences makes our attempts at answering the question of being iterative. Every time we form the question, we attempt to apprehend the other according to a particular system of meaning that operates under the authority of the question. Metaphysics attempts to locate truth in this particular way, but the foundation of this systematization requires repeated crises of the foundational concepts of the systems it forms. This foundational crisis reveals not that there is a more foundational ontological being, but rather that the ontic-ontological difference is preceded by difference. The primary mode of the metaphysical tradition seeks the iteration of truth through a process of repetition. As Socrates tells us, paraphrasing the *Odyssey*, “and if I believe that someone else is capable of discerning a single thing that is also by nature capable of encompassing many, I follow ‘straight behind, in his tracks as if he were a god’” (Phaedrus 266B). Derrida focuses on this idea of legacy and footsteps as a matter of reiteration in the following of truth. Footsteps are tracks or marks that guide the path of the inheritor of truth. Through following the correct authoritative footsteps, I arrive at the truth as the many understood and captured by the one. Writing possess a status as other, as a secondary vehicle, in Plato’s conception of truth. But

footsteps are also a form of writing. Footsteps leave traces. Heidegger's concern is that Plato, in attempting to locate truth, has mistaken beings for being and thereby forgotten the question of being. Derrida reminds us that every step, whether that step follow Heidegger or Plato, even prior to an external injury "has to bear disequilibrium within itself," (Freud's Legacy 406). Every step is always already a limp. Rather than the other as an instance of the same, the step embodies *différance* within itself. The question, as the self-binding governing logos presiding over the differential play of presence and absence, therefore loses its privileged position as master and arbiter of meaning. We conclude with the abundance, multiplicity, and proliferation of the other that can never be subsumed under a given form.

It's not that Derrida would call for the total abandonment of New Criticism, and much less, the total abandonment of questioning. His readings always begin by assuming the established modes of the given text. However, the phallogocentric ideal that the text can be mastered in the way the New Critics originally supposed is an illusion. Derrida does not take this as a reason to totally abandon having a formal methodology for reading, he rather states that some form is necessary, but he simply hasn't arrived at the form that will satisfy him, a form that can't be deconstructed (Form and Meaning 173). Deconstruction's engagement with formalism can be understood in terms of its larger discussion about systematic approaches to knowledge and the possible ends and limitations of knowledge, as the process being open to the future as *to come* rather than determined by a set of causal chains of activity.

4 THE POLITICAL TURN: GREENBLATT, BUTLER, SPIVAK

A key focus of the political turn is that *form* is not simply an internal organic unity in a text but rather a uniform self-perpetuating cultural structure of power. Works in the political turn aren't necessarily anti-formalist, rather they seek to understand the text within larger, culturally entrenched forms of power. Per-form-ance then is the productive process of inheritance that either unconsciously reproduces or consciously subverts the established dominant forms in a given society. In this turn, the literary text moves from a self-sustained, freestanding autonomy to a subject of power. It is an expression of power relations, and its meaning is dependent upon the relationship of power between the larger cultural context, message, and audience. As we will see, these modes, although they employ aspects Derridean themes, remain within a metaphysical framework that assumes society represents a unified system. Derrida critiques this unified view in both Marx and Foucault as involving foundational metaphysical assumptions.

4.1 Greenblatt

In many ways, Greenblatt draws on the critical momentum of deconstruction. He is critical of Platonic conceptions of truth and is interested in the ways that language structures our relationship to the other. But despite these themes, he is decisively rooted in the work of Foucault. His critique of what he calls *cultural poetics* identifies texts as both structured by and structuring systems of power in society. As we will see, this focus on power is directly related to Foucault's concept of *discourse*. Following Derrida, I argue that discourse, in the way Foucault uses the term, suppresses the differential play of *différance* under a unified logos.

A standard feature of Greenblatt's approach is to start with a unique statement from a given person in a historical period—this often involves people outside of the usual spotlight in a more marginal or overlooked place or comments by more mainstream historical figures that have been overlooked by other historians—and then use that anecdote as an explanatory model, a form, for understanding the broader historical era. In this way, Greenblatt demonstrates the pervasiveness of modes of thought, how

even the seemingly tinniest and marginal event can be understood in relation to overarching influences of power (Fry Theory 248). Greenblatt begins his book *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* with Queen Elizabeth's statement "I am King Richard II, Know ye not that?", which reflects her concerns about the popular performance of Shakespeare's play *Richard II* in the streets to radicalize the audience to participate in an uprising against her. Greenblatt's attack is against both the formalist literary critics who look for a stable, universal meaning of a text that remains unchanged by time and place and traditional historicists who see the literary text as essentially epiphenomenal, as a product of history but having no causal power to influence or shape history. He writes of Elizabeth's reaction, "clearly it is not the text alone...it is rather the story's full situation—the genre it is thought to embody, the circumstances of its performance, the imaginings of its audience that governs its shifting meanings" (Power of Forms 2252). Greenblatt affirms rhetorical aspects of literature in context over the idea of literature as a disembodied abstract universal, arguing that relationships of time and place, speaker, message, and audience inform the meaning of the text and that the presentation of the text at various points in time to different audiences and with different intentions can change its meaning. Rather than a purely epiphenomenal product of history, as literature is seen by the *old* historians, the text also plays a causal role in shaping how we think, feel, and act. As Greenblatt writes, Queen Elizabeth was concerned about the danger when the play "had broken out of the boundaries of the playhouse, where such stories are clearly marked as powerful illusions, and moved into more volatile zone—the zone she calls "open"—of the streets" (Power of Forms 2252). Following this idea of moving the text into the open streets, into the broader cultural context that exposes competing forces rather than unity, Greenblatt's approach itself also appears to liberate literary texts from fixed forms that control meaning, to move texts into the always open and contingent movement of history. He liberates the text from these antiquated Platonic notions of truth floating out there in some abstract universal form, unaffected by time and place, and gives the text a new sense of movement and agency. The text plays an active role in the discursive system of power-knowledge. It is shaped and shapes historically situated discourse.

The initial rise of Stephen Greenblatt's method shows a shift from *language* to the *body*, from abstract philosophizing to politics. As Paul H. Fry argues, literary studies in this period develops a guilt complex, a feeling that culture, global capitalism, Vietnam, and concerns about identity all imply that we have passed a certain point and literary studies must turn to address politics (Theory 247). As he further elaborates, "it was felt that an ethical tipping point had been arrived at and that the modes of analysis that had been flourishing needed to be superseded by those in which history and the political implications of what one was doing became prominent and central" (Theory 248). Stephen Greenblatt follows this call and argues the formalist approach to literature depends upon "a stable point of reference, beyond contingency, to which literary interpretation can securely refer." (Power of Forms 2254). Greenblatt calls for a movement from a disembodied idealized notion of truth to culturally embodied, historical truth.

Despite largely being seen as taking a step beyond the formalism of the New Critics, Greenblatt was very interested in issues of form. He uses the term *historical contingency*, but this contingency is not as open ended as the term itself suggests. It seems that rather than leaving form behind, Greenblatt is offering us a new definition of form. He argues that the text is formed by and plays a causal role in forming cultural discourse: "These collective social constructions on the one hand define the range of aesthetic possibilities within a given representational mode and, on the other, link that mode to the complex network of institutions, practices, and beliefs that constitute the culture as a whole" (Power of Forms 2254). Unlike previous historicisms, Greenblatt doesn't view the historical moment as a self-same unity which the text then reflects, with history as cause and text as effect, rather the text participates in the dynamic interweaving of multiple currents in a larger movement of cultural forces. As we will discuss later, the tension that arises in this approach to historicism involves how committed the historian of contingency can be to critiques of causality and unity while at the same time providing a history. At some point is there a demand for unity, if even for the sake of the internal consistency of the author's own account? How does historical analysis itself both define the limits of *the range of aesthetic possibilities* and establish the boundaries that define *the culture as a whole*?

Greenblatt's focus on Queen Elizabeth is an excellent choice in support of his argument because it shows her own acute awareness of the mutability of the meaning of literary works within the broader cultural dynamics of power. When the Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux, made the attempt to raise a rebellion in London against Queen Elizabeth in 1601 he was a desperate man. The queen had banned him from the court and she did not renew his monopoly on sweet wines, which led to him falling into financial ruin. He didn't have much support and was dependent on organizing a popular uprising in support of his small army to seize London. The play was commissioned by the Earl and his supporters by paying forty shillings above the normal ticket price to have the play performed by Lord Chamberlain's Men the night before the uprising. The next day on February 8th, the Earl and around 200 armed men marched into London but failed to capture the city and to incite the citizens to rise up in support of their cause.

Greenblatt applies the politicization of performance to scholarly interpretation as well, interpretation and presentation are also means of performing a play. His nemesis and representative of the *old* historicism in the text is Dover Wilson, who offers a reading that *Richard II* is "not at all subversive but rather a hymn to Tudor order" (Power of Forms 2252). For Greenblatt, this conclusion reflects the old way of doing history that looks at history in terms of broad internally consistent unities: "the earlier historicism tends to be monological; that is, it is concerned with discovering a single political vision, usually identical to that said to be held by the entire literate class or indeed the entire population" (Power of Forms 2253). Once these unities are discovered and understood as internally consistent, they then gain "the status of historical fact" (Power of Forms 2254). And once history is understood as facts they're protected and serve as a "stable point of reference, beyond contingency" (Power of Forms 2254). History, as a set of facts, is separated from the process of historical interpretation. When history is presented this way, historians also tend to view the literary text as merely a reflection of the established facts of a given period rather than seeing the work as playing an active role in the production of meaning. Once objectified in this way, any later interpretations or presentations of that text are viewed as transparent conduits of the facts about the text and its embeddedness in its historical era. The differences in meaning

in terms of how, where, or when one presents a text to an audience are overlooked because the meaning is inherent to the text itself not to a historical process of interpretation or mode of presentation.

However, as Greenblatt points out, Wilson's interpretation, which favors order over disorder, tradition over usurpation, has a political interest. Wilson's article, "The Political Background of Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *Henry IV*" was originally presented to the German Shakespeare Society in Weimar in 1939, five years after the weakened and struggling Weimar Republic lost its constitutional governance, democracy collapsed, Germany became a single-party state under Nazi control, and Hitler achieved full dictatorial power. As Greenblatt writes, a new historicist would "look closely at the relation between Dover Wilson's reading of *Richard II*—a reading that discovers Shakespeare's fears of chaos and his consequent support for legitimate if weak authority over the claims of ruthless usurper—and the eerie occasion of his lecture" (*Power of Forms* 2254). Greenblatt quotes Wilson making a statement that contrasts his own expressed view of history, "these plays should be of particular interest to German students at this moment of that everlasting adventure which we call history" (qtd. in *Power of Forms* 2254). As Greenblatt demonstrates, including quoting passages from Wilson's text that contradict Wilson's thesis, although previous movements in historicism and literary studies attempted to deny the contingency of interpretation in terms of a timeless, wholistic, and fixed meaning to a text, their own words contradict this understanding. The power of the day operates as a kind of cultural unconscious, functioning and playing a causal role in our actions of interpretation and suppressing our alternative currents of thought whether we actively acknowledge its influence or not.

For Greenblatt, the approach of starting with an anecdote reinforces his argument that power dynamics are so pervasive and hegemonic that even the smallest details are permeated by the overarching structures of power. This approach can be seen in both Marx and Foucault. As we see in Marx's discussion of commodity fetishism in *Capital, Volume I*, the simple, common-place commodity is the entryway through which Marx explains the whole world of material human relationships that produce, reproduce, and expand capital as a global and totalizing phenomenon (47). Or in Foucault, the singular event, the 1757 public killing of Damiens at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish* for example, is a

reflection of a greater cultural shift of the *episteme*. In this example, the shift from the body politics of the monarchical society to the modern microphysics of power.

Foucault draws from Marx but takes Marx out of the factory and explores the school, hospital, military, and prison as points where the disciplining of bodies is the source and production of power. He refers to this disciplining of the body as *bio-power* and the phenomenon involves not only the subjecting of bodies to labor with machines but also the biological, medical, educational, and military understanding and ordering of the body, as well as a public interest in sexual reproduction and monitoring birth and death rates in the population (History of Sexuality 139). As Foucault explains, “This bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes” (History of Sexuality 141). This understanding of power is no longer simply top down, and neither is the historical material force of capitalism the primary cause of inequality, but rather force, in the form of bio-power, is the more primary operation that gives rise to capitalism and also makes things appear to us how they are in our normal way of seeing and apprehending them. As Greenblatt argues following Foucault, our subjective modes of understanding are culturally constituted and historical. Our reaction to the torturing of Damiens is one of being offended and even the physical feeling of nausea and disgust, which is different from the reaction in 1757. What we think, what we are permitted to think, is power. This explains how forms of knowledge become dominant in certain places during certain time periods. Power is a ubiquitous mode of circulating knowledge.

Like Foucault, Greenblatt is interested in the contingency of history. In the *Order of Things* Foucault writes, “I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet” (XXVI). But as Derrida argues in “Cogito and the History of Madness,” Foucault’s historicizing has a tendency to construct an ontological view of history. Derrida selects Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* to make broader claims about Foucault’s work. He writes, Foucault’s structuralism presents a “method for which everything

within the structural totality is interdependent and circular in such a way that the classical problems of causality themselves would appear to stem from a misunderstanding” (Cogito and History 44). As Derrida argues, this apparent destabilization of causality however, becomes ordered under Foucault’s interpretation, which brings Derrida to ask Foucault about the demand of causality, the necessity of the chain of causality, when giving a history: “But I wonder whether, when one is concerned with history, a strict structuralism is possible, and, especially, whether, if only for the sake of order and within the order of its own descriptions, such a study can avoid all etiological questions, all questions bearing, shall we say, on the center of gravity of the structure” (Cogito and History 44). This irresolvable tension between the destabilization of causality and providing a historical account leads Derrida to suggest another approach. He first quotes from Foucault, “To write the history of madness thus will mean the execution of a structural study of an historical ensemble—notions, institutions, juridical and police measures, scientific concepts—which hold captive a madness whose wild state can never in itself be restored” (Cogito and History 44). Derrida then points out the various fields that Foucault attempts to organize under a unified *historical ensemble* and asks about the meaning of the various terms and how the fields are related, “What is a ‘notion’? Do philosophical notions have a privilege? How are they related to scientific concepts?” (Cogito and History 44). He then argues for an approach we might understand as formalist. He argues that prior to answering these questions subsumed under Foucault’s historical account, we would first require “the internal and autonomous analysis of the philosophical content of philosophical discourse” (Cogito and History 44). Before situating a philosophical account in history, he argues we must first understand what the text of philosophy itself has to say.

Derrida’s formalist stance however, is itself a mask, he reads Descartes himself in order to reveal what is always already other about Descartes, what the various faces we ascribed to Descartes conceal. Derrida turns to the passage on madness from the first *Meditation*, which plays a primary role for Foucault in the movement of western discourse’s suppression of madness in the formation of the modern subject. The moment in Descartes is where he is raising foundational epistemological doubts about the existence of the external world. First Descartes, mentions that there are people “whose cerebella are so

troubled and clogged by the violent vapours of black bile, that they constantly assure us that they are kings when they are really poor...” or “believe they are nothing but pumpkins or made of glass...” (qtd. in *Cogito and History* 46). Descartes then states, and this is as Derrida notes the most significant sentence in Foucault’s eyes, “But they are mad, and I should not be any less insane were I to follow examples so extravagant” (qtd. in *Cogito and History* 46). This sentence is crucial for Foucault because it shows that “madness is inadmissible for the doubting subject,” madness is excluded from the enclosure of the modern subject (*Cogito and History* 46).

Derrida, however, argues that the movement from the consideration of madness to the dream hypothesis expresses a more profound epistemic doubt. He argues that the very next paragraph that follows immediately after this quoted line, and where the existence of the external world is put into doubt by the possibility that he could be dreaming, begins, in the French translation from Latin, with *toutefois, at the same time* (*Cogito and History* 46). This *at the same time* for Derrida means that Descartes isn’t excluding madness but instead moving toward a thought along the same line that will be of a greater impact. When Descartes introduces the notion that he could be dreaming it is toward a more profound disturbance of sense certainty and our belief in the reality of the external world. We all very well might be mad but it is even more so the case that we all dream and while dreaming at some point have mistaken our dream for reality. Derrida writes, “the dreamer insofar as concerns the problem of knowledge which interests Descartes here, is further from true perception than the madman (*Cogito and History* 51). It is in this more universal and profound way that we have all accepted illusion for reality that Descartes locates his radical skepticism.

Foucault’s view that reason escapes madness because it is defined by its exclusion, summarized by his rephrasing of the cogito “I who think, I cannot be mad,” cannot be sustained (*Cogito and History* 55). As Derrida argues, the cogito escapes madness not from its exclusion but because even if in the moment of the statement I am mad the cogito is valid because its validity rests on an appeal to its own authority. Even if my thoughts are unreasonable, completely mad, the structuring of thought, and existence, in this case in the form of a sentence, is still meaningful. Even if mad, our thought formations

are still structured around meaning. This move toward meaning escapes Foucault's dichotomy of madness vs reason (Cogito and History 55). Derrida describes this mode of skepticism by Descartes as hyperbolic skepticism (Cogito and History 56). Descartes first presents a natural skepticism, that I could be mad and therefore mistaken about my perception of the external world, but then bases his argument on a hyperbolic claim. He takes the claim based in common experience, *we all dream and have mistaken dream for reality*, to an excessive, or what Derrida refers to as audacious, claim, *we could all be dreaming right now and therefore completely mistaken about reality*. This excessive claim, that finds meaning in a suspension of disbelief and willingness to engage in the extravagant thought, points toward meaning that exceeds logic. It is an illogical leap, a metaphor, granted on the charity of the reader that returns to us an excessively meaningful statement, a claim that exceeds logic, that is true even if it is not thought by a healthy or logical individual.

When turning from Foucault's historicism to the text of philosophy itself, Derrida takes a formalist stance. He argues only after first working out the meaning of the text itself, could we then begin "to situate it in its total historical form" (Cogito and History 44). He then proceeds beyond formalism to show us what is always already uncanny and other about a text. When we address ourselves to texts, whether as formalists, or simply posing the form of a question, we foundationally address ourselves to the other of the text, we ask the text to mean something, to answer back. This questioning always has a particular structure, a syntax, and the answer, a corresponding syntax that is reciprocal to the syntax of the question. Prior to this form of the question, which is the classical and privileged form of philosophy, is our address to what is incalculable about the other. The incalculability that is other. This excessive element of meaning, in this reading within the text of philosophy itself, precedes and can never be subsumed by its own internal demand for form even before it is asked to be located within historical form by historicism.

Derrida's style then, his approach, is neither a history nor a genealogy, nor a Heideggerian phenomenology, nor a structuralist linguistics, from which it borrows a certain removed sense of distance, but a kind of formalism that deconstructs formalism. He inhabits texts, taking them on their own terms,

and thereby undermines the very foundational features which the text claims to establish its self-same consistency and autonomy. Greenblatt and Foucault's approaches, although they attempt to uproot truth, serve the effect of subsuming and categorizing the differential play of meaning under a unified historical narrative. Butler also demonstrates this tendency in Greenblatt to follow Foucault. Butler continues to focus on power-knowledge and the role of performance, specifically related to gender and sexuality, and Spivak makes a break with Foucault in order to re-affirm Marx. As we will see, both of these approaches also involve traditional metaphysical references.

4.2 Butler

Butler sees a permeating form of violence as essential aspect of the social construction of human subjectivity. This *normative violence* is a hegemonic form of power that permeates society and regulates our gender and sexual norms. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler describes her theory of *subjection*. According to her view, the term "signifies the process of becoming a subject" (3). In this framework, we become human through the process of conforming to the dominant norms and practices of society. In this social constructivist analysis of the human, we are not born, but rather become human through the process of socialization. She develops this idea from the notion of interpellation from Althusser and discursive productivity from Foucault, where "the subject is initiated through a primary submission to power" (Psychic 3). Following Foucault, she uses the term *discourse* to describe how these norms are guided by and shape identities through relationships of power. Rather than discourse being a matter of producing meaning through thinking, Foucault understands discourse as "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them" (Weedon 108). For Butler, gender is not something we naturally or essentially are. A statement such as "I am a man" is not an expression of a present and stable inner truth of my being. Rather, gender is performative in the sense that my speech act of saying "I am a man" combined with the disciplined repetition of behaviors that align with restricted idealized norms of gender over time constitute my identity.

Butler describes the prohibition of homosexual desire as an *originary violence* because it is the prohibition of homosexual desire that is at the origin or foundation of the subject (Psychic 25). In Butler's view, idealized morphologies of gender and heterosexuality code and shape our behavior. Butler relates her conception of subjection as the productive process formed by idealized, restricting norms back to Nietzsche and Freud (Psychic 22). She writes, "both account for the fabrication of conscience as the effect of an internalized prohibition, (thereby establishing 'prohibition' as not only private, but productive)" (Psychic 22). Butler is interested in the way that "in Freud and Nietzsche, a prohibition on action or expression is said to turn 'the drive' back on itself, fabricating an internal sphere, the condition of subject formation, a primary longing in recoil that is traced in Hegel's view of the unhappy consciousness as well" (Psychic 22). Through the suppression of particular drives, the subject starts to take shape through prohibitive norms. Butler describes this process writing, "conscience is the means by which a subject becomes an object for itself, reflecting on itself, establishing itself as reflective and reflexive. The 'I' is not simply one who thinks about him- or herself; it is defined by this capacity for reflective self-relation or reflexivity" (Psychic 22). As particular drives that would initially be expressed outwardly are suppressed, they are turned reflexively on the self in a way that begins the process of identity formation. Conscience, as internalized ideal modes of behavior, takes the self as an object and starts the process of subjection. For Butler, the suppression of the drive for same-sex love is the fundamental prohibition that structures the subject. She argues, "the foreclosure of homosexuality appears to be foundational to a certain heterosexual version of the subject. The formula 'I have never loved' someone of similar gender and 'I have never lost' any such person predicates the 'I' on the 'never-never' of that love and loss" (Psychic 23). She describes this process of repression as a double negation because there is a denial of the drive and then a denial of the feeling of loss that predicates the *I*. She states, "indeed, the ontological accomplishment of heterosexual 'being' is traced to this double negation, which forms its constitutive melancholia, an emphatic and irreversible loss that forms the tenuous basis of that 'being'" (Psychic 23). In Butler's view, the very being of the subject as present and accountable to social discourse is a product of the heteronormative repression of homosexual desire and the denial of that repression. Rather than

being born with either a male or female gender and heterosexual identity, we are socially constituted and shaped as subjects within particular identities through the prohibitions that guide the performance of our behaviors.

Butler makes a powerful claim toward the primacy of the violence of heteronormative suppression of gender and sexual identity in early childhood development as the primary mechanism of social control. As a contrary point of reference, we might reference a Marxist-feminist account on gender identity and social change offered by Simon de Beauvoir. In an interview, entitled “The Second Sex 25 Years Later,” Beauvoir argues that challenges to the cultural mythology surrounding gender are foundationally rooted in the disruptions to traditional cultural arising from the historical material movement of capital. She states, “As technology expands – technology being the power of the brain and not of the brawn—the male rationale that women are the weaker sex and hence must play a secondary role can no longer be logically maintained...It was thus normal that the feminist movement got its biggest impetus in the very heartland of imperial capitalism, even if that impetus was strictly one of economics, that is, the demand for equal pay for equal work” (Gerassi 1976). Because of changes in technology, labor in the mid-twentieth century no longer involved pure muscle but instead brain power, thereby rendering obsolete the male chauvinist myth that men are superior to women because women are physically weak. Beauvoir argues that this change is why an essential push in the feminist movement first occurred in the US, “the very heartland of imperial capitalism,” around the struggle for equal wages. This view of the primary causal, historical material force of capital in uprooting traditional culture and its mystical and religious views is captured in the much quoted phrase from Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, “all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned” (16). I offer this counter point, not to side between Butler’s view, which draws heavily on Foucault, or Beauvoir’s view drawing heavily from Marx. Both are equally compelling arguments that have been incredibly influential in the struggle for gender and sexual equality. Rather, I put this argument forward to show how two very distinct accounts with two very distinct ontologies can offer compelling and influential arguments.

To address this gap between two incommensurable systems offering two distinct foundational ontologies, I argue that Derrida offers an crucially valuable approach. With reference to the previously discussed essay “Cogito and Madness,” we might also turn to Derrida’s essay “Structure Sign and Play” and the before mentioned “Critique of Violence” in order to deconstruct this reference to a foundational center. Rather than exclusively *queer*, Derrida’s work asks us to address ourselves to what is always already other about a person. This otherness might very well include categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality but they would also include that which is uncategorizable. Categories, such as sexuality and material class position, are of extreme importance to individuals, but one or many of those categories may also not be the sole ontological defining feature of the other, but rather one form through which we attempt to address ourselves to the other in the interest of justice. We might think of the way that workers in social services in the US now often refer to individuals as *experiencing homelessness* rather calling individuals *homeless people* as an attempt to deontologize our address to others, or Zora Neal Hurston’s essay “How it Feels to be Colored Me” in which she discusses the various ways she experiences her identity both within and beyond categories of race and experiences of oppression and liberation. This address to the other would come before our interpretive systems, our attempts to understand the other within a system. By deconstructing unified views, Derrida argues that deconstruction is justice because by deconstructing our forms of interpreting the other within metaphysics it brings us back to this more foundational and unresolvable relationship to the other.

4.3 Spivak

Spivak’s major shift from Derridean deconstruction is that she takes up deconstruction as a tool to serve a Marxist mode of critique. She offers a postcolonial, Marxist feminism informed by deconstruction. As she describes in “Can the Subaltern Speak”, her task as a postcolonial intellectual is not the same as Derrida, who she argues performs a Nietzschean philosophical and psychoanalytic critique of western philosophy, rather than a specifically political critique (Subaltern 89). Her criticism is directed at Foucault in a dialogue with Deleuze. In particular, she argues that Foucault’s mystifying

concept of *power* presents an undivided subject that is Eurocentric. His universal subject is in fact the “Subject of Europe” (Subaltern 69). This *subject* without foundational contradictions becomes especially problematic for Spivak when Foucault addresses the *third world* subject. His Eurocentric and totalizing analysis overlooks the international division of labor that constitutes the divided subjectivity of oppressed people in the third world (Subaltern 69). She suggests that Marx provides a better account of the constitutive contradiction of the subject and therefore a better basis for the analysis of subjects in the third world. Spivak also draws on Derrida’s critique of the ethnocentric relationship with *the other* but argues that where Derrida defines ethnocentrism in relation to the other as a “general crises of European consciousness,” the other can be better traced in an analysis of “the imperialist constitution of the colonial subject” (Subaltern 89). This post-colonial Marxist account examines the way Foucault in particular, and the European intellectual in general, constructs the third world person as other from a self-centered and closed mode of thinking. At the heart of her discussion then is the question of representation and our relationship to the other. How is it that the third world person can speak and be represented? How can this person have a political voice, an active influence in changing policy and economic relationships when they are denied material modes of organizing and exercising political and economic influence? This lack of political voice in the form of material agencies means that no one can address their grievances because their actions are constantly misrepresented and therefore misinterpreted.

The first half of Spivak’s essay focuses on articulating two forms of representation that Marx describes in relationship to French peasant-farmers in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Her goal is to articulate the problem of representation of the divided subaltern subject drawing from a Marxist critique (Subaltern 69). In this work by Marx, she sees the fundamental paradox of representation for those that don’t fit into typical models of class struggle. Drawing from Gramsci she uses the term *subaltern*, which describes the position of marginalized and displaced subjects, to define oppressed people in the third world. The *Eighteenth Brumaire* opens with Marx’s famous statement about history repeating itself: “all great world-historic facts and personages appear twice...the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce” (5). The text focuses on the distinction between parody and genuine revolution,

“between the spirit (*Geist*) of the revolution and its specter (*Gespensst*)” (*Specters* 143). The spirit being the mode through which genuine revolutionary inheritance can take place, and the specter being that which haunts revolution, causes it to seek a disguise in the costume, personages, and poetics of previous revolutions. For Marx, peasants, as opposed to the proletariat, are in particular danger of parodied revolution because they have no common interest that forces them to share a collective identity and therefore do not represent a class in the historical material sense (*Eighteenth Brumaire* 62). Without this class interest, they are forced to look toward a political representative to stand in and speak for them. In the case of French peasants, a superficial representative Napoleon III, the cousin of the Napoleon who was a gambler who spent years in exile, gained the peasants support and was elected the president of France. This question of representation for the peasant-farmer, a supplemental non-class, as opposed to the proletariat, who finds economic representation through class struggle, creates the space for Spivak to ask about the possibility of the subaltern finding its own voice, of speaking for itself. In the second half of her essay, she turns to an analysis of a revolutionary activist in India whose suicide was misinterpreted.

For Spivak, the idea of speaking for oneself is found in the distinction between two German terms translated as representation in English: *Darstellung*, representation as tropes embodied in the figure of the poet, rhetorician, or actor providing a merely symbolic voice of the people, and *Vertretung*, representation in the form of a political representative acting as a substitution or in the place of the people he represents, e.g. a member of Parliament. This meaning, the distinction between the two, is covered over when both are translated as representation in English. This translation to the same word runs the two senses together, which resolves the exact tension which Marx wants to point out. As Spivak writes, “the complicity of *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*, their identity-in-difference as the place of practice since this complicity is precisely what Marxists must expose, as Marx does in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* - can only be appreciated if they are not conflated by a sleight of word” (*Subaltern* 72).

As Spivak explains her interest in the *EB* is because it explains the inner dynamics of false representation. She writes, “representation in the economic context is *Darstellung*, the philosophical concept of representation as staging or, indeed, signification, which relates to the divided subject in an

indirect way” (Subaltern 73). As a key example of *Darstellung*, she quotes a passage from the section on commodity fetishism in *Capital*, Vol. I, where Marx explains that the exchange-value, rather than the use-value becomes “the common element which represents itself [sich darstellt] in the exchange relation” and “is thus its value” (qtd. in Subaltern 73). The price tag on the commodity we encounter in the store becomes the value of the commodity, which functions as a sort of objective ontological valuation of the item, and we don’t think of the world of material relations of production and human activity that produced that value. The whole material context, which she refers to using the Derridean phrase the *scene of writing*, then is the stage where false identification, acting as performance, becomes the means through which we encounter and value the object. *Darstellung* then is made possible and maintained by *Vertretung*, the political force of representative democracy. As Marx writes in “On The Jewish Question,” the division between the political state and the civil society, between the collective representation of citizens and the private individual, creates and protects the private property form necessary for capitalism (34).

The historical material scene of the rise of Napoleon III is haunted by the hope of Napoleon’s transformations that ended in tragedy for the peasants and are then farcically conjured by Napoleon III. As Marx describes, “The Napoleonic property form, which at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the condition of the emancipation and enrichment of the French countryfolk, has developed in the course of the century into the law of their enslavement and their pauperism” (Eighteenth Brumaire 63). The small land holdings were mortgaged by banks and peasants went into debt and many lived in extreme poverty. The peasants were also given a sense of pride through military service combined with nationalism. As Marx writes, “The uniform was their own state costume; war was their poetry; the small holding, enlarged and rounded off in imagination, was their fatherland, and patriotism the ideal form of the sense of property” (Eighteenth Brumaire 65). But later the peasant found himself sunk into mortgage debt. As Marx writes, “the enemies whom the French peasant now has to defend his property against are not the Cossacks; they are the huissiers [bailiffs] and the tax collectors. The small holding no longer lies in the so-called fatherland but in the registry of mortgages” (Eighteenth Brumaire 65). And the army no

longer represents their honor, “the army itself is no longer the flower of the peasant youth; it is the swamp flower of the peasant lumpen proletariat” (Eighteenth Brumaire 65). And as Marx continues, “it consists largely of replacements, of substitutes” (Eighteenth Brumaire 65). Wealthier people in France were able to pay others to serve in their place in the conscription military service.

Although Napoleon’s transformations to peasant life ended tragically for the peasant, his persona and political actions established tropes which the peasant identified with and through which felt a symbolic sense of representation. Although the institutions of private property and the military brought the peasant to tragic ruin, they provided a social symbolic or metaphorical framework in which the peasant felt he was represented even though he didn’t actually increase his political and economic influence. Certain modes of representation allow the peasant to feel he has spoken although his interests have not been given causal, material force. Peasants lack the class consciousness needed to have genuine revolutionary representation. Napoleon III finds a currency in the name *Napoleon*. The fetishized exchange value of the name stands in for political representation. It parodies political representation for its own private gain. He is a parody of that name, and the peasants look to his performance not to find resolution in truth but in fantasy. This is where psychoanalysis talks about the dream as wish fulfillment. Political theater provides the fantasy space for a staged repetition in order to symbolically resolve previously unresolved events and failed expectations from the past. The staged show supplements real life and becomes a mode of catharsis by giving us a place we can project our emotions and through that process heal unresolved mental wounds. Marx describes the peasants as conservative rather than progressive (Eighteenth Brumaire 63). Peasants accept this showmanship, they cling to the dreams of the past, and accept the catharsis of imagined representation in place of a political force of their own.

Spivak draws on this analysis and turns to a discussion of an Indian activist, Bhuvanewari Bhaduri, whose suicide was misinterpreted by her family and others. As Spivak writes, “the suicide was a puzzle since, as Bhuvanewari was menstruating at the time, it was clearly not the case of an illicit pregnancy” (Subaltern 103). It was only later discovered that she was part of an armed resistance movement for Indian independence, and she had been asked to carry out an assassination. As Spivak

writes, “unable to confront the task and yet aware of the practical need for trust, she killed herself” (Subaltern 103). Spivak argues that the suicide was misunderstood. Her act of delay, “waiting for menstruation,” was intended as an act of displacement of the likely male-centered interpretation that her suicide was the result of her passion for a man, that a woman’s life essentially belongs to a man. However, other family members speculated that her suicide was a result of her brothers taunting her for being too old not to be a wife (Subaltern 103). As Spivak describes, the suicide also occurs in the social text of *Sati*, the ritualistic practice of widow suicide. Women who traditionally practiced this suicide would have been expected to wait for menstruation to pass before the act because they would have been considered unclean. The accepted interpretations of her suicide reconstructed the male centered cultural narratives surrounding female suicide. They interpreted her suicide, because she was menstruating, as an ad-hoc or misperformed iteration of *Sati*. This interpretation then effectively rendered her silent by presenting her act within dominant male-centered narratives.

Spivak concludes, drawing from this event, that the subaltern cannot speak (Subaltern 104). Because subaltern individuals don’t have access to structures of political representation their actions are subject to misinterpretation. As Spivak states in an interview, Bhuvanewari “had spoken with her body, but could not be heard. To say the subaltern cannot speak is like saying there’s no justice (Paulson 2016). Spivak shows that the mutually permeating structures of *Darstellung* and *Vertretung* set the scene for Bhuvanewari’s actions not to be heard, for her voice to be rendered silent. This silence means that she cannot be granted justice. In our relationship to her as other, we lack the material means that would allow her to speak and therefore we cannot hear her.

In Derrida’s critique of Marx in *Specters of Marx*, he argues the possibility of misrepresentation is the very essence of representation. As Derrida writes, the two forms of representation, genuine and parody, Spirit and ghost, “contaminate each other sometimes in such a troubling manner, since the simulacrum consists precisely in miming the phantom” (Specters 139). In Derrida’s view the binaries in Marx between material and immaterial, base and superstructure, use value and exchange value, all are haunted by their constitutive other (Specters 204). It is here where Marx is not radical enough, his need to

exorcise the ghost and arrive at a material interpretation set him up for a haunting, cause his work to be metaphysical. Rather than the material foundations of capitalism creating the division between *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*, Derrida argues the two forms of representation haunt each other. They are each the other through which we define each individual term in the binary.

If we draw on Derrida's critique of Marx as well as Derrida's expressed interest in justice. We perhaps see the emergence of another theme arising from Spivak's essay. Both within and beyond Bhuvanewari's silence, Spivak approaches her story with an interest in justice. It is in consideration of her misinterpretation by what Spivak refers to as *the social text* as well as the historical material conditions of her subaltern position that Spivak approaches her as other, as the other that has not been justly accounted for. The possibility of injustice, of violent misinterpretation, creates a demand of the call of the other. This inequality is also at the heart of what we consider correct interpretation. As Derrida writes of Levinas, "Here equity is not equality, calculated proportion, equitable distribution or distributive justice but rather absolute dissymmetry" (Force of Law 959). Rather than a specifically Marxist metaphysics we turn to Derrida's interest in Levinas, which Derrida says is not completely unlike a Jewish mystical notion of "sanctity" (Force of Law 959). Rather than a materialism, this mystical turn in Derrida, distinguishes between the law and the "heteronomic relation to others, to the faces of otherness, that govern me, whose infinity I cannot thematize and whose hostage I remain" (Force of Law 959). Our commitment to the other is both preceded by and exceeds what Marx would refer to under the unified term *historical material*. The material, then, rather than a base, is one way through which the social text approaches the relationship to the other. And history would exceed the division between fact and fiction, scientific understanding and mythology. The social text through which Spivak writes and interprets and takes up Bhuvanewari's story is not purely historical, it also draws on fiction. As Spivak says in an interview, "that's what you do if you can't carry through an assassination. Then you kill yourself. I mean, I don't understand those things but we've read enough Dostoevsky and we've read enough about the struggle against imperialism in India to know that this kind of thing happened" (Paulson 2016). This

understanding then is an attempt to interpret and give a just account of the other. It is always already oriented toward the other because to tell a story, I must foundationally address myself to others.

4.4 Metaphysics of the Political Turn

In Derrida's lectures on *Being and Time* entitled *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History*, Derrida discusses Heidegger's critique of the Hegelian metaphysics of the model of the oppressed struggling for recognition. Derrida states, when Heidegger speaks of war, "[he] does not tell stories, he speaks neither of the struggle between individuals or consciousnesses, like Hegel..., nor of groups, states or classes. But...by thinking them at the level of the originary and in the horizon of the question of being" (198-199). In Heidegger's critique of Hegelian metaphysics, he argues that there is a more primary ontological basis that the "phenomena described, for example, by Hegel by the name of 'struggle for recognition' can possibly come about" (197). Heidegger argues that violence, warfare, *polemos*, is "the phenomenon of the meaning of being" (199).

In Derrida's description of theaporetic structure of justice, he argues that the rule of law is foundationally unstable in its being because it is always already other. The being of the law, in its constitution, is always haunted by the ghost of the undecidable. The undecidable can never be fully accounted for by the narrative of the dialectical struggle for recognition between dominant and non-dominant groups within the sphere of law. In Derrida's view, the undecidable can never be neatly folded into the system, it always haunts the system, remaining irreducible, threatening the destruction of that system from the inside. As Derrida writes, "the undecidable remains caught.... Its ghostliness deconstructs from within any assurance of presence, any certitude or any supposed criteriology that would assure us of the justice of a decision, in truth of the very event of a decision" (Force of Law 965). Deconstruction, that deconstruction is even possible, reveals that the system is always already not self-same and present. The undecidable is both the condition of possibility and the impossibility of the system of law. This failure of the law to establish a self-same presence reveals the more primary violence at the origin of being. Because being lacks presence, it can never be captured in terms of a formalism or a

structuralist account of human society founded on a central prohibition. Formalism is a mode through which Derrida inherits a given text in the interest of opening it up to its original otherness.

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